



# HOW TO HELP COMMUNITY CATS

A step-by-step guide to Trap Neuter Return







# Introduction

## What is the CATalyst Project?

**T**he CATalyst Project aims to raise awareness of community cats in Ireland and to promote best practice and training in Trap Neuter Return (TNR) programmes. The Project is based on the idea of citizens within a community implementing humane management programmes for community cats. The CATalyst Project fosters partnerships with local rescue groups, grassroots rescuers and local animal welfare groups.

We recognise that success is based on community partnerships. Combined, these partnerships are integral to ending feline homelessness and overpopulation. Individuals can't solve the problem, but when several partners work side-by-side we can make a huge impact in saving and improving the lives of these beautiful animals.

We have developed this handbook to provide a blueprint for creating a programme to help community cats and to motivate people in the community to support the project. This handbook provides all the information and resources you need to create a successful Trap Neuter Return programme in your community.

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### Ending feline homelessness and overpopulation.

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*The **How to Help Community Cats Handbook** is a resource for community cat colony caregivers and those who want to learn more about TNR or implement TNR programmes in their community.*









# How to Help Community Cats

## A step-by-step guide to Trap Neuter Return

**A**t teacher at the school, your neighbour, the lady at the supermarket; people all over Ireland care for outdoor cats every day. Like them, you've discovered cats in your community - and you want to help them.

### Feral & Community Cats

It is guesstimated that there are hundreds of thousands of cats in Ireland. Many of them make their home outdoors and are known as *community cats*. When you consider that one female cat and her offspring can be responsible for 30 cats in an area in just one year the numbers are hardly surprising.

While some community cats are friendly, some feral and most somewhere in between, none are 'wild' - every native cat in Ireland can trace their ancestors back to a family pet - 'wild' or 'feral' cats are no more than abandoned domestic cats or their descendants. Feral cats differ in that they are not socialised to people. They are wary of us and cannot be adopted.

Community cats have a home - the outdoors. There is a simple way you can help them: Trap Neuter Return (TNR). This programme ends reproduction, stabilises colony populations, and improves cats' lives. The behaviours and stresses associated with mating such as pregnancy, yowling, spraying and fighting stop. There are no new litters of kittens.

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**Over 300,000 kittens are born in Ireland every year**

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*Over 300,000 kittens are born in Ireland every year. Of those 180,000 kittens die before they are 4 months old.* What kills these kittens? Hunger, disease, exposure and people. There are no statistics for how many felines are killed in shelters. Find out more about kitten mortality at [tnrireland.ie/KittenMortality](http://tnrireland.ie/KittenMortality).



## What is Trap Neuter Return?

1. **TRAP:** Humanely (painlessly) trap all of the cats in a colony (a group of cats living outdoors together).
2. **NEUTER:** Take the cats in their traps to a veterinarian to be health checked, neutered, treated for parasites and eartipped (a universal symbol indicating they have been neutered).
3. **RETURN:** Return the cats to their original outdoor home.

## What NOT to do if you want to help cats

You may think that calling your local authority is the best way to help them, but it isn't. Believe it or not, the local authority only deals with dogs! While many rescue centres in Ireland are no-kill or low-kill, many others humanely kill animals who are not adoptable.

Remember that because feral cats are unsocialised to people, they are not adoptable. Most rescues won't take in feral cats simply because they don't belong in the shelter system, or because they can't rehome them.



**TNR TV**

Watch our selection of TNR videos online, as a complement to this guide.  
[tnrireland.ie/Videos](https://tnrireland.ie/Videos)





# This guide will help you to help cats effectively and humanely

CATalyst is an exciting initiative whose mission is to inform, enable and inspire TNR projects throughout Ireland. This manual is just one component of our educational tool set, compiled in association with Drogheda Animal Rescue, Feral Cats Ireland and Animal Advocacy, experienced practitioners in Irish animal welfare and TNR.

We've drawn heavily from material by *Alley Cat Allies* who helped introduce TNR to the United States way back in 1990, adapting it to suit our own experiences of the feline situation in Ireland. They've helped hundreds of thousands of individuals and local organisations worldwide improve the lives of community cats by providing expert guidance on how to implement Trap Neuter Return, and educating communities about the benefits of the programme. Now CATalyst intends to do the same for Ireland. This guide reflects the standards we've collectively developed in our decades of experience - and it will show you how easy it is to help cats.

**Armed with your new knowledge you will be able to join the thousands of people improving the lives of community cats!**

## The CATalyst TNR Network

Many individuals and organisations volunteer in TNR programmes around Ireland. CATalyst is an inspiring TNR initiative with designated trainers throughout Ireland.

If you're interested in initiating TNR projects contact CATalyst to find out more. If you're looking for someone to help you out with your cat colony check CATalyst's listing for those available in your area.

Find out more at [tnrireland.ie/CATalyst](https://tnrireland.ie/CATalyst)



### TNR IRELAND

Throughout this guide we refer you to our website, [tnrireland.ie](https://tnrireland.ie). There you can find more in-depth information on all the topics in this guide – and more!



### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

We aim to promote animal welfare and TNR best practice. Not all groups have the time or money to achieve it – but it's something for us all to strive for. Take note of our Best Practice boxes and aim to be among the Best!



