



**Maricopa County**  
*Animal Care and Control*

# LIVING WITH FERAL CATS



MCACC recognizes that free-roaming cats are an issue in our community and is committed to effectively and humanely controlling the problem. We have taken a proactive stand in the way we believe feral cats should be handled and controlled.

We have over 20 years of documented proof that traditional ways of dealing with feral cats don't work. The "catch and kill" method of population control (trap a cat, bring it to a shelter, ask that the cat be euthanized), has not reduced the number of feral cats. The cat may be gone, but now there is room for another cat to move in.

By creating that hole in a neighborhood feral cat colony, it encourages fighting, spraying of territory and breeding. In addition, female cats in distressed colonies tend to produce more offspring than those in stable colonies. So, "catch and kill" actually makes the problem worse.

In examining effective programs across the country, MCACC has concluded that the most effective solution is a comprehensive program that includes:

- **C**ommunity education about spay/neuter and keeping tame cats indoors
- **A**doption of tame strays into new homes
- **T**rap, Neuter, Return (TNR) to managed colonies for feral cats

Through TNR, cats are humanely trapped and sterilized. Feral, therefore unadoptable, cats are placed back into the environment in which they were living. Volunteer caretakers then provide food, water, and clean, unobtrusive shelters for the cats. Eventually, through natural attrition, the colony dies out. Any stray or tame, adoptable cats found in the colony are removed and adopted into homes.

## **What is the difference between a stray cat and a feral cat?**

A stray cat is an un-owned animal that you see in your neighborhood that is friendly and enjoys human contact. A feral cat has had little or no human contact during its natural life.

Some people consider feral cats to be nuisances because they can exhibit behavior such as marking their territory, howling at night, fighting, and destroying property. Because feral cats are usually not spayed or neutered they reproduce at an alarming rate, which results in more cat problems and public health concerns.

Here is some more information about TNR:

### **Trap, Neuter, Return:**

- Stabilizes the population.
- Is more effective and less expensive than attempts at extermination.
- Eliminates or reduces annoying behaviors like spraying, yowling and fighting.
- Is the humane thing to do. Anyone who suggests inhumane and/or illegal methods of cat population control will be prosecuted according to the law.

For more information on animal care, behavior or MCACC programs, contact  
(602) 506-PETS or visit [pets.maricopa.gov](http://pets.maricopa.gov)  
Excerpts from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Cats International.

## **What happens with TNR?**

**Trap** – The cats are humanely trapped.

**Neuter** – The cats are taken to a veterinarian where they are spayed or neutered. Feral cats have their left ear “tipped” (has the point cut flat) so people will recognize that the cat is sterilized.

**Return** – Feral cats are returned to their original caregivers who agree to provide them with food and water. (Tame, adoptable cats will not be returned to the colony, but will be adopted into homes.)

## **What are the alternatives?**

**Do Nothing** – Eventually the problem will reach unmanageable levels and cause untold suffering.

**Trap & Kill** – Aside from being inhumane, this approach is not a solution. The problem is everywhere. More cats will simply move in to fill the void and start the cycle over again.

**Catch & Tame** – This approach is not realistic. Feral adults cannot be socialized to humans to the point where they are able to find homes as pets. Even if they could be tamed, the time and effort that goes into helping just a few cats is prohibitive.

**Relocation** – There is no other place for them to go, and if you remove them other cats will come to take their place.

## **Your next step:**

- ◆ Call 602-506-PETS (7387) to learn about spaying and neutering your cats. Call Altered Tails at (602) 943-7729 or visit their website at [www.AlteredTails.org](http://www.AlteredTails.org) to learn more about TNR. You can also call the Spay Neuter Hotline at (602) 265-SPAY. Or you email them at [feralcats@adlaz.org](mailto:feralcats@adlaz.org) or visit them online at <http://www.adlaz.org/spay/maricopa/index.html> for information and assistance. Another good informative site is Alley Cat Allies at [www.Alleycat.org](http://www.Alleycat.org)
- ◆ If you elect not to participate in TNR, there will be a minimum \$96 fee assessed for every feral cat brought to MCACC. This is what it costs MCACC to impound a feral cat, maintain the animal for three days, and finally euthanize the animal. TNR is clearly more cost-effective and will actually help to solve the free-roaming cat problem in Maricopa County. You will thus be offering your neighbors, clients, tenants, or others you serve a real and humane solution!

## **MCACC Animal Care Centers:**

**2500 S. 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85009**

**2630 W. 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Mesa AZ, 85201**