

# Managing Your Cat Colony

Feral or free-roaming cats often live together in territories or colonies. Thanks to the kindness of strangers, these cats get fed and looked after by Colony Caretakers, who work in cooperation with a Trap-Neuter-Return-Monitor (TNR/TNRM) program, to help keep the cat population down.

It's important to note that caretakers for TNR programs do not establish colonies of cats, but take care of already-established colonies that form naturally.

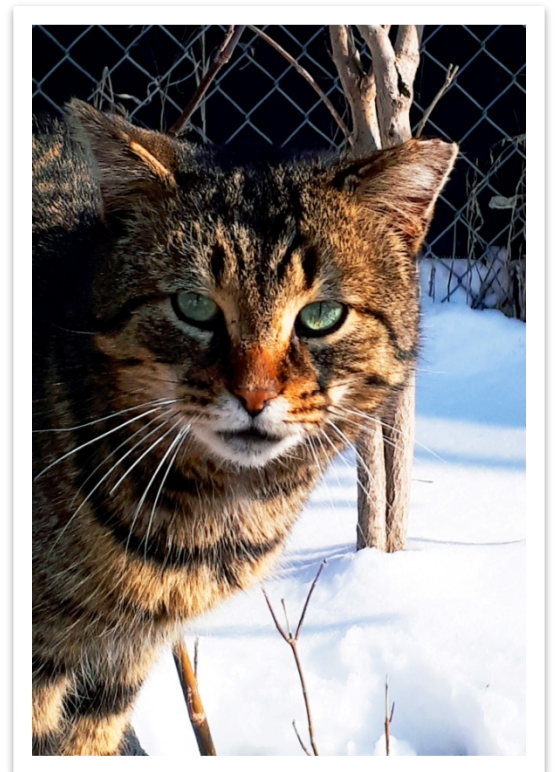
## Are you interested in taking care of a cat colony in your neighbourhood?

Before you get started here are some helpful tips:

1. **Be prepared.** Make you sure you learn more about taking care of your colony by reviewing this document and reading up on the linked resources. This includes ensuring your neighbours are aware of the colony caretaking.
2. **Ask for help.** Colony caretaking can be a massive undertaking, including time and resources. Get in touch with a rescue agency, like AVA, to ensure you have the support and resources to look after your colony. Make sure you have a community network of volunteers to help care for the colony, especially if you will be away.
3. **Know the basics.** Always provide fresh water daily for your colony, and have shelter to protect them from inclement weather. Many resources exist about building inexpensive shelters for cats.

Taking care of a colony is often a natural first step in getting involved in a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program.

[Community Cats Toronto](#) offers workshops and other helpful resources about managing a colony and TNR programs.



*Action Volunteers for Animals (AVA) is an all-volunteer-run charitable animal rescue dedicated to helping stray and feral animals live healthy and happy lives.*

## Food and Water

Cats must be provided with adequate food and water on a daily basis, year round.

When cats do not have enough food and water, they will seek it in areas where they are not welcome in an effort to avoid starving (for example: your neighbor's trash or local restaurant dumpster).

### Tips for feeding

- Cats should be fed in a designated, inconspicuous area, away from people or high traffic where they might create a nuisance or be injured.
- Feeding areas should always be kept neat and clean – this is one of the most common complaints from neighbors about cat feeders/caregivers. Food that has gotten wet or has been spoiled should be discarded. Wet food can cause illness in cats.
- Create a small partially enclosed feeding site to make food/water bowls and the cats less visible and prevent food from getting wet and spoiled during rain or snow.
- If you are leaving for a time, or cannot feed the cats, arrange to have someone else provide them with food and water on approximately the same schedule.
- Providing cat food for a few cats can be quite affordable but when caring for large numbers try to get help.
- Costs can be shared with friends, family members and neighbors.
- Contact vet clinics to see if they would be willing to give you free samples, food about to expire or straight donations.
- Visit your local pet supply and pet stores and ask if you could place a small bin and sign in their store explaining to people what you're doing and asking for food donations to be placed in the bin. Any donations should be picked at least once per week. Some stores are also willing to donate food near its expiration date or "damaged in shipment" bags and cans.

## Cat Shelters

Cats must have adequate shelter. Even though feral cats do build thicker coats for winter, they can quickly succumb to hypothermia, particularly in rain and snow when their fur gets wet and does not insulate them sufficiently.

When cats do not have a warm and dry shelter, they may seek it in areas where they are not welcome, for example under your neighbour's deck, shed or in a car motor.

## Tips for shelters

- Provide enough shelter for all the cats in the colony.
- They should be placed in inconspicuous areas away from people and traffic.
- Shelters and cat feeding stations should be placed so that cats do not need to cross roads or neighbour's properties to move back and forth between the shelter and food/water stations.
- Try to paint them in neutral colors or get them to blend into their surroundings.
- Wood boxes, plastic bins and other types of shelters can be made or bought very easily and sometimes very cheaply.
- Straw, not hay, is the best and cheapest natural insulator and therefore best outdoor cat shelter material. The cats can nest and burrow into the straw and with their thicker, winter coats, stay warm through the cold months
  - Do NOT use blankets, towels, or other cloth material inside the shelter. The inside of the shelter will be exposed to moisture from outdoors and the cats themselves; fabric tends to grow mold and mildew.
- You can buy straw in animal feed and garden stores, in the rabbit supply section of your local pet store, and often off Kijiji.

## Need shelters?

- Requests for ready-made feral cat shelters can be ordered online through [Toronto Street Cats](#).
- Toronto Street Cats offers [workshops on building colony shelters](#).
- The Toronto Feral Cat Coalition has a [short video on how to build a cat shelter](#).