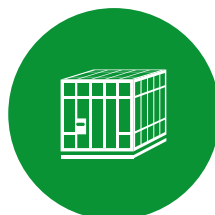


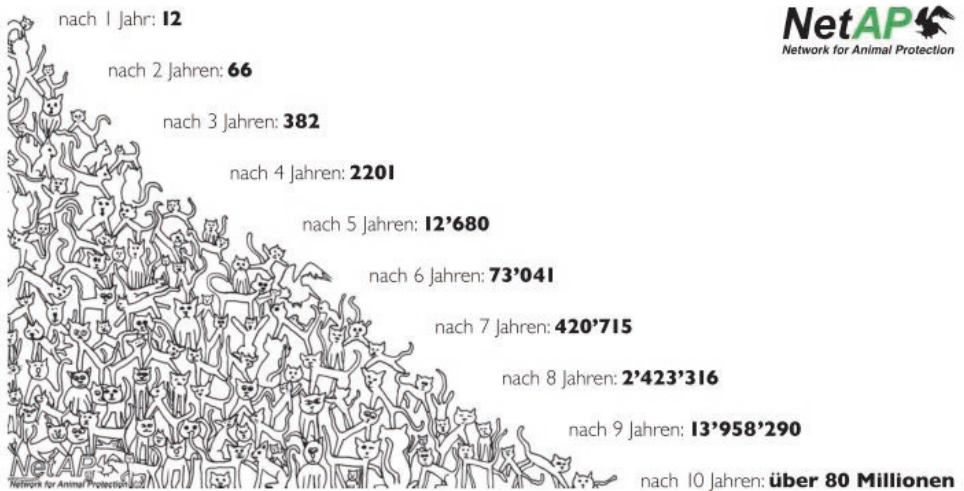
# DEALING WITH FERAL CATS



Stray and feral cats are found in most countries – settled on industrial sites, in allotments, and in residential neighbourhoods, along forest edges, on camping grounds, hotel grounds, farms, and many other places.

Without human contact as kittens, they become feral and taming them as adults is very difficult if not impossible. They shy away from human contact and are difficult to catch. They often struggle through life, suffering from hunger, parasites, diseases or injury. Sadly, humans can also make life difficult for these animals. They resent their presence and chase them away or even kill them – often in inhumane ways.

In these difficult living conditions, unsplayed females have litters on a regular basis. By the age of five to six months, they are sexually mature, and after a gestation period of 63 to 65 days they give birth to up to seven kittens which can happen up to three times a year! Accordingly, the number of cats in a colony will increase rapidly. If there are too many cats, some will migrate and start new colonies.



The only way to control overpopulation in a sustainable and humane way is to spay/neuter the cats. Spaying and neutering also makes sense for the numerous health benefits it brings the animals.

This guide is intended to help you take the right steps if you become aware of a feral cat or an entire feral cat colony. Please do not look away but take steps to stop current suffering, prevent future suffering and allow existing cat colonies to live a healthy life.

## RESPONSIBILITY FOR FERAL ANIMALS

The responsibilities for stray and feral cats are regulated differently depending on the country; they mostly lie with the government. In Switzerland, the responsibility for the issues surrounding strays and ferals usually lies with the relevant municipalities.



## WILD CATS VS DOMESTIC CATS

The distinction between wild cats and domestic cats is essentially that the former is considered a wild animal due to its gene pool. Domestic cats are divided into different types:

- Free-roamer: This is a pet cat who can go outside independently and on a regular basis but has an owner. Most of these types of cats are friendly.
- Stray cat: This is a cat who has lost its owner or has been abandoned. A stray cat is likely to be tame and may stop when you approach it, or even come up to you to be stroked.
- Feral cat: This is a cat who was born to a stray domestic cat in the wild and has never had contact or a relationship with humans. Feral cats are not the same as wild cats. Feral cats usually live in colonies and avoid human contact. They are very shy, will not let themselves be touched and will flee or hide when someone approaches. Many of these cats are active mostly at dawn and dusk and will often stay hidden. They tend to be skinny and/or have poor general health, often shown by a dull, shaggy coat. Eye conditions or poorly healed injuries are also sometimes apparent.

All domestic cats can reproduce very quickly and therefore – from an animal welfare point of view – should be spayed/neutered.

If you see a stray cat, the first thing to do is to check if it is marked/micro-chipped and find out if it is missing. Ask people in the area if anyone is missing a cat or knows to whom the cat belongs, keep an eye out for missing cat reports and post lost and found reports yourself. Check the entries in national databases such as the Swiss Tierneldezentrale ([www.stmz.ch](http://www.stmz.ch)) or the German TASSO ([www.tasso.de](http://www.tasso.de)) and register a lost and found report if necessary.

