

TNR is a misguided attempt at controlling overpopulation

The terms can be confusing — feral cats, wild cats, stray cats, domesticated cats, house cats. A feral cat is defined as an unowned and untamed domestic cat, born in the wild and without direct human contact.

Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) seems like a cure for our feral-cat problems; however, this is the furthest thing from the truth. To institute a program such as TNR is irresponsible in many ways. While there are many reasons not to institute a program such as this, there is generally one that TNR proponents have: to prevent the possible death of a cat. These decisions should be made on a biological and environmental stance and not in line with the "feel-good" society we are becoming.

TNR is a misguided attempt at controlling overpopulation that results in environmental irresponsibility, the mortality of native wildlife and miserable living conditions (trash, makeshift housing) and tragic deaths (cars, disease) for cats, not to mention subsidized abandonment and a drop-off point for more cats.

I am a professional wildlife control operator who has removed many feral cat colonies and corrected misguided attempts at TNR. A small community within Old Bridge had accumulated hundreds of feral cats and just as many complaints, resulting in the removal of 370 cats from that community. However, these cats are no longer free to roam and decimate the native wildlife population or create a public-health risk and nuisance. All cats were turned over to a state-licensed shelter and either adopted out or euthanized vs. being altered and returned to perpetuate the problem.

First, the state of New Jersey does not endorse TNR when it comes to public safety. This information and pertinent laws can be found on the state website at www.state.nj.us/health/animalwelfare/stray.shtml.

When someone is involved in a bite/scratch incident, who will take the financial and legal responsibility? Rabies shots and treatment for exposure to a host of other diseases and parasites is not inexpensive and can be quite a traumatic experience for the victim. A child will be quick to approach a cat or dog and risk being bitten. TNR advocates would consider it

ludicrous to take legal responsibility for the actions of their colonies.

A frequent problem at managed cat colonies is the presence of rabies vector species including skunks, raccoons and fox as well as rats/mice. As stated by the New Jersey Animal Rights Alliance (NJARA) in its Project TNR literature, not every cat in a colony can be trapped; therefore, not every cat is vaccinated for rabies or distemper or treated for parasites. Cats are not retrapped for subsequent vaccinations when initial inoculations expire. Cats are the only known carrier of toxoplasmosis, which can affect people and wildlife populations.

Colonies can grow to large numbers, creating unsanitary conditions around homes and under structures. Unsanitary conditions in such places include accumulated urine, feces, flies, roaches, dead birds, rodents and reptiles.

While I am in agreement with reducing the cat population, TNR only perpetuates the killing of wildlife. The Audubon Society does not support TNR; it does support the Cat Indoors! Program.

(www.nj Audubon.org/conservation/catsindoors/). Instituting a TNR program will be placing our endangered species at great risk from the now free-roaming cats. Ground-nesting birds such as shore birds, quail and woodcock have had their populations devastated by cats. There is no evidence that colony-management programs will reduce diseases. With many proven detrimental consequences to humans and native species (that our ecosystem depends upon), feral-cat colonies should not be kept. Feral cats that are captured should not be released. They should either be adopted and kept indoors, or euthanized.

Let's hope that common sense will prevail and not waiver to environmental irresponsibility. The following is a good article that shows the facts related to the current feral cat issues that we are facing today:

http://www.nwcoa.com/pr/wall_street_journal_Oct11-2002.pdf. **Frank Spiecker** Harbor Wildlife Control Laurence Harbor section of Old Bridge