

FACTS ABOUT *Community Cats*

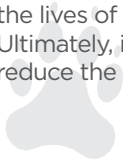
- Community cats live in family groups called “colonies.”
- Depending on availability of food, these colonies can vary in size from 2–200 cats or more.
- The average lifespan of a community cat is approximately 3–5 years. The incidence of disease in community cats is not higher than in tame or owned cats.
- Community cats are at much greater risk of being hit by cars, injured by other cats, or attacked by predators.
- Early efforts to control community cats included permanent removal from their colonies. This technique did not reduce community cat populations because a food source (intended or not) and shelter remained. Instead, it left space in the environment for new cats to move in and reproduce. This is called the “vacuum effect.”



**Thousands of community cats
are euthanized every year.**



The Companion Animal Initiative of Tennessee (CAIT) is an outreach program of the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine. Our mission is to reduce the state surplus of homeless cats and dogs by taking a proactive approach and promoting humane education throughout the state, thus improving the lives of all companion animals in Tennessee. Ultimately, it will take all of us working together to reduce the surplus of unwanted animals in Tennessee.



*Improving the lives of
companion animals in Tennessee.*

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Community **CATS**

**Understanding the Issues.
Creating Solutions.**



866-907-7729

What is a Community Cat?

Community cats, also referred to as stray or feral cats, have co-existed with people for thousands of years. Whether in rural or urban environments, community cats adapt to their surroundings, creating colonies and reproducing offspring that are fearful of humans. If caught early, kittens can be socialized enough to be adopted. Otherwise, they will remain feral.

Why are they a problem?

- Left unmanaged, colonies continue to grow as the cats constantly give birth.
- Un-neutered male cats (owned or not) create a sickening odor by spraying their territory and can be loud when fighting or mating.
- Community cats living in rural areas typically rely on wild birds, rodents and other native species to survive.
- Feeding groups of community cats without having them spayed/neutered allows the colony to continue to grow and compound the problem.
- Unsocialized cats cannot be placed in homes and shelters are not able to list them for adoption.



What are the answers?

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)

TNR is a humane and effective alternative that not only helps control the size of community cat colonies, but also improves its health and well-being. With TNR, the cats are trapped, vaccinated, and spayed or neutered, then returned to their colony.

A **tipped left ear** is an indication that a cat is part of a managed colony. While the cat is under anesthesia for a spay/neuter, a veterinarian “tips” the cat’s left ear (see photo at right).

TNR, coupled with colony management that includes regular monitoring and feeding by care takers, keeps community cat populations healthier and less dependent on wildlife for their survival.

Responsible Animal Ownership

If you have any outside cats*, have them spayed or neutered. Kittens as young as nine weeks (about 2 pounds) can be spayed and neutered. Ask your veterinarian if he or she performs early age spay/neuters.

If you are feeding any stray or feral cats that do not belong to you, have them spayed or neutered.

Although male cats are not burdened with kittens, they still contribute to the problem.

**In general, “outside cats” are stray cats, community/feral cats and owned cats that are allowed outside, even for short periods of time.*

How can I help?

Efforts big and small are needed to help manage community cats.

- If you know of an unmanaged colony contact your local community cat or feral cat group.
- Volunteer your time to community cat management by either helping to monitor a colony or offering assistance at a TNR clinic.
- Make a monetary donation to TNR efforts. The money will help cover surgical costs, medicine, vaccinations, and/or food for the cats.
- Consider joining a local community cat or feral cat group. Visit the CAIT website for more information (vetmed.tennessee.edu/outreach).
- Pay the spay/neuter fee for a cat owner who can’t afford it. To locate a subsidized spay/neuter clinic in Tennessee call 1-866-907-7729.

