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## A best-practices method for cats helps all

By Michel Meunier and Joe Miele / For the Sun-News

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As our community seeks multiple ways to help reduce the intake of animals to the municipal shelter, more and more we look to "TNR" of feral cats as a responsible intervention with important results. The letters T-N-R signify "trap", "neuter", and "return" or "relocation" of free-roaming cats.

The method originated in England about 55 years ago and was introduced in 1980 by Alley Cat Allies here in the U.S.

TNR is an alternative to traditional catch-and-kill means of cat population control paid by taxpayers. These have failed miserably for decades, because the cat population soon rebounds to previous levels, with remaining unaltered members breeding litter after litter.

Thanks to the advancement by Alley Cat Allies and others, including endorsement of notable organizations like Best Friends Animal Society, Humane Society of the United States, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and Spay USA, TNR is recognized as a best practice in animal welfare with more municipalities, like ours, considering or adopting TNR-friendly ordinances.

TNR is implemented by first humanely trapping a cat with a live trap, followed by an appointment to a veterinarian for spay-neuter surgery and vaccinations against disease. Then the animal is returned to the area where it was trapped, to be

cared for by the provider who supplies food, shelter and monitors for health. Ear tipping (surgical removal of the top of a cat's left ear) is commonly done to

identify altered feral cats. With a humane policy/TNR-friendly ordinance in effect, this prevents capture by authorities for euthanasia.

TNR, when properly implemented, reduces the population and eventually eliminates homeless cats by preventing new litters. In addition, TNR eliminates behavior that some people find bothersome, such as territorial spraying and fighting associated with mating. TNR also is a factor in decreasing complaints about homeless cats' affecting wildlife.

It reduces public health risks due to improved health of the free-roaming cat population via vaccination and decreases shelter intake (and killing) dramatically, thus freeing shelter/rescue space and funds. Traditional catch-and-kill methods do not produce these kinds of results; moreover the public, by and large, does not support capture and euthanasia as a means to help cats.

Dr. Beth Vesco-Mock, the director of the animal shelter, the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, notes "what we are currently doing is not working, and we should consider all options available."

We have success stories in our own backyard: the NMSU Feral Cat Management Program (fCaMP), approved by the campus administration since 2002. Under the direction of Michelle Corella, the program reports (July '09 newsletter) a population of 95 known TNR'd felines on campus compared to 200 to 250 mostly unaltered cats living on the main campus when the program first started more than

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seven years ago. As noted or concluded in the newsletter, "TNR is successfully and humanely controlling the feline population at NMSU."

In addition to the humane efforts of organizations locally and nationally, individuals in the community help orphaned and feral cats by providing resources in the form of traps, food, veterinarian care and financial help if possible for spay-neuter surgery, where a sanctuary or place to live is provided or relocation is possible. Many embrace TNR as a humane and cost-effective way to reduce the number of free-roaming cats in both the short and long term, as compared with the costly and ineffective capture and kill method currently in effect.

Some people believe, incorrectly, that TNR is detrimental to birds and wildlife. The Mesilla Valley Audubon Society and some individuals who work in wildlife rehabilitation oppose TNR for these reasons. On the contrary, TNR significantly reduces risk of endangerment to wildlife through the dramatic reduction of free-roaming cats. The greatest risk to bird populations, as reported by the National Wildlife Foundation, is human development. And Defenders of Wildlife notes that cats are not having a known effect on the population size of any continental bird species.

Michel Meunier is a no kill and progressive animal welfare advocate, as well as the founder and president of ACTION Programs for Animals. Joe Miele was awarded the Alley Cat Allies Feral Cat Activist of the Year 2004 honor for his efforts educating communities large and small about the merits of TNR and humane feral cat care.

## About feral cats

- Local animal welfare organizations that support

trap-neuter-return are ACTION Programs for Animals (APA), the Doña Ana County Humane Society (DACHS), the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico (HSSNM), Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary (SHAS), and the Spay and Neuter Action Program (SNAP).

- To learn more about feral cats and their management, visit the website of fCaMP at <http://www.nmsu.edu/~fcamp/> and Alley Cat Allies at [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org).

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