## TOOLS FOR TRAPPING CATS

There are various tools for trapping cats. The most common and easiest to use is the humane trap. Other tools require specialist knowledge and practice.

### Cat trap

The cat trap is a humane trap adapted to the size of the animals. It is released by a footboard. The humane trap is a common and gentle means of catching feral cats and is well accepted by most cats. We recommend using traps with two openings and sufficient length to avoid injuries to the cat when the trap closes.

There are also so-called „family traps“, which are much larger and are particularly suited to catching several cats at the same time. However, these must be triggered by hand as soon as all the cats are inside. Many animal welfare organisations (e.g. NetAP) will loan or rent out cat traps. A deposit is usually required.



### Net

A dip-net or hand-net (a bag-like net stretched around a round or square frame and attached to a pole) is a suitable tool for catching cats and can be purchased at a fishing shop / tackle shop. The net is placed over the cat and secured so that the cat cannot escape. The cat is then either transferred to a box or sedated while still in the net. Trapping a cat with a net takes a lot of practice; among other things, you must get close enough to the animal and not injure it with the frame. Nets are regularly used on trap-resistant cats or inside enclosed spaces.

### Cast net

The folded cast net is thrown onto an escaped animal using a specific technique. It can then be picked up with protective gloves or anaesthetised while still in the net. The procedure is complicated and should only be used by people who are specially trained to use a net.

### Net gun

With the net gun, the net is shot out of the net funnel by means of compressed air (CO<sub>2</sub>). Again, this method requires a lot of experience.

### Blowpipe

The blowpipe is used to sedate the cat by means of an anaesthetic dart. This is shot at a distance of three to four meters. Using the blowpipe correctly is very difficult, especially because the target is very small and mobile. It should therefore only be used by professionals.

## CONVINCING PEOPLE – THE CRUCIAL STEP

Not everybody will react positively to your proposal to arrange neutering/spaying for the cat or cats. Lack of or incorrect knowledge, outdated ways of thinking and indifference towards animals are unfortunately still widespread. Make sure you prepare yourself for conversations with sceptical local residents. Familiarize yourself with the pro-neutering arguments and think about answers to potential objections. Emphasize that there will be no disadvantages for local residents. Try to convince them of the advantages of not allowing an uncontrolled growth of the cat colony. Remain objective and friendly! Do not let yourself be put off by harsh, uneducated statements from your counterpart.

## ADVANTAGES OF SPAYING/NEUTERING

Neutering is not just the best means to prevent uncontrolled reproduction at the source – it also has numerous advantages for animals, nature and humans:

- Massively reduced risk of cancer, cysts, mammary tumours and uterine infections in females
- Reduced risk of prostate cancer in male cats
- Significantly reduced spreading of infectious diseases like FIV, FeLV, panleukopenia and other diseases
- Reduced risk of accidents as the urge to roam far in search of a mate decreases
- Huge reduction of injuries caused by fighting
- Much fewer foul-smelling markings by males
- No symptoms of females in heat, such as loud screams, etc.
- No mating-related injuries (e.g. bite wounds in the females caused by neck bites from the male)
- Reduced aggression and stress
- Reduced mortality rate
- No more survival struggles for kittens, often accompanied by suffering and pain
- No unwanted mating with the protected wild cat, stopping any negative influence on the gene pool
- Overall, spaying/neutering results in a healthy, balanced cat population

**Spaying and neutering means fighting the causes rather than the symptoms!  
It is the only animal-friendly and sustainable way to control the population!**





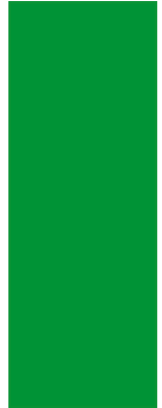
## STARTING THE TRAPPING CAMPAIGN

The winter months from November to the end of January are ideal for trapping campaigns, because cats are less likely to be pregnant or nursing during this time. A word of caution though: Due to climate change and global warming, this unfortunately applies less and less. In many countries, female cats now have kittens three times a year, including the winter months.

### Preparation

It will take a lot of patience and some preparation time to be able to trap feral cats. First, observe the cat, or the entire colony, for some time. Take notes on the number of animals observed, their health status, and their general behaviour. If there are nursing females in the group, we recommend waiting a while before you attempt to catch them. Up to the age of 5 weeks, kittens can only survive without their mother for a very limited time. So please keep in mind that if the mother were spayed, she would be absent for 24 to 48 hours – which will almost certainly lead to the death of her kittens.

