

What is a Feral Cat?

A feral cat is a cat that was born and raised in the wild with very little if no human association during the key period (6-9 weeks) of their lives when their future behaviours are formed by their experiences at that time. These cats are free roaming and will always want to live outside—either in alleys, around gardens, or on farms. While some may appear friendly (especially friendly to one person), they retain independence and may source their own food; often by scavenging, hunting or just eating food that people leave for them. These cats are completely harmless to humans and all research has shown they are no more likely to carry diseases infectious to other cats or to humans, than pets. Additionally, being more fearful animals, ferals tend to be more likely to bury their faeces than pet cats, so mess in gardens is more likely to be from pets.

Oak Tree contributes to the community by carrying out TNR. TNR stands for Trap, Neuter and Return and neuters around 150 cats every 6 months. We aim to manage cats who are feral or less socialized by maintaining them at their current location. This keeps our limited cattery spaces free for those cats which really do need to come into our care more urgently (such as from cruelty and stray situations) and which will cope better with being confined in a cattery. TNR stabilizes the population of feral cats, limits or eliminates further breeding, and helps control disease in each population—contributing to the overall health of all cats in an area. Through TNR, feral cats can live the rest of their lives content and healthy without adding to the homeless cat population.



How much does it cost?

TNR is free—we do not charge for the service but we would welcome donations. It costs us between £30 and £90 to neuter each cat in time, petrol, equipment and vet costs. The national Cats Protection Neutering Department supports some of our veterinary costs for which we are very grateful!

How do you carry it out?

We will work with you to carry out all trapping and transport in larger colonies. For one or two cats we may loan you a trap and ask you to transport the cats if you are able to. It's important to follow all our instructions and fully cooperate with guidelines given to ensure as many cats are neutered as possible. We are extremely successful in the numbers caught but **ONLY** if instructions are followed.



The process

We'll do an initial consultation and assess the number and sex of the cats present. We will then check with the vet practices we use (currently Eden Vets, The Green Vets in Skelton, And Vets 4 Pets Carlisle) for dates when they can neuter. We'll loan a dummy trap or a feeding cage to you to get the cats used to, and we will then attend on the dates advised. This may include evenings, overnights and early mornings to try and ensure all cats get done. You'll need to ensure

that we have access to anywhere on site, and that all pet cats are kept indoors to avoid being caught. What is crucial is that cats need to be very hungry to get caught, so it is essential that you follow our instructions concerning not feeding the cats.

If visiting critical areas of farms, we will either ensure that the vehicle used has not recently been near agricultural areas recently, or we will clean and disinfect wheels and footwear between farms.

When trapping we have specialist traps and cages which we are extremely experienced at using, so we won't need you to handle or otherwise confine any cats.



When do the cats come home?

The day after surgery in most cases—confinement is stressful for them so we aim for 48 hours maximum. We make the timing decision based on a combination of our own experience, the veterinary procedure carried out, and the weather.

Normally males and any routine-neutered females (operated on the side) will be returned the next morning after surgery. If a female has needed midline surgery we might hang on to her for an extra day to be extra safe. All cats receive routine pain relief that lasts a couple of days and if considered necessary, a long acting antibiotic.

We generally don't release the cats on the same day as surgery since their ability to regulate their own body temperature, may take several hours to return, as may full consciousness. If surgery has been delayed (for example if a cat was trapped unexpectedly and it has taken a couple of days to get it into the vets for neutering) then of course the cat may not be returned as quickly as always.

On the day of release, we will either leave food down at the release spot or will ask you to do so. Do be aware that the cats may be a bit shell-shocked and so you might not see all of them for a day or two.

There are very rarely any postoperative complications – but call us if you do see anything. If you do have access to a trap or one of the feeding cages, we would recommend that you continue to acclimatise and feed cats in the trap even after their return, so that they are easier to trap in the event of any problems.

There are usually no stitches in the skin in either males or females – occasionally skin sutures are placed but these will dissolve automatically after a couple of weeks.



How do I know which cats have been done?

We ear tip the left ear (removing 3 to 8 millimetres from the end while the cat is under anaesthetic) so we can see in the long term which cats are neutered. This is important if the cat moves away from the original home zone later in life, or if the original feeder moves away.

What if I only want certain cats done?

We neuter all cats in the colony, without exception, and this includes males and all others that can be caught. We do not provide the TNR service unless all cats are going to be neutered. We safely neuter pregnant cats and those which have recently had kittens. Lots of experience shows that the kittens thrive if mum is away for a short time, and neutering will not affect milk production so kittens continue to be fed by that cat and other females in the group.

Can you take some cats away?

We neuter and return all healthy cats, except those which we deem suitable for adoption and you agree can be adopted, and any which need to be humanely put to sleep because of ill health. We do not provide a TNR service in cases where animals are removed from site.

What do I do next

Leave your details at reception including two phone numbers and your name and address for us. Alternatively you can visit this internet site: www.oaktreeanimals.org.uk and register for help on the menu tab saying “feral cats”.