# Step 1 Preparation for Trapping

## Five Things to Keep in Mind about Trapping

1. **Only use a humane box trap or drop trap to trap a community cat.** Never use darts or tranquillisers.
2. **Never attempt to pick up or handle a conscious feral cat - even a kitten.** You risk injury to yourself and the cat. **Note: There are those who'd have a cat killed if she bit someone so don't let that situation arise.**
3. **Do what you can to trap all cats and kittens during your first trapping session.** This is important because the more times cats are exposed to the trapping process, the more suspicious they become of traps.
4. **Feral cats are cautious of people in general.** This fact should influence every choice you make when trapping. They may feel even more frightened and threatened when faced with a new experience like being trapped, caged and transported to a veterinarian. This is also true for cats who normally act docile around their caregivers as well. Feral cats may not communicate their needs if they are hurt, in pain or frightened. Instead, they will thrash about trying to escape when in their traps or they may simply shut down. It is essential that you stay quiet, calm and conscious of the cats' well-being during your trapping ventures.
5. **Every trapping effort is different.** A colony's location – a school, a warehouse, a farm, a lane, a car park - will have unique elements for you to consider. Use your discretion and common sense to determine any additional steps to those provided in this guide and tailor the basics to fit your colony's situation. For instance, you may need to work with school staff, connect with other caregivers, or ensure you have enough traps and vehicles for a large colony.

But most importantly before you trap a cat, **PLAN**. Take time to feel comfortable and confident. Review all of the Trap Neuter Return steps and scenarios in this booklet and online. This will help you be calm and unruffled when trapping; ensuring the safety and lowered stress level of the cats. Remember, you're doing what is best for the cats. Keep in mind that simply doing Trap Neuter Return significantly improves the cats' lives.



## 1. Assess the Cats and Their Environment

- **Communicate with neighbours around the colony.** Open communication and education are important parts of conducting Trap Neuter Return. Many are not aware that community cats live and thrive outdoors and that neutering improves their lives and they may have problems with the cats that can easily be addressed. By introducing yourself as the person to contact if neighbours have questions or concerns, you can prevent potential situations from escalating and avoid endangering the cats. Learn more about helping cats and people co-exist at [tnrireland.ie/CommunityRelations](https://tnrireland.ie/CommunityRelations). And use our flyers and leaflets, which are available at [tnrireland.ie/Paperwork](https://tnrireland.ie/Paperwork) to help explain your plans.
- **Find out if there are current caregivers of the colony, something often indicated by food or water bowls.** If your neighbourhood communications didn't give you contact details, consider leaving a note with your contact information. Be clear in the note that you are there to help the cats, not to remove them. Once you've found any other caregivers in the area, coordinate your efforts - their cooperation could be critical for success.
- **If there is a primary caregiver for the colony, have them read and sign the Consent Form,** [tnrireland.ie/ConsentForm](https://tnrireland.ie/ConsentForm). Emphasise that the cats will be returned to the location they came from.
- **Use our Planning Form - A Community Cat Tracking System** ([tnrireland.ie/Tracking](https://tnrireland.ie/Tracking)), to record the number of cats and a brief description of each, including health status. Also include photos of each cat if possible. Better still, if there's a caregiver or interested neighbour, ask them to do this, or do it with them. Many people enjoy being included in the process - and you'll get more accurate numbers and general information from someone who knows the cats well.
- **While assessing the colony, determine if the cats are friendly or feral.** This will help you prepare for what you will do after trapping and neutering. Will you be looking for adoptive homes for the friendly cats or returning all of the cats to the colony.

*See Special Scenarios below.*

### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

Involve caregivers and neighbours in the process as much as possible. They'll know the cats and their quirks far better than you ever will (unless you move in!). They may even be able to pick some of the cats up and put them in a carrier saving you a lot of trapping time and energy. You'll leave them with a positive feeling about you and TNR. Find out more at [tnrireland.ie/Caregivers](https://tnrireland.ie/Caregivers)

### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

While some TNR groups attempt to rehome stray and socialised cats, sadly the situation in Ireland makes it impractical. With so many socialised cats (many Irish 'ferals' are, in fact, quite friendly and used to humans) and so few homes, CATalyst recommends returning all healthy cats and kittens to their colony.



**Note each cat's socialisation level on the Planning Form.** It can be difficult to discern a cat's level of socialisation by just looking at them. Observe the cat's appearance and behaviour using the quick tips below. Confirm your assessment with those individuals who know the cats and have long-term familiarisation with them; they'll be much better informed than you of their colony's individuals. These tips are only a general guide. Each cat acts differently so trust your own judgement. You can learn more about the difference between stray/friendly and feral cats at [tnrireland.ie/StrayorFeral](https://tnrireland.ie/StrayorFeral).

Stray/Friendly Cat	Feral Cat
Likely to approach you	Will not approach you
May approach food that you put down right away	Will wait until you leave before approaching food that you put down
Likely to be vocal	Will be silent
May look dishevelled	Will appear groomed
May be seen at all hours of the day	May be more active at night

## 2. Be Prepared for Special Scenarios

Your response to these scenarios will very much depend on your ethical position with regards to animal welfare/animal rights and kill/no-kill.

- **Kittens and/or Nursing Mothers:** You may come across kittens and/or nursing mothers in your trapping efforts. There are many factors for you to take into account before you decide what your plan of action will be, including the presence of the mother, the kittens' ages and your own resources. Learn what to take into consideration as well as how to trap the entire family at [tnrireland.ie/Kittens](https://tnrireland.ie/Kittens). If you decide to include kittens and/or the nursing mother in Trap Neuter Return, it is important to use the proper traps. See equipment lists at [tnrireland.ie/Equipment](https://tnrireland.ie/Equipment) to ensure their safety. Follow the proper post-surgery protocol for kittens and mothers. This is available at [tnrireland.ie/PostSurgery](https://tnrireland.ie/PostSurgery).

- **Pregnant Queens:** Are you going to have a queen's pregnancy terminated? Do you have reliable caregivers to keep an eye on her and her resulting kittens if you don't? This decision is complicated by the fact that it's very difficult to tell if a queen is pregnant in the early stages.
- **Ill or Injured Cats:** Plan ahead to ensure you can provide immediate care to, and make decisions about, an ill or injured cat. Have the phone number on hand of a veterinarian who works with feral cats, and whose practice will be open when you are trapping. Building up an emergency fund to help cover unexpected expenses is a good idea, and allows you to get a cat medical treatment immediately if necessary.
- **Socialised Cats:** Have a plan in place for how to help socialised cats. For instance, will you find potential foster or adoptive homes, work with a local cat rescue group or include the cats in your Trap Neuter Return programme? Whatever your resources allow, it's important to neuter every cat in the colony. For more information and tips on finding homes for socialised cats, visit [tnrireland.ie/FindingaHome](https://tnrireland.ie/FindingaHome).

