

# TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN (TNR) INSTRUCTIONS FOR FERAL CATS



Ark-Valley Humane Society  
701 Gregg Dr.  
Buena Vista, CO 81211  
(719) 395-2737

**WHAT IS THE TNR PROGRAM** Ark-Valley Humane Society's TNR Program provides no cost spay/neuter and vaccinations for free-roaming/feral cats living in the Chaffee County, Colorado. Call Amber van Leuken, AVHS Programs & Services Manager, at 719-966-8023, to find out which veterinary clinics are currently participating.

**WHAT IS A FERAL CAT** Free-roaming/feral cats are born and raised outside with no human contact or are strays that have lived outside long enough to revert to a wild state. Adult feral cats usually cannot be tamed and are most content living outdoors. Importantly, feral cats are scared of people and therefore do not pose a threat to people as long as they can run away and are not cornered. Never try to touch or hold a feral cat.

**WHY TNR** Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) benefits the cats and the community. Cats are spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and ear-tipped (the universal symbol of a neutered and vaccinated cat), and then returned to their outdoor home. The colony's population stabilizes—no more kittens! Trap-Neuter-Return improves their lives and improves their relations with the community—the behaviors and stresses associated with mating stop. Trap-Neuter-Return is the humane, effective approach for feral cats. Feral cats are just as healthy as pet cats—with equally low rates of disease. They have the same lifespans, too (Alley Cat Allies, 2015).

**GETTING A HUMANE TRAP** Humane traps are available for loan at Ark-Valley Humane Society in Buena Vista (701 Gregg Drive). A \$50 trap deposit will be collected and returned when the trap is returned to the shelter. Ask humane society staff to demonstrate how to set the trap if you have any questions.

**SCHEDULING WITH A VET** Before you set the trap, contact the participating veterinary clinic you plan to use, to let them know you are setting the trap and may be bringing in a feral cat or cats for spay/neuter surgery. This will allow the veterinary clinic to schedule an appointment, give you any instructions, or inform you if they cannot perform the surgery that day. Surgeries are typically scheduled Monday through Friday, and it's possible the cat will need to stay an extra day at the clinic. You'll want to trap the cat the night before the surgery is scheduled, or early the morning of, to minimize stress to the trapped cat. The cat can then be assessed, sterilized, vaccinated, and released in the shortest amount of time.

**GETTING CATS USED TO ENTERING A TRAP** Before the appointment, start feeding the cat only inside of the trap. Zip tie or wire the trap door into the open position, so that the door will not swing shut when the cat steps on the trap plate. This will allow the cat to get comfortable going in and out of the trap for food, prior to the spay/neuter appointment. When it's time to trap the cat, you have a better chance of catching the cat on the first try.

**TRAPPING A CAT** To set the trap, open the trap door by pushing the top of the door in and pulling the bottom of the door upward. There is a small hook attached to the right side of the trap top. It hooks onto a tiny metal cylinder on the right side of the door. The hook holds the door in an open position, which also raises the trap plate. When the cat enters the trap and steps on the plate it will cause the hook to release the door and close the trap.

You can bait the trap with smelly food, such as canned cat food or canned fish. Catnip in addition to food also works well as a great lure. Set food on aluminum foil on the ground and place the trap on top of the food so the food is far back in the trap but not accessible from the outside. Cover the trap with a towel leaving just the opening exposed. Line the trap floor with a piece of newspaper to obscure the wire mesh and trigger plate, so that the cat feels more comfortable entering.

Leave the trap area for 15 minutes at a time until you've succeeded in trapping a cat. Never leave traps unattended for long periods of time. Cats in traps outdoors are vulnerable to the elements and predation. If you've trapped a cat, check to be sure that both ears are intact. If the tip of the left ear is missing, this cat has already been spayed or neutered through the TNR Program and should be released.

**KITTENS & NURSING MOMS** Kittens can be trapped as early as 12 weeks (3 months old) and 3 pounds for spay/neuter surgery. We recommend waiting until kittens are this old to trap them and the mom cat. If kittens are younger, and are in danger or sick, then contact AVHS Programs & Services Manager for assistance at 719-395-2737 or [avanleuken@ark-valley.org](mailto:avanleuken@ark-valley.org). A large drop trap can be used to trap and mom and kittens together.

**CARE & TRANSPORT** Once the cat is trapped, keep the trap covered with the towel until you can bring the cat to the veterinarian clinic. Keep the cat in the trap. Place the trap in a safe, sheltered area, such as inside your garage until it's time to bring it to the vet. Bring the cat in the trap to the veterinary clinic first thing in the morning, as per the vet's instructions. When carrying a trapped cat, hold the trap away from your body. If trapped the night before, do not give the cat additional food overnight, since ideally food should be withheld at least 12 hours prior to spay/neuter surgery. Never try to touch a feral cat. If you are bitten, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water. Seek medical attention and report it to Ark-Valley Humane Society.

**AT THE VET** Coordinate with the veterinary clinic to determine a time and date for you to pick up the cat after surgery. At the veterinary clinic, the overall health of the cat will be assessed. Cats with a poor prognosis due to serious medical issues may be humanely euthanized. Healthy or treatable cats will be spayed or neutered and vaccinated for Rabies and FVRCP. The tip of the left ear will be removed during surgery for identification purposes.

**WHAT IS AN EAR-TIP** We use the word "ear-tip" to describe when a small portion of the tip of a feral cat's left ear is surgically removed during neuter surgery, to denote that the cat has been neutered and vaccinated. Ear-tipping is done while the cat is anesthetized and is not painful for the cat. Ear-tipping is the most effective way to identify neutered feral cats from a distance, to make sure they are not trapped or undergo surgery a second time (Alley Cat Allies, 2015).

**RETURNING A CAT** When you pick up the cat at the veterinary clinic it will be in the trap it arrived in. Wrap the trap in a towel and transport the cat to its familiar habitat for release. If the cat is picked up on the same day of surgery, the veterinarian may advise that the cat be kept in the trap overnight in a warm location for recovery. And, don't forget to return the trap to Ark-Valley Humane Society and collect your deposit.

**REHOMING A CAT** Any time a cat is not returned to its habitat there is an increased risk that it won't survive. Never take a feral cat from its habitat and release it into the wild, since doing so would be traumatic to the cat and there is little chance it would survive. In cases when a cat cannot be returned to its habitat, rehoming may be used as a last resort. AVHS keeps a list of potential barn homes for feral cats. Do not trap a cat until you have confirmed a new home for the cat. The person receiving the cat should keep the cat contained in a sheltered environment, such as a shed, garage, or room in a barn for several days, while providing it with food, water, litterbox, and a chance to recover from surgery and adjust the surrounding sounds and smells. Then the cat can be released, but should continue to be fed and provided with a fresh source of water.

**CARING FOR AN OUTDOOR CAT** Now that the cat is spayed or neutered and is back to living outdoors, there are a few things you can do to help care for it. Unless there is a known and plentiful food source, these cats should be fed daily and provided with fresh water. Cats also need shelter from inclement weather and winter temperatures. Cat shelters, similar to dog houses, or access to a barn or shed should be provided. Feral caretakers should also monitor cats for potential health issues and should seek medical care as needed.

**MORE INFORMATION** For general information about TNR and Feral Cat caretaking, visit the Alley Cat Allies website at [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org) and click on the GET HELP tab. For specific questions about Ark-Valley Humane Society's TNR program, please contact Amber van Leuken, AVHS Programs & Services Manager, at 719-966-8023 or by email at [avanaleuken@ark-valley.org](mailto:avanaleuken@ark-valley.org).