

“Trap, Neuter, Return NOT Trap, Neuter, Adopt”

It is a common occurrence that many who set out to help feral cats get sidetracked along the way. We may start off with goals of TNR (trap, neuter, return), but soon find ourselves spending more time rescuing cats than TNR'ing them. It is easy to become attached to the cats in our care and convince ourselves that we will best serve the cats by attempting to socialize and adopt them out. Although cat rescue is a noble cause, the truth is that focusing on rescue and adoption is not going to further the efforts of the TNR movement.

Those of us committed to feral cats need to constantly remind ourselves that our efforts need to be spent serving the greater good. Alley Cat Allies has helped us to do this by clearly stating the goals of the TNR movement:

- 1) To change the way feral cats are treated in this country
- 2) To recognize their right to live and their niche in the environment
- 3) To improve the quality of their lives through spay/neuter
- 4) To humanely, nonlethally, and substantially reduce their numbers

Socializing and adopting out one cat at a time does not address the larger issue of feral cat overpopulation. TNR is the only method that will allow us to see change and improve the lives of the most cats possible.

Of course, there are instances where cats and kittens should not necessarily be returned to their colony. Young kittens under 12 weeks of age and abandoned companion cats should be placed into foster homes until they are adopted into forever homes. For those who have chosen to help feral cats, finding a reliable foster home system will be a great resource to allow your focus to remain on your TNR efforts.

It is often a difficult, emotional task to return that potentially sweet cat back to his colony after being neutered, but it must be done to truly deal with the issue of cat overpopulation. The amount of time necessary to socialize a feral cat versus TNR'ing him is substantial. While we are busy socializing cats, the unaltered cats will continue to reproduce and bring more homeless animals into the world. This is a defeatist cycle and will consistently drain your time and your resources. Our time would be much better spent trapping, neutering and returning the many unaltered feral cats that share this Earth with us.

The feral cat in your care has the opportunity to live out his life happily, safely and according to his own nature in his colony. A companion cat sitting in a cage in a shelter has only one hope: to be adopted into a forever home. If we fill up the forever homes with formerly feral cats, what will become of those in the shelters who never get adopted? The family that adopted your previously feral cat very well may have visited the shelter and adopted a cat slated to be killed the next day. When you return a feral cat to his colony, you are also giving another cat the chance to live. By TNR'ing one cat, you have essentially helped two.

The founder of Alliance for Animals Donna Bishop wrote “If we understand the cat at all, if we care about her at all, if we can rise above the human need to possess and control we must let her go.” By focusing on TNR you will make the largest impact on the lives of the cats that you care for and those that you've never even met.

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