## 3. Establish a Feeding Schedule

Establish a set time and place to feed the cats every day. This will get the cats used to coming out and eating while you are there (and help with your assessment process). If there's a caregiver, explain the schedule and assess if they'll stick to it to save you a daily trip. For one to two weeks before TNR day, feed the cats as much as they can eat in a 30-minute period, and pick up the food after that period. *An established schedule is essential to be sure the cats come to eat when you plan to trap.*

Remember *always* to coordinate your feeding and trapping efforts with other caregivers. This will make the best use of your time and resources.

## 4. Ensure Appropriate Placement of the Feeding Station

If you have a feeding station, make sure it is positioned in an area that is free of human traffic and inconspicuous.



#### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

Best practice on pregnant queens is a tough one. But keep in mind a feline foetus is only considered viable at seven weeks. Some organisations will terminate right up to term. Some won't terminate at all. CATalyst recommend terminating up to seven weeks as an option.

#### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

Keep in mind that TNR is about *neutering*; it's *not* about rescue. If you lean towards the animal rights/no-kill end of the spectrum you'll want to consider teaming up with a rescue group to deal with socialised & sick animals, nursing mothers & their offspring and heavily pregnant queens. If you start fostering yourself you'll have a lot less money for TNR.

#### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

Feed out of unset traps for one to two weeks prior to the trapping day to get cats used to seeing and walking into them. Do not put food anywhere else but inside the trap. Remove the back door or secure the door of the trap so it stays open. Remove traps after the cats eat so there is no risk of theft, damage or a cat accidentally being trapped.



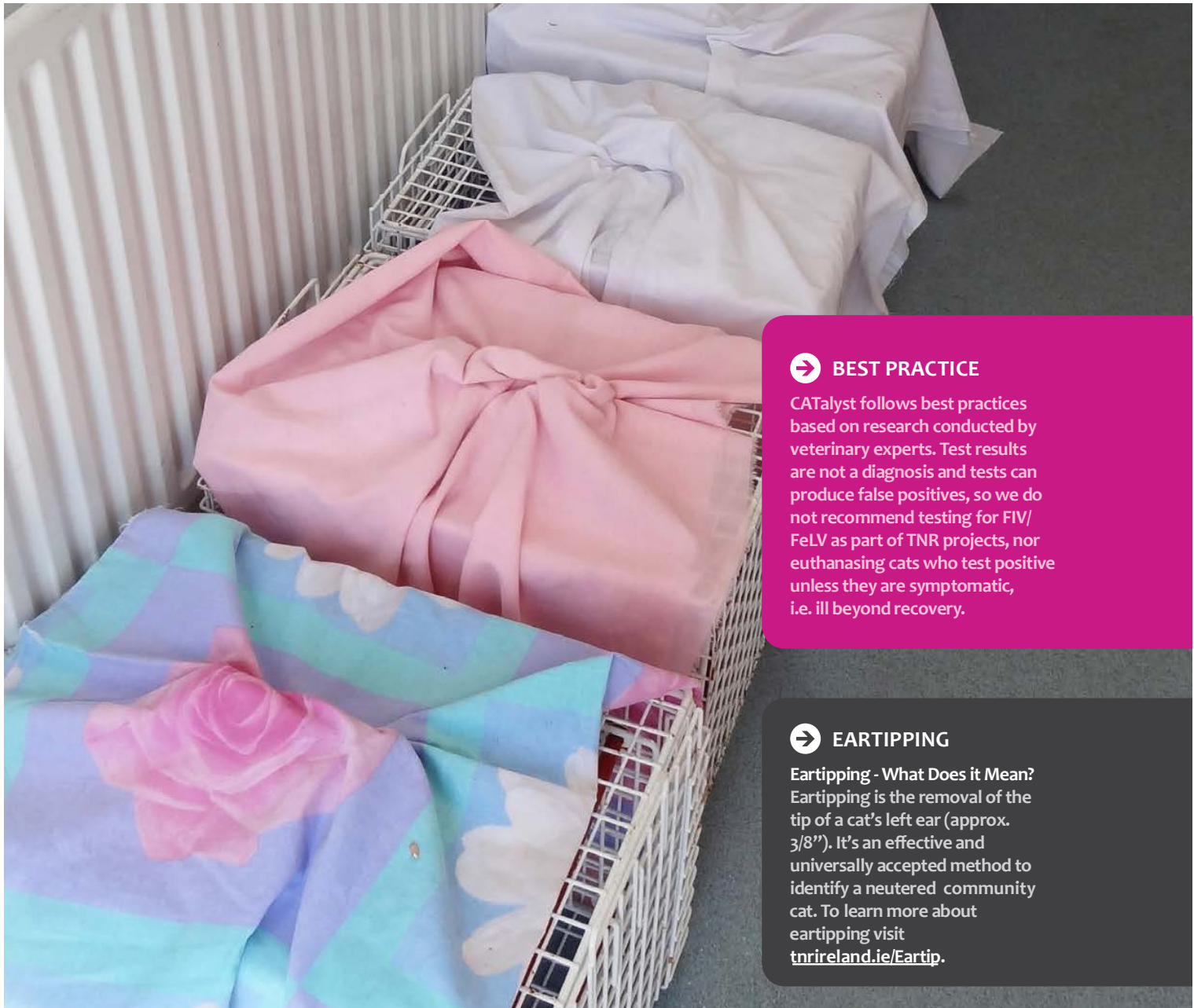
## 5. Find and Coordinate with a Feral Friendly Veterinary Practice

If possible, work with vets with feral cat experience. You can find one at our Feral Friendly Vets listing at [tnrireland.ie/FeralFriendsVets](https://tnrireland.ie/FeralFriendsVets). Or, inspire and inform your own vet with our feral cat veterinary resource centre at [tnrireland.ie/Veterinarian](https://tnrireland.ie/Veterinarian).

