

## Program eyes feral cat problem

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T N R — What does it mean? Before I jump in and answer that question, let me ask another question.

How many of you are or know someone who is feeding the stray cats in your neighborhood? Those who feed the stray cats are called caretakers. The cats live in colonies, and a colony can be three to 100 cats or more.

These cats can be a mixture of owned or recently abandoned cats. You will know this to be true if the cat will come to you and allow you to pick her up and cuddle with you.

If these cats are not spayed or neutered, they — or should I say you — are contributing to the overpopulation problem.

This type of cat belongs in your home or at the Caring Hands Humane Society, not dumped in the country for someone else to do what you should have done in the first place.

The remainder of these cats are called feral cats. A feral cat is one that used to belong to someone who was taking care of it but has now reached a second generation of being on its own and has reverted to more of a wild state.

This type of cat will not allow you to pick her up and will avoid human contact altogether.

This type of cat does not belong at Caring Hands, as it could never be placed for adoption since it no longer trusts humans. Its fate will be death.

As long as there is a food source, a colony will remain in that area. It doesn't matter if you remove one or 50 cats from that area, other strays will show up to eat the food.

So you're probably thinking I should just get this person to stop feeding the cats and problem solved. Wrong!

These cats will become more of a nuisance when they begin to rip open bags of trash sitting at the curb on trash day.

They will fight more with each other over what little food they can find.

They will sneak into your dogs' food, robbing him and costing you more in feed.

They will rely more on the predation of wildlife seeking out backyard ponds and bird feeders.

Government agencies and humane societies have been trying to reduce these populations of cats for more than 100 years through the method of trapping and killing.

Guess what, it doesn't work.

So what is the answer? T N R — Trap, Neuter, Return.

T N R is a method where the caretakers receive assistance and the cats are humanely trapped, taken to a veterinarian for vaccinations and neutering, and their ear is tipped for future identification.

Finally, they are returned to the area they came from. The caretaker agrees to continue providing food and shelter for this colony, and they are allowed to live out their natural lives.

T N R is the only proven method of reducing the feral cat population in any given area. It is rapidly becoming the method of choice on the east and west coasts, as well as Colorado and other states.

T N R also reduces the nuisance behavior associated with these colonies, which usually makes the caretakers neighbors happy.

There are many other benefits to using this method to control feral cat populations. However, this forum does not allow me to delve that deeply.

Caring Hands Humane Society has the support of a local organization called Friends of Felines and the knowledge to begin implementing such a program.

This is a community-wide problem that will require community involvement and produce community results we can all be proud of.

I encourage you to get involved by giving me a phone call or writing a letter to let me know you are interested.

If you can attend the February Newton Area Chamber of Commerce breakfast at 7:15 a.m. at Red Coach Inn, Friends of Felines representatives will discuss the issue.

If enough interest and involvement is generated, other forums will be held and committees formed to begin moving forward.

So here is the knowledge. What you do with it is up to you!

Kevin Stubbs is executive director of Caring Hands Humane Society in Newton.