

# Trap, Neuter, Reabandonment (TNR) Programs

## REAL-WORLD RESULTS OF TNR

Public officials and animal shelters are under pressure to end the euthanasia of homeless animals, but there are pitfalls to using a slingshot approach to ending animal overpopulation. In TNR (trap, neuter, reabandonment) programs, for example, cats are captured, sterilized, and then put back outside, where they are exposed to diseases—including some that can be transmitted to humans, such as rabies—and they fall prey to the elements, traffic, cruel people who consider them a nuisance, and predators.

TNR programs are designed to keep cats out of animal shelters, usually with the goal of increasing “save rates.” However, leaving cats outdoors is not a humane or an effective solution to the overpopulation and homelessness crisis they face, and it often causes even more problems in the community.



## TNR INCREASES CAT POPULATIONS, RESIDENT COMPLAINTS, AND HEALTH HAZARDS

Cat colonies become dumping grounds for unwanted cats because people incorrectly believe that they’ll be cared for. Food set out for colonies attracts felines from surrounding areas, increasing unsterilized cats’ opportunities to mate and reproduce. It also attracts wild species, such as rats, and rabies-vector species, such as raccoons, to the area.

It can take up to 28 days for newly vaccinated cats to develop immunity to the rabies virus, and retrapping them for the necessary booster shots is virtually impossible and seldom attempted. Many people who feed cats—as well as passersby and curious children—have had to undergo rabies treatment after being bitten or scratched. Cats in colonies can also transmit parasites and diseases to humans who come into contact with them or their feces.

Finally, cats in TNR colonies stalk, injure, and kill native birds, reptiles, and other small animals who are part of the ecosystem and already struggling to survive habitat loss and other challenges.

Examples of these problems are below.

**Pembroke, Ontario:** The DailyObserver.ca [reported](#) that a TNR group was shutting down, citing the continued growth of the cat population because of abandonment by residents and difficulties trapping cats for sterilization. The city administrator said, “[N]ow there’s all kinds of cats and kittens down with lots of issues as a result. [The group] had a lot of sick cats, dead cats and feces where you had to wear rubber boots to try and walk around.”

“[N]o evidence exists that maintained cat colonies adequately reduce human public health risks or appropriately address their impact on pets or native wildlife. Several reports suggest that support of ‘managed cat colonies’ may increase the public’s likelihood of abandoning unwanted pets in lieu of more responsible options.”

—National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians

**Pocahontas, Virginia:** BDTOnline.com [reported](#) that a man had sustained injuries when he was attacked by a bear in his backyard. Authorities told him that the animal had likely been attracted to cat food left out on his porch.

**Hillsborough County, Florida:** WFLA.com [reported](#) that a cat who had been abandoned in the county's TNR program had bitten a good Samaritan. The animal tested positive for rabies.



**Borough of Cornwall, Pennsylvania:** LDNews.com [reported](#) that a child had had to undergo treatment for an illness caused by exposure to cats outdoors. The Cornwall Borough Board of Health reportedly agreed that food left out for roaming cats had created a health hazard.

**Port Orange, Florida:** News-JournalOnline.com [reported](#) that the number of cat colonies in the city's TNR program had increased from 12 to 168 in five years. The annual cost of the program had also increased, from \$9,000 in 2012 to \$23,000 in 2016.

**Whitby, Ontario:** DurhamRegion.com [reported](#) that city workers were trapping and removing cats who had previously been trapped, neutered, and reabandoned in a neighborhood because of "several complaints from residents, concerned with cats running at large and destroying their gardens."

**Panama City, Florida:** NewsHerald.com [reported](#) that staff and students at Gulf Coast State College had been told to stop feeding a colony of cats and that plans had been made to remove the animals because food left out for them was attracting coyotes and bears.

**Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania:** CitizensVoice.com [reported](#) that a homeless cat being fed by a resident had attacked an out-of-state woman who was visiting a neighbor. The cat either died or was euthanized before testing positive for rabies.

**Burnsville, Minnesota:** FOX9.com [reported](#) that a resident had contracted tularemia after he was bitten by an infected cat.

**Parry Sound, Ontario:** ParrySound.com [reported](#) that the city was reconsidering its pilot TNR program because "the number of feral cats appears to be increasing—as does the noise, smell and general nuisance."

**Avalon Peninsula, Newfoundland:** SaltWire.com [reported](#) that a TNR program had had to be suspended after an outbreak of feline distemper. A spokesperson for a TNR group said that populations were growing: "You can't get to them fast enough. People are dumping animals back in the colonies as fast as we get them cleaned up."

**Rochester, New York:** 13WHAM.com [reported](#) that the Monroe County Health Department had ordered the removal of wooden houses intended for homeless cats, because they had attracted rats. The Rochester environmental commissioner said, "Rats were actually nesting, roosting and breeding. It's contaminated with rat feces and things that are not good for public health."