You can create perfect conditions if the animals already trust you through regular feeding. Ideally, you should feed the cats in the same place and at the same time. Also, ensure that fresh water is always available. Regularly remove any leftover food after feeding. A tidy feeding area is very important in order to avoid upsetting local residents or attracting other animals. If there are people who are already feeding the cats, inform them about your plan and come to an agreement with them. Remember that you must obtain the owner's permission in order to enter a private property.



### Choosing a veterinarian

Talk to your trusted veterinarian about the spay/neuter operation as soon as possible. If you do not have one, check with animal welfare organizations to find out which veterinarian is committed to animal welfare and has experience in dealing with feral cats. Dealing with feral cats is very different to dealing with pets and will require specialist knowledge and experience. Inform the vet about the number of cats and agree a date for the spaying/neutering (or, in case of large groups, several dates) and, if necessary, the time windows in which you can bring the animals, as the trapping might not always go according to plan. Make sure you discuss any further actions following the operation and prepare yourself accordingly.

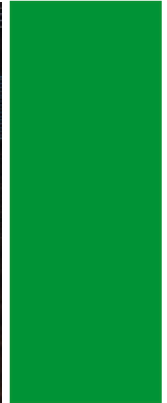


## Placing the traps

It can be useful to place the traps open and deactivated (i.e., not „set“) in the appropriate locations a few days before the actual trapping event and let the cats find food in them. This way, the cats learn that there is no danger from the traps. The traps should be placed on a firm, flat surface. Try to make sure it is protected from the elements, otherwise ensure you protect the traps with protective foil. Smelly wet food (e.g. tuna or sardines) is particularly suitable bait.

Do not feed the cats the night before the scheduled trapping so that the next day, when the traps are activated, they will be hungry and hopefully go into the traps quickly. On spay/neuter day, or while the traps are activated, you will need to be nearby to monitor the situation and respond quickly when a trap snaps shut. Once a cat is in the trap, completely cover the trap with a towel, as darkness tends to have a calming effect on the animals. Immediately move the trap to a quiet location.

It frequently happens that not all cats are caught in one day. However, for the success of the project it is essential that all animals of the group are spayed or neutered. It is the only way to ensure that the population is under control. So, please, don't give up. Keep repeating the process of trapping until all animals are spayed or neutered.



## Transport

The trapped cat should be taken to the veterinarian as soon as possible. Keep the cat in the covered trap during transport. Some trapping systems will also allow the safe transfer into a transport cage. This will be easier to transport, and the trap can be re-used straight away. Keep calm, speak softly, avoid noise. Loud noises and voices frighten and stress the animals even more. Protect your car with plastic sheets and newspapers from any faeces and urine, as some animals may empty their bladder or intestines when in perceived danger.

## At the vet

The vet will be expecting the cats and be prepared, as you will have arranged this in advance. They will transfer the cat from the trap into a restraint (or 'crush') cage in order to easily anaesthetise it. If a restraint cage is unavailable, a thick blanket may be used to push the animal backwards in the trap in order for the vet to inject the cat through the grid.

When the anaesthetized cat is asleep, it is imperative to give it an eye ointment immediately to prevent the eyes from drying out. This is very important but unfortunately often forgotten. Therefore insist on this treatment! You can also buy a normal eye ointment at the pharmacy or at the chemist/drugstore (e.g. from Bepanthen) and take it to the vet. Afterwards the cat is examined and among other things the teeth, the ears and the general condition are checked. This step is also fundamental! If, in addition to spaying/neutering, other procedures or measures are necessary, they should be performed now, as a feral cat will usually only have that once-in-a-life chance to receive veterinary treatment.



## SPAYING/NEUTERING PROCEDURE

A skilled veterinarian will only need a few minutes to spay or neuter a cat. In the case of male cats, the entire testicles are removed (called neutering). The cut in the scrotum is so small that it requires no stitches. In the female cat, the entire ovaries are removed (spaying). For a skilled veterinarian, the incision in the abdominal wall or the side will be no longer than 1 to 2 centimetres (0.4 to 0.8 in) and, after both ovaries are removed, is closed with a 'hidden' suture (an intracutaneous suture). This is to prevent the animals from instinctively trying to pull out protruding sutures with their teeth, which are perceived as foreign bodies in their wound. This could cause them to accidentally tear open their fresh surgical wound. The veterinarian will use an absorbable and atraumatic needle/thread combination, making postoperative thread removal unnecessary.

To prevent complications and infections after surgery, strict hygiene must be maintained. The veterinarian must use a fresh, sterile set of instruments for each cat. Any suture remnants must be disposed of! Veterinarians who use suture remnants for the next animal expose it to a risk of infection. The same applies to the repeated use of instruments without sterilising them first.

