

Five FAQs (frequently asked questions) About **STRAY AND FERAL CATS**

1. What is a feral cat?

A feral cat is either a cat who has lived his whole life with little or no human contact and is not socialized, or is a stray cat who was lost or abandoned and has lived away from human contact long enough to revert to a wild state. Feral cats avoid human contact and cannot be touched by strangers.

2. Is “feral cat” another term for “stray cat”? What is the difference between a stray cat and a feral cat?

“Feral” is not another word for “stray.” A stray cat is a domestic cat who has been abandoned or has strayed from home and become lost. A stray cat may be skittish in your presence, but because stray cats once knew human companionship, they can usually be re-socialized and re-homed.

Adult feral cats usually cannot be socialized and are most content living outside. Feral kittens up to eight or ten weeks of age, on the other hand, can often be tamed and placed in homes. See Alley Cat Allies’ factsheet, “Taming Feral Kittens.”

3. How can I tell if a cat is stray or feral?

Observe the cat's appearance and behavior. A stray cat is likely to approach you, although usually not close enough for you to touch him. If you put food down, a stray cat will likely start to eat it right away. A stray cat is often vocal, sometimes talking insistently, and may look disheveled, as if unaccustomed to dealing with conditions on the street. A stray cat may be seen at all hours of the day.

A feral cat is silent, will not approach humans, and generally will be seen only from dusk to dawn, unless extraordinarily hungry and foraging for food. A feral cat has adapted to conditions and is likely to be well groomed. If you put food down for a feral cat, he will wait until you move away from the area before approaching the food.

4. I would like to find good homes for the feral cats I have been feeding. Is this possible?

Generally, no. Adult feral cats usually cannot be socialized and will not adjust to living indoors. A great deal of time and effort can go into attempting to tame an adult feral cat, with no assurance of success. This time and effort is far better spent sterilizing feral cats to break the cycle of reproduction. See Alley Cat Allies’ factsheet, “The ABCs of TNR.”

Stray cats and kittens up to eight or ten weeks of age can usually be socialized and placed in homes.

5. I discovered some cats outside. Who can I call to come and get them?

The first step is to determine if the cats are tame or wild. If the cats are tame, they may belong to people living in the neighborhood. Observe the cats to determine if this is so. Post “lost cat” flyers throughout the neighborhood. After a day or two, if you get no response and you decide they are lost or otherwise not owned, you can register the cats online at www.pets911.com in the Found Pet section. If you take the cats to a shelter, be certain it is a no-kill shelter.

If the cats are feral (wild), animal control or a municipal shelter is the only agency that may come and get them, and the cats will almost certainly be killed. Even no-kill shelters find feral cats impossible to adopt out because they are wild.

Fortunately, there is a solution. Feral cats live in colonies and congregate near food sources. Feral cat colonies can be managed with a nonlethal method called **Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)**, in which cats are humanely (and painlessly) trapped, spayed or neutered, and returned to their colony site where volunteer caretakers provide them with food, water, and shelter.

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the only chance feral cats have of living safe, healthy lives without reproducing. But TNR is a hands-on project requiring commitment from one or more volunteer caretakers, often with help from feral cat advocates living in the area.

For information on starting a TNR program in your neighborhood, refer to Alley Cat Allies’ factsheets, videos, and other materials. ■