Consider the following to help you choose your vet:

- **Prices:** Ask for the exact charge for spaying and neutering and all other treatments. Decide which services to request. Figure out the cost of veterinary care for a male and a female cat so that you can estimate a budget for the whole colony. CATalyst strongly recommends that all cats being sterilised be given aftercare pain medication unless there is a medical reason not to. You will need a practice that will give you discounts and low-cost options. Always tactfully ask about these, don't expect them, and be grateful for any you get.
- **Appointment Policies:** Find out if the practice understands the unpredictable nature of trapping cats. You may intend to trap six cats, but only end up trapping four. Conversely, you may think there are six cats to be trapped and then end up discovering a seventh. It's important that the practice be flexible in order to accommodate a few more or less cats than you expected. Ask them how many cats they can spay/neuter in a single day.
- **Testing Protocols:** Ensure that testing for FeLV and FIV is NOT a requirement. CATalyst is against routine testing for FeLV and FIV, and against euthanasing cats who test positive unless ill beyond recovery. Learn more about FeLV and FIV testing at [tnrireland.ie/FeLV-FIV](https://tnrireland.ie/FeLV-FIV).
- **Vaccines:** Find out which vaccinations they require, which they offer, and how much they cost. Rabies vaccines are not currently required in Ireland. If funding is available, FVRCP vaccines (also known as distemper or feline disease vaccines) are also recommended. However, be aware that with limited funding, as is the case in Ireland currently, money is better spent on neutering. Find out more about TNR and Vaccines at [tnrireland.ie/Vaccines](https://tnrireland.ie/Vaccines).
- **Ill or Injured Cats:** Know the practice policy concerning cats who need extra medical attention. Make sure you know how they will charge for treatments. Ask that they call you before making any decisions about procedures or how they will treat the cats. Ensure that you will be given the ability to make the ultimate decision regarding humane euthanasia if necessary.
- **Kittens:** Do they have age or weight requirements for kitten neuter? Ask for their kitten surgery protocol. Kittens can be safely spayed or neutered if they are healthy and weigh 1kg. To learn more about early-age spay and neuter, go to [tnrireland.ie/EarlyAge](https://tnrireland.ie/EarlyAge).  
  
Consult with your vet about feeding requirements for kittens prior to trapping; kittens may not need to have food withheld before surgery because their metabolism is faster than adult cats. To learn how to safely feed cats while they are in their traps go to [tnrireland.ie/PostSurgery](https://tnrireland.ie/PostSurgery).
- **Pregnant or In-Heat Females:** Will they spay a pregnant female or a female in oestrus (in heat) and are they experienced in the procedure? Is there an extra fee for this?
- **Recovery:** Find out when they'll discharge cats after surgery and if they have different discharge times for males, females, pregnant females, etc. Do they hold cats overnight for recovery in their surgery and, if so, is there an extra charge for this service?
- **Eartipping:** Check that the practice understands the importance of eartipping the cats and knows how to perform the procedure.
- **Other Protocols:** Be sure your vet knows, and is willing, to:
  - » use dissolvable stitches as you're not going to be able to take the cats back to have the stitches removed!
  - » use the flank approach for spays, not the midline approach.
  - » ensure the wound site is as small as possible utilising keyhole surgery preferably.
  - » in colder months ensure as little fur as possible is shaved.
  - » Check for microchips prior to surgery.

See Surgery Recovery instructions for veterinarians at [tnrireland.ie/Veterinarian](https://tnrireland.ie/Veterinarian).



### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

CATalyst follows best practices based on research conducted by veterinary experts. Test results are not a diagnosis and tests can produce false positives, so we do not recommend testing for FIV/FeLV as part of TNR projects, nor euthanasing cats who test positive unless they are symptomatic, i.e. ill beyond recovery.

### ➔ EARTIPPING

**Eartipping - What Does it Mean?**  
Eartipping is the removal of the tip of a cat's left ear (approx. 3/8"). It's an effective and universally accepted method to identify a neutered community cat. To learn more about eartipping visit [tnrireland.ie/Eartip](http://tnrireland.ie/Eartip).



Line up clinic or veterinary appointments before you trap; you don't want to successfully trap cats and then have nowhere to take them. Make appointments for the number of traps you have even though you may not catch a cat in every trap. Plan your trapping session so that the cats are transported to the veterinarian or clinic as soon as possible. Make appointments for the same or following day to keep cats' time in the traps at a minimum.

To learn more about other considerations to take into account and issues veterinarians must know about when working with community & feral cats, see [tnrireland.ie/Veterinarian](https://tnrireland.ie/Veterinarian). For help with finding financial resources go to [tnrireland.ie/Fundraising](https://tnrireland.ie/Fundraising).

## 6. Set up your Holding/Recovery Area

- Choose an indoor, dry, temperature-controlled (approx. 75°F / 24°C), and safe overnight holding/recovery area for use before and after the cats' surgeries. Some examples of acceptable locations include bathrooms, garages, or possibly your vet's office, as discussed above.
- Make sure it is quiet and inaccessible to other animals and human traffic.
- Ensure all doors, windows, ceiling tiles, etc. are closed at all times in the unlikely event that a cat should escape from its trap.