Spaying incision  
on a female cat



### Early spaying/neutering

The spaying/neutering of a cat should ideally be done at the age of five to six months, i.e. before they become fertile. In animal welfare situations, however, early spaying/neutering at three months of age often makes sense. Once trapped, no animal should go back into their territory unsprayed or unneutered, as it is unlikely they will go into a trap a second time. Provided a few rules are followed such as keeping the young cat/kitten warm, not making it fast for too long, sufficient hydration, etc., it will survive an earlier procedure by an experienced veterinarian without any problems.

For cats are younger than twelve weeks, consider placing them in foster homes or animal shelters. At this point, socialization and subsequent placement is still possible. This work takes time and patience, but the prospect of a nice and safe home is worth it for the cat in any case.



## Marking

For efficient, effective and sustainable population management of feral cats, it is essential to be able to quickly and clearly distinguish unneutered animals from those that have already been neutered. Internationally, the docking of the left ear tip has become accepted for this purpose. It is the only practicable and functioning identification method to recognize a spayed/neutered cat permanently and from a distance clearly and quickly and to save it from unnecessary stress and a possible unnecessary further anaesthesia or even surgery.

The small procedure is performed under anaesthesia at the same time as neutering/spaying. The tip of the ear is removed with the help of a clamp and a scalpel by means of a straight cut, in kittens about 3 mm, in adult cats a maximum of 1 cm. The clamp will then remain on the ear for about 15 minutes. By the time the clamp is removed, the bleeding will usually have stopped. In rare cases, there may be some bleeding, but blood loss is minimal, and neither this, nor the absence of the ear tip, will have any adverse effect on the health or function of the cat's ear.

This form of ear marking has, among others, the following important advantages compared to other methods:

- It is visible from a distance even to untrained persons and at dusk.
- The marking is permanent, which means that it does not fade (unlike a tattoo, for example) and cannot fall off (unlike ear tags, for example).
- Due to the straight cut, the marking cannot be confused for a fight injury, and the animal cannot get it caught on something.

Some alternative identification methods include tattoos, collars, ear tags or a microchip. However, for various reasons, these have not proven successful in animal welfare work.

For more information on this, see [http://www.netap.ch/images/Projekte/Kastrationen/Identification\\_methods\\_for\\_feral\\_cats\\_\\_ear\\_cut\\_\\_NetAP\\_June\\_2015\\_2.pdf](http://www.netap.ch/images/Projekte/Kastrationen/Identification_methods_for_feral_cats__ear_cut__NetAP_June_2015_2.pdf).

## Other procedures

After neutering, the cat will be treated against internal and external parasites, especially fleas and worms, and if possible vaccinated against feline infectious disease. If there is a chance that the animal can be rehomed, it should also be tested for FeLV/FIV. While a positive result is by no means a reason to euthanise an animal (unless it already shows the relevant symptoms), it must be taken into account when looking for a new home. Please note: Rapid tests are not 100% reliable and should be repeated after a minimum of six weeks.

If further treatments are required, such as abscess clearing, bullet removal, tooth extraction, amputations, etc., these should be performed during the same anaesthesia if possible to save the animals from further stress.



## Medication

Since it is not usually possible to recapture these cats, the veterinarian will inject an antibiotic (e.g. amoxicillin) and a painkiller (e.g. Metacam, Onsiar, Tolfedine) as a precaution. If further procedures were performed (e.g., pulling teeth, clearing an abscess) or if the cat is sickly, we also recommend giving the animal a high-dose, long-term antibiotic (e.g., Convenia).



### Warmth and body temperature

During and after surgery, as well as during the recovery phase, it is crucial to keep the cat warm until it is fully awake. Animals become hypothermic very quickly, which can affect the postoperative recovery process and sometimes even result in organ failure. Make sure that the ambient temperature during this time is at least 25 °C, or better 28 °C. If you do not have a professional practice infrastructure at your disposal, you should provide sufficient heaters, heat lamps and insulating material (e.g. blankets, insulated sleeping mats). In addition, a PET bottle filled with hot water can be placed in the cat's box. Caution: Never allow the bottle to directly touch the cat; wrap the bottle in a cloth first. The bottle must be checked regularly and replaced when it has cooled down, otherwise it will draw heat from the cat. The body temperature of the cat is normally about 38 °C. We advise checking the body temperature after the procedure, even several times if necessary. If the body temperature drops, additional warming measures have to be taken, such as using a warming mat and/or wrapping the animal tightly in a rescue blanket (golden side out). If the temperature drops below 36°C, quick action must be taken, as this is perilous for the cat!