**South Huntingdon Township, Pennsylvania:** TribLive.com [reported](#) that an employee had required post-exposure treatment after a rabid homeless cat entered a business and attacked the individual. A colony of homeless cats was reportedly fed near the business.



**"Free-roaming cats account for the most cases of human rabies exposure among domestic animals and account for approximately 1/3 of rabies post-exposure prophylaxis treatments in humans in the United States."**

—R.W. Gerhold and D.A. Jessup, "Zoonotic Diseases Associated With Free-Roaming Cats," *Zoonoses and Public Health*, 2012



**Albuquerque, New Mexico:** LCSun-News.com [reported](#) that an apparently homeless cat had been found dead and had tested positive for plague.

**Stanislaus County, California:** CeresCourier.com [reported](#) that a cat colony caretaker had found it impossible to keep up with the number of dumped and dying animals. “For the past 10 years [Neva] Walker has tended to the cats at the river location but is troubled that the problem is worsening. Many of the cats are dying from distemper or neglect. . . . ‘It’s happening daily,’ said Walker. ‘Last year not a day went by that I didn’t have at least one, possibly two or three cats abandoned.’”

**Front Royal, Virginia:** NVDaily.com [reported](#) that a colony of homeless cats was to be removed, in part because food left out for them was attracting deer, bears, and vultures.

**Chesapeake, Virginia:** 13NewsNow.com [reported](#) that a “rabid black and white short-hair cat with a broken front paw attacked customers in the parking lot of the Family Dollar Store and Easy Go Market.”

**Orange County, California:** OCGrandJury.org [reported](#) that because of feral cats around the county animal shelter and nearby jail, a Sheriff’s Office employee had been infected with flea-transmitted endemic typhus and required hospitalization.

**Phoenix, Arizona:** AZCentral.com [reported](#) that after eight years of allowing a TNR program on campus, Phoenix College had ended it because “[i]nstead of stabilizing the population, it has doubled, creating an unhealthy situation for the cats and the community.”

**Jacksonville, North Carolina:** JDNews.com [reported](#) that a homeless cat had bitten a man who was feeding a “colony of feral cats.” Authorities captured the animal, who was euthanized after exhibiting “neurological symptoms,” and he or she tested positive for rabies.

#### **Honolulu, Hawaii:**

HawaiiNewsNow.com [reported](#) that after 20 years of allowing a TNR program on campus, Chaminade University had ended it because the homeless-cat population “continued to thrive and . . . feeders were just throwing the food around the campus, making a mess.” A spokesperson said, “It just didn’t work, I wish it did work.”

#### **Upper Marlboro, Maryland:**

WUSA9.com [reported](#) that an area where cats were being fed was “beset



“Neutering, vaccinating, and feeding a cat after trapping leads to a longer life for the cat relative to trapping and euthanizing, but the eventual death of that cat will be much more inhumane. . . . No kill does not equal no death. It only postpones death and exchanges euthanasia for what will almost certainly be a much crueler death for the cat by car, disease, predator, or animal cruelty.”

—Joel R. McNeal, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biology  
Kennesaw State University

by a large flock of black vultures that roosts above the feral cat colony” to consume food put out by residents.

**Miami Beach, Florida:** Sun-Sentinel.com [reported](#) that seven people had been infected with hookworm near Miami Beach caused by cats defecating on pathways near the beach. Another eight cases were under investigation, including that of a 3-year-old boy.

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While TNR may lower shelters’ intake and euthanasia rates temporarily (because cats are turned away rather than being given shelter), it quickly creates even worse—and more complex—problems that plague communities.

The proven, humane, and sustainable way to address the crisis of homeless cats is by requiring that they be spayed or neutered, licensed, microchipped, and kept indoors.



“TNR advocates take advantage of the lack of population biology knowledge in the general public to sell neutering as population control, while their feeding has a much more profound effect on populations. Reduced intake rates at shelters are often promoted as successes, but this simply means there are more cats on the streets rather than coming through shelters and says nothing about population increase or decrease.”

–Joel R. McNeal, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Biology  
Kennesaw State University

“We estimate that free-ranging domestic cats kill 1.3–4.0 billion birds and 6.3–22.3 billion mammals annually. Un-owned cats ... cause the majority of this mortality.”

–Scott R. Loss, Tom Will,  
and Peter P. Marra,  
“The Impact of Free-Ranging  
Domestic Cats on Wildlife  
of the United States,”  
*Nature Communications*,  
12 Dec. 2013

“[C]at predation is one of the reasons why one in three American [bird] species are in decline.”

–George Fenwick, former president of American Bird Conservancy