## 7. Assemble your Trapping Kit

Your trapping kit should include:

- **A FRIEND** for your safety and peace of mind. CATalyst recommends trapping with at least one other person.
- **PAPERWORK**, pen or pencil and clipboard.
  - **TNR PLANNING FORM.** Track the colony before, during and after the project.
  - **TNR CONSENT FORM.** It's essential for your legal protection to get written consent from the felines' caregiver.
  - **TNR EQUIPMENT LABELS.** For labelling traps and equipment with your details. Also for communicating information to vet staff and other trappers, such as the date, cat description, exact location where cat was trapped, and observations, such as noticeable injuries.
- **TNR LEAFLETS** from Feral Cats Ireland. For distributing to caregivers and the public to explain what you're doing and raise awareness about the benefits of TNR.
- **TNR GOING ON HERE POSTER.** To publicise TNR in the area where necessary.
- **COLONY CARE FACTSHEET.** For colony caregivers.
- **TRAPS** for a list of the traps CATalyst recommends please visit [tnrireland.ie/Equipment](https://tnrireland.ie/Equipment). You should have one trap per cat plus a few extras in case additional cats are trapped that you did not account for.
- **CAGES** for transfer, transport and recovery. For a list of cages and accessories recommended by CATalyst see [tnrireland.ie/Equipment](https://tnrireland.ie/Equipment).
- **BAIT**, including several large pop-top cans of tuna, mackerel, sardines or other smelly fish that are tempting to the cats, preferably oil packed so that it does not dry out (if you don't bring pop-top cans be sure to bring a can opener).
- **FORKS** or spoons (to scoop out the bait).
- **SMALL FOOD STORAGE CONTAINER.** For storing open cans of tuna still in use and to prevent spillage.
- **DRY AND CANNED CAT FOOD** and water. To leave after trapping for cats not trapped.
- **CARABINERS**, cable ties, pipe cleaners or similar to secure the doors of the traps closed.
- **BIN BAGS** for tuna lids, tins and other waste.
- **TRAP & CAGE COVERS** that are big enough (i.e. beach size towels, blankets, or sheets - cut to size) to fully cover the top and all four sides of each trap after cats are caught: one cover per trap/cage.
- **ANTIBACTERIAL WET WIPES** or gel and paper towels for easy clean up of yourself, traps and messes.
- **TOOLS** such as pliers and some non-toxic lubricant for traps that might not work properly.
- **FIRST-AID KITS** for humans and felines.
- **NEWSPAPERS** to put under traps to prevent messy leavings.

- **GAUNTLETS** or thick gloves to wear for your safety and comfort while carrying cats in traps. One pair per trapper.
- **HEAD TORCH** and/or flashlight. For safety and visibility at night and in dark areas.
- **MOBILE PHONE** for safety and fast, easy contact in emergencies and when you need a bit of advice.
- **CAMERA** for tracking cats and publicising your endeavour.
- **VEHICLE PROTECTORS** such as cardboard, large plastic bin bags, a plastic shower curtain or towels. Puppy pads also work well if the cats have 'accidents'.
- **BUNGEE CORDS** for holding traps securely in place in your vehicle during transportation.
- **LITTER TRAYS**, food & water bowls (chicken feeders recommended).
- **HEAT LAMPS**, heat pads and/or hot water bottles to keep the cats warm post-surgery.
- **BEDDING** for the felines' comfort during their stay. Vet bed recommended.
- **DISINFECTANT.** All equipment and areas used during TNR need to be disinfected between projects.
- **DRINKING WATER** and snacks. For you!
- **APPROPRIATE WEATHER-RELATED CLOTHING** and practical shoes/wellies. Very necessary in Ireland.
- ... and last, but by no means least ... **PATIENCE!** Trapping can be time-consuming and, at certain moments, a bit stressful. If you remember to stay calm and follow the plan that you've devised, you will be successful!

#### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

Not all TNR volunteers have the time or patience to maintain a paper trail. But Best Practice requires that we are open and accountable for our actions and finances and we'd recommend using all the paperwork mentioned here. At the very least a Consent Form is essential for your own legal protection. Further information and PDFs of the paperwork for your use as is, or adapted to suit, are available at [tnrireland.ie/Paperwork](http://tnrireland.ie/Paperwork).





## 8. Prepare Equipment & Paperwork

Practice ahead of time how to set and bait traps. Our photo demonstrations, linked from [tnrireland.ie/Traps](http://tnrireland.ie/Traps) can help. Ideally you'll have arranged some training first with an established TNR group. You can find out about CATalyst's training and trainers at [tnrireland.ie/Training](http://tnrireland.ie/Training).

It's always a good idea to test all your traps before going out to ensure they are functioning properly. If you haven't already, attach labels to all traps and cages with your name, contact details and information on what you are doing.

Plan to use a vehicle that comfortably fits all traps and cages. You may be able to stack equipment on top of one another as long as you have a way to secure them so they cannot fall or tip over. Just be sure to use a puppy pad or folded newspaper between the traps to protect cats in lower traps.

Print out copies of the paperwork you will need and keep it protected in a sturdy folder.

## 9. Make Spay/Neuter Appointments

Pick the day you will trap and make your neuter appointments. You should schedule the appointments to occur as close to the day of trapping as possible (preferably trap the day before or the morning of the appointment); the number of reservations should equal the number of cats you plan to trap.

### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

Make a written plan for your trapping day making sure it includes every tool you need and step you must complete throughout the TNR process. This doesn't have to be a huge task - you can simply print out the relevant pages from our online TNR Manual.

Remember that many tasks must be completed before trapping can start. You must liaise with caregivers and neighbours; set up the feeding schedule; procure traps and equipment; prepare paperwork; and arrange for veterinary services; transportation, and a safe, indoor recovery space.



Now you are ready to start trapping!

# Step 2 Trapping

## 1. Set-up and Prepare for Trapping

Do all of your set up and preparation away from the colony site. Remember, community cats are generally fearful of people. Onsite, always move quietly and slowly. Trapping will also go more smoothly if you don't disrupt the cats' feeding area.