### Hygiene

Hygiene is of utmost importance during the whole process. To prevent spreading diseases (e.g. the deadly feline panleukopenia), it is imperative to disinfect everything that comes into contact with the cats (e.g. traps, restraint cages, transport boxes, etc.). You should use highly effective antiviral, antifungal and antibacterial agents (e.g. Virkon or Softa-Man). All textiles (e.g. surgical gowns and terry cloths) must be washed at a temperature of at least 75°C.



## CHECK AND RELEASE

Before the cat is released after the procedure, it must remain confined and observed for at least 24 hours. As a rule, the veterinarian will not hand over the animal to you until it is awake. Nevertheless, check the cat's condition: Does it look fit? Is it alert, does it seem to be 'with it'? Does it appear healthy and pain-free overall? How is the wound looking? If you have a feeling that the cat might not be well or it is not waking up from the anaesthesia, consult the veterinarian immediately.

Due to the anaesthesia, the animals' ability to react will be limited for up to 36 hours, even if an antidote is administered. Therefore, an immediate release after waking up would not only present the risk that a health problem can no longer be treated, but would also expose the cat to unnecessary danger including reduced reaction times (resulting in accidents, defeat in fights, etc.).



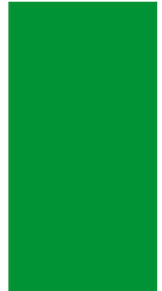
In general, the cats should be released into their former territory, where they were captured. If this is no longer possible, a new place must be found. Ask farms if they have room for some cats or try to find a solution with the responsible municipal administration. Keep in mind, however, that if cats are re-homed, they will need to be confined at the new location for a period of two to three weeks to acclimatise to the new home. Unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to tame feral cats and integrate them into households; animal shelters are therefore usually not an option.

## SET UP A FEEDING STATION

If possible, a feeding station should be set up for a spayed/neutered cat group. Not only does this help the cats, it also protects small animals, as they are less likely to end up as prey of the hungry cats. Regular feeding also offers the advantage that the group can be better monitored. This way, unspayed/unneutered (i.e. not marked) new arrivals can be spotted quickly (and should then also be spayed/neutered as soon as possible), and sick or injured animals can be treated if possible.

Set up the feeding station in a place that is protected from the elements. Keep the feeding area and bowls clean and dispose of any leftover food. Dry food has the advantage that it does not freeze in winter and spoils less quickly in summer. Always provide sufficient clean water. Cats are creatures of habit; therefore, try to always feed them around the same time. This isn't just helpful for the cats, it also makes it easier for you to keep an eye on them, as the animals will congregate regularly at feeding time.

Please note that you must have the owner's consent before setting up a feeding station on their property. Mark the feeding station as such and indicate that the animals are being monitored and are spayed/neutered. If possible, also leave a phone number where you can be reached in case of an emergency.



## SET UP WINTER SHELTERS

Cats that are always outside can handle cold and heat relatively well. If the cat colony lives on a farm, they can retreat to the barn, stable or hayloft when it is cold and raining. However, if they live on a factory site, in a graveyard or at allotments with no appropriate shelter, it is important to provide them with a wind- and weatherproof shelter. Styrofoam boxes that are not too high and offer space for at least two to three animals, for example, are a suitable option. The entrance hole must be set high (so that e.g. hedgehogs cannot get in) and it should only be as large as is necessary for a cat to get through (15 to 20 cm). Fill the boxes generously with straw; blankets or other pieces of cloth are not suitable, as they can become damp and freeze from wet paws or wet fur. The cat will then avoid the crate or may even catch a cold in it. Straw, on the other hand, absorbs moisture. Tape the lid and wrap the crate with a thick plastic, which should also be well secured. Make sure there is enough air circulation (to prevent condensation). Do not place the crate directly on the floor, but preferably on a wooden board. Tip: There are numerous instructions on how to construct winter shelters on the internet.

## COSTS

The cost of neutering varies from country to country. Talk to your veterinarian to see if they offer special rates for stray and feral animals. Also contact local animal welfare organizations, as they are likely to have a network of supportive veterinarians. Many will contribute to the cost of neutering feral cats or even cover all the costs. Keep in mind that all animal welfare organizations rely on donations and will appreciate any contribution toward the cost.

If you are in charge of a feeding station, ask your local pet store if they will provide you with cat food that can no longer be sold, free of charge. Also ask animal welfare organizations - some of them support feeders by giving away food.



## CONCLUSION

If you want to take care of a feral cat group, you need time, patience, perseverance and perhaps a little courage. But it is worth it! Spaying/neutering is one of the most important and sustainable things you can do to effectively protect cats.





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