Throughout the entire trapping process, veterinary stay, recovery and return, you should make the environment around the cats as calm and quiet as possible. This will help minimise their stress.

Twenty-four hours before trapping, *withhold food*, but always continue to provide water. This will ensure that the cats are hungry enough to go into the traps. Remind other caregivers and neighbours to withhold food as well.

### BEST PRACTICE

Stress the importance of withholding food to caregivers. This is one of the worst areas of non-compliance and can make or break your trapping effort. So explain why they need to withhold food. And then tell them again. Phone them the night before to remind them not to feed the cats and the time you plan on arriving.

### BEST PRACTICE

Keep an eye on the traps at all times for the safety of the cats and to make sure your equipment is not taken or tampered with. Observe from a location far enough away that the cats will not be disturbed, but close enough so you can still see all the traps.

On the day of trapping, prepare all of the traps:

- Count all of your traps and record how many you have.
- Line trap bottoms with newspaper, and tape or peg it down if it's windy (ensure the tape/peg doesn't interfere with the trapping mechanism or doors).
- Before baiting, ensure the trip plate and trap door are functioning properly.
- Bait traps. Place about one tablespoon of bait at the very back of the trap, so that the cat will step on the trigger plate while attempting to reach the food. You may choose to put the food on a safe (without sharp edges) disposable container (such as a plastic lid or paper plate). Drizzle some juice from the bait in a zigzag pattern along the trap floor toward the entrance.  
  
Also place a tiny bit of food (½ teaspoon) just inside the entrance of the trap to encourage the cat to walk in. *Do not use too much food at the entrance of the trap. The cat must be hungry enough to continue to the trip plate, and cats should have a relatively empty stomach for at least 12 hours before surgery.*
- At the colony site, place traps on level ground - the cats will not enter an unstable or wobbly trap. Make sure they are not placed on a hill where they could tip or roll over when cats enter them. Ensure that metal traps do not sit on particularly hot or cold pavement (those temperatures could make the metal painful to the cats' paw pads when they touch it).
- On your already prepared trap labels, fill in the exact location where you are setting the trap. This will make return much easier!
- Set the trap and move away from the area.

**Be patient. At each trap, wait for a cat to enter and for the trap to close.**





## 2. Once Cats are Trapped Calmly Walk Over to the Traps:

- Cover the traps with trap covers.
- Do not open the traps or release cats once trapped - even if it appears that the cats are hurting themselves. Community cats may thrash around after being trapped, but do not be alarmed by this - it is completely normal. Covering the trap will calm them down almost immediately. And remember - *never try to touch community cats or let them out of the trap.*
- When trapping an entire colony, use your best judgement about removing each cat as they're trapped. If you step in immediately the other cats might scare, thus disrupting the trapping. Wait to remove the trapped cats until the other cats are not around. Or when setting out your traps, partially cover the back end of the traps - this will provide the trapped cats with a bit of security until you can cover them fully. Keep in mind that these are guidelines and some situations will call for you to deviate from them. For example: if a cat is severely thrashing around you may need to go ahead and cover the trap and remove it from the area; if you are trapping in cold weather cats should be covered and moved to a warm location (like your car) as soon as they are trapped.
- **Hard-to-Trap Cats** - Cats can become trap-shy (frightened to go near or enter a trap) or trap-savvy (mastered the art of removing food without triggering the trap). Don't be discouraged. There are several unique but straightforward techniques to humanely trap hard-to-trap cats, including the use of a drop trap. Please visit [tnrireland.ie/HardtoTrap](https://tnrireland.ie/HardtoTrap).
- **Neutered Cats** - remember to release the cats you identified during the Planning Stage as already neutered before setting off to the vets.

## 3. Trap Transfer

- Transfer the trapped cats to hospital or transfer cages as soon as possible after trapping. Ideally cats should be transferred in an enclosed space, such as a shed or garage, to prevent escape, but this isn't always possible. Find out how to transfer the cats safely and securely at [tnrireland.ie/TrapTransfer](https://tnrireland.ie/TrapTransfer).
- Many TNR organisations will house the cats in their traps pre- and post-surgery due to financial or practical considerations. It's not ideal, but acceptable if there are no better options. In this instance, do be sure to check on the cats regularly in case they injure themselves in the trap mechanisms.

## 4. Transport Cats from Trapping Site

Count your traps and cages again before leaving the trapping area to ensure that you don't leave any equipment behind.

Safely transport the cats to the veterinarian's clinic, or to the holding area which you should have already prepared.



### BEST PRACTICE

CATalyst recommends using a Hospital Cage for housing the cats pre- and post-surgery. It's one of the most humane environments for the purpose, and is designed for easy transfer from the trap, easy access to, and plenty of room for, litter trays and food bowls; and it's easy to restrict your community cat while you change food and litter.



## Step 3 Post Surgery

- The cats should be returned to you in the same covered equipment in which they were brought to the vets, with clean newspaper inside. If you are given medical records be sure to save them. Most vets will require you to sign a Consent and/ or Release form, either for each cat or for multiple cats, and you should do so.
- Let the cats recover overnight in the climate-controlled and quiet recovery area you have prepared, if not at the vets. When cats are recovering from anaesthesia they are unable to regulate their body temperature, which is why it is so important for the recovery area to be warm but not hot.
- While the cats are recovering, keep them in their covered housing; this reduces the stress on the cats and ensures the safety of both you and the cats.
- Monitor the cats. Keep an eye out for bleeding, infection, illness or lack of appetite. If a cat is bleeding, vomiting, breathing irregularly or not waking up, contact your vet *immediately*!
- Feed and provide the cats with water after they regain consciousness. Wait eight hours after surgery before feeding adult cats. Kittens can be fed shortly after waking from anaesthesia. To learn how to safely feed cats while they are in their housing, go to [tnnireland.ie/PostSurgery](https://tnnireland.ie/PostSurgery).
- Return the cats to the same location (their colony site) where you trapped them. Early morning is a good time. Point the cage or trap away from roads or high-traffic areas. Pull the door up and off, while standing well away from the door and the cat's direction of exit. Then completely remove the cover and walk away. Be careful to keep your distance and keep your fingers and hands as far from the cat as possible when opening the trap. Sometimes it takes the cats a moment to realise where they are, but they will run off once they get their bearings.
- Once you have returned the cats, provide food and water.
- The cats may stay away from the area for a few days after being returned, but they will come back eventually.
- Clean all equipment with non-toxic disinfectant; throw out all newspaper, and wash and disinfect trap covers.

For more detailed post-surgery instructions, visit [tnnireland.ie/PostSurgery](https://tnnireland.ie/PostSurgery).

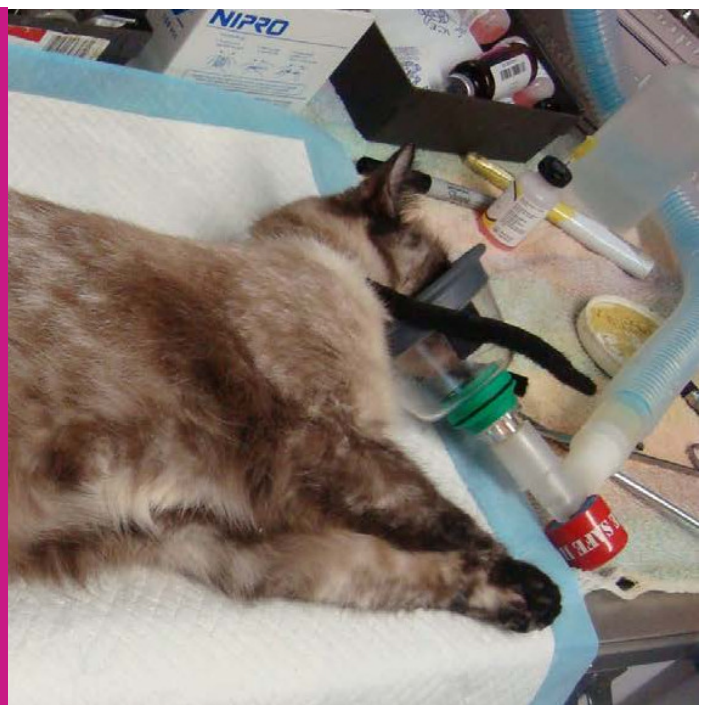
### ➔ BEST PRACTICE

According to Dr. Julie Levy, a leading feral cat veterinarian and researcher, a good rule of thumb is that all cats can be returned 24 hours after surgery, once they're clear-eyed and alert, unless advised otherwise by their veterinarian. The practice may ask you to make exceptions for cats who are slow to recover, need continuing post-operative care or have specific issues.

CATalyst recommends holding females for longer – three days – unless they are very distressed, to ensure the wound site is healing well.

You may also want to consider holding cats longer in freezing weather, as anaesthesia drugs may impact on their ability to regulate their body temperature.

However, it is always the goal to return the cats as soon as you can – 'rapid return' is associated with better outcomes, & confinement for community cats is extremely stressful.



# Step 4 Monitor the Colony

**TNR** doesn't end with the return of the neutered cats. The colony needs ongoing care and monitoring. In particular, any new arrivals need to be trapped, health checked, treated for parasites, neutered and eartipped - otherwise we're back to square one in no time.

## TNR the remaining colony members

Your TNR effort is not complete until you've trapped the remaining members of the colony, including those that only visit sporadically. Don't forget any cats who were neutered before you started your TNR may not be eartipped. And update your Planning Form as you go along.

## Maintain the feeding schedule

It's a good idea to maintain the feeding schedule you set up for the TNR. This acclimatises the cats to a set feeding time and ensures they're having regular, healthy meals. Having all the cats turning up at a known time makes it easy to monitor their health, numbers, arrivals and disappearances.

## Newcomers & kittens

Any newcomers should be TNRed on arrival. Kittens that were too young to be neutered in your initial TNR efforts, and any that turn up subsequent to it, should be neutered as soon as they're old enough.

## Create a plan for potential adoptions

Kittens and cats that are friendly to humans can be adopted into homes, but we don't advise removing healthy cats from the colony at present. If you decide to go down the adoption path anyway, create a plan before a potential adoption situation arises, itemising the kind of cats you're prepared to find homes for, your budget, etc. Preferably co-ordinate with a rescue group rather than fostering and arranging adoptions yourself.

## Record keeping

You should hold on to all medical records for each cat in every colony you care for. It's also useful to keep detailed statistics of the colony, for your own benefit and to feed into community cat and TNR research. Such stats would include: the date cats arrived in the colony; numbers of males and females; when they were neutered and treated for parasites; when they've been ill; births and deaths; who's been rehomed and when; etc. You can continue to use our Planning Form for this purpose.

## COLONY MONITORING

[tnrireland.ie/ColonyMonitoring](http://tnrireland.ie/ColonyMonitoring)

## BEST PRACTICE

One way to stay organised is to keep all information for a colony together in a ring binder. Not only will you be prepared to provide documentation about your cats if needed, you will also represent yourself as well-organised and on top of the situation when conversing about the cats.



# Congratulations!

## You made it through a successful trapping

You have joined the hundreds of thousands of other compassionate individuals and groups across the globe working to improve and protect the lives of outdoor cats.

After you have returned the neutered community cats:

- If you will be trapping on a larger scale or if you will be continuing to trap in surrounding areas, you should implement **targeted trapping**. It is the most effective method of trapping because it targets entire colonies in a single geographic location before moving on to the surrounding colonies, and ensures that populations are stabilised, creating 'kitten-free zones' and preventing population explosions.

To learn more about targeted trapping visit [tnrireland.ie/TargetedTrapping](https://tnrireland.ie/TargetedTrapping).

- Best practices for ongoing colony care can be found at [tnrireland.ie/ColonyCare](https://tnrireland.ie/ColonyCare).
- Join the Feral Cats Ireland's network on Facebook to put your new skills to work as a resource for your community and to get advice when you need it. Visit [tnrireland.ie/FeralFriends](https://tnrireland.ie/FeralFriends) for more information.
- Visit [tnrireland.ie](https://tnrireland.ie) for additional information and resources.

For more personalised help you can access our email assistance form at [tnrireland.ie/GetHelp](https://tnrireland.ie/GetHelp) or you can contact us at [info@tnrireland.ie](mailto:info@tnrireland.ie).









# About Us

## Drogheda Animal Rescue

**Drogheda Animal Rescue (DAR)** is a rescue and TNR group solely managed by volunteers.

DAR maintains the CATalyst Project, its accompanying webpages and this handbook.

DAR is based at Bellescourt, Scholes Lane, (off Narrow West Street), Drogheda, Co Louth.

For further information:

041 983 2418

Facebook: [@DroghedaAnimalRescue](https://www.facebook.com/DroghedaAnimalRescue)

General queries: [info@dar.ie](mailto:info@dar.ie)

Cat queries: [cats@dar.ie](mailto:cats@dar.ie)

Fundraising events: [fundraising@dar.ie](mailto:fundraising@dar.ie)



## Animal Advocacy

**Animal Advocacy** was one not-for-profit person, nested in an inspiring network of charitable, government, public and networking organisations, volunteers and individuals. We're all part of that network!



### Muriel Lumb

Muriel Lumb first became involved in animal welfare at the early age of eight. Horribly allergic to the kitten she begged for, her mother took her to the doctor for antihistamines rather than getting rid of the cat. Since then she's lived a full and varied life; working in computing, psychology and running her own environmental bookshop; singing in music sessions around the world; volunteering in a variety of sectors including HIV/AIDS, mental health, women's issues, environment and animal welfare.

For nearly 20 years she focused on animal welfare and TNR, through Animal Advocacy which closed in 2020. She feels the way people treat animals says a lot about them, how they treat other people and the planet we live on. She still doesn't know what she wants to be when she grows up.

# Feral Cats Ireland

**Feral Cats Ireland** is an on-line internet resource founded in 2010 by Maureen O'Malley to raise awareness of the plight of feral and stray cats in Ireland and to promote Trap Neuter Return (TNR) as a humane effective solution to their prolific breeding.

From its beginnings as an active Facebook page it has grown to comprise a website - [feralcatsireland.org](http://feralcatsireland.org) - a National Feral Cat Awareness Week and information leaflets on various aspects of feral cat welfare and care. Over the years it has lobbied the Irish Government for legislation to protect and safeguard the welfare of these cats.



## Maureen O'Malley-Gibbons

Maureen O'Malley-Gibbons came to love cats as a young child growing up on the family farm in Co Mayo. The highlight of her day was the visit of a neighbour's ginger and white cat. Sadly, aged 10, her family left farm-life behind for urban living in Westport. Although the odd cat and kitten were rescued along the way it was in 1995 that she became aware of the plight of stray and unwanted cats in the county after reading an article in her local paper. She began volunteering in animal rescue and in 1998 she founded Mayo Cat Rescue.

In 2003 she returned with her husband to live on the old farmstead, a perfect location for Mayo Cat Rescue and cats and kittens who needed rescue, respite and rehabilitation. In 2003 and the three subsequent years she organised high volume TNR projects in Mayo in conjunction with UK charities with approx 130 cats trapped, neutered and returned over a period of 5/6 days each year. In 2010 Maureen founded Feral Cats Ireland and in 2011 began Cat Adoption Drives at a local petshop. Maureen left animal welfare and closed Mayo Cat Rescue in 2019.

## Special Thanks and Acknowledgements to: Alley Cat Allies

**Alley Cat Allies** is the only national advocacy organisation in the United States dedicated to the protection and humane treatment of cats. An engine for social change, Alley Cat Allies was the first organisation to introduce and advocate for humane methods of feral cat care - particularly Trap Neuter Return - in the American animal protection community. By establishing and promoting standards of care, the organisation has brought humane treatment of cats into the US spotlight, a practice now embraced by major cities and animal protection organisations coast to coast. In 20 short years Alley Cat Allies changed America to better understand and respect the lives of cats. Find out more at [alleycat.org](http://alleycat.org).





## CATalyst (noun)

**A person or thing that precipitates an event.**

*Together we can help and support community cats in Ireland – without intervention there is suffering and ignorance.*

## C – Community

Community cats live in the community but are often not seen as part of it; in many instances they are viewed as dangerous pests and something that should be removed. Education of the public and awareness of colonies, the benefits they can bring to a community and how to support and manage them is the start. Community cats don't just need the help of a few individuals; they need to support of the entire community.

## A – Action

Act now, find out who in your community is working with community cats.

## T – Trapping (TNR)

Trap - take part in trapping efforts or use your influence to fundraise or raise awareness. Become an advocate for the unseen and unloved in your community.

*Together we can effect change. Be that person that initiates change in your community; be a CATalyst for Community Cats.*

## Photo credits

Photo credits go to TNR groups:

Alley Cat Allies - [alleycat.org](http://alleycat.org)

Animal Advocacy

Limerick Feral Cats - [limerickferalcats.com](http://limerickferalcats.com)

Mayo Cat Rescue

**Thanks guys!**







## Notes



## Notes





## Contact CATalyst

CATalyst is the volunteer group that cares about Community Cats in Ireland. It is supported on the TNR Ireland website and offers support and guidance.

For more information please get in touch:

[www.tnrireland.ie/ContactUs](http://www.tnrireland.ie/ContactUs)





