TNR & COLONY CARE

# How to Manage a Feral Cat Colony: Records, Headcounts and Care

Looking after a colony once TNR starts: a roster of every cat, counting at feeding time, tracking who is fixed, newcomers, health and vet records, costs and grant reports, a backup caretaker, and keeping the colony private.

By Catt County Cat Nippers • Reviewed October 27, 2026 • 5 min read • 5 cited sources

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## The short answer

A well-managed colony is one where every cat is known, fixed, vaccinated and fed on a routine, and where someone notices newcomers. TNR means humanely trapping all the cats in a colony, having them neutered, vaccinated and ear-tipped, and returning them to where they live, as Alley Cat Allies explains. Managing the colony afterwards is mostly about records: who each cat is, who is fixed, who is new, and what it all costs.

Keep a roster, count at feeding time, trap newcomers quickly, keep each cat's medical records, and line up a backup caretaker before you need one.

## Know every cat: the roster

Give every cat you see more than once a line and an ID: its coat and markings, sex, estimated age, ear-tip and status. Alley Cat Allies suggests keeping up-to-date medical records for each cat: the vaccines it has had (especially rabies), when it was spayed or neutered, and any other procedures, with a photo you update as it grows older, and the microchip maker and number if it has one.

STATUS CODES FOR A COLONY ROSTER

| Code | Means | Counts as |
|---|---|---|
| N | Needs TNR | Still to fix |

| Code | Means | Counts as |
|---|---|---|
| B | Booked for surgery | Still to fix |
| F | Fixed and returned | Fixed |
| A | Arrived already ear-tipped | Fixed |
| K | Kitten, too young yet | Still to fix |
| H | Adopted or rehomed | Left the colony |
| M | Missing | Left the colony |
| D | Died | Left the colony |

Fixed divided by (fixed plus still to fix) is the share of the colony you have fixed. The aim of TNR is every cat in the colony.

## Count at feeding time

Cats come to food, so feeding time is the best time to count. Count at the same time of day, ideally once a week, and write down the adults you see, how many are ear-tipped, how many aren't, and any kittens.

A rising number of cats without an ear-tip means newcomers, or cats you missed. Plan your next trapping day around them.

**This quick sheet is the start of the guide.** Still to read: Newcomers and kittens, Feeding on a routine, Health and the vet and 6 more sections, plus the TNR Binder Pro: Binder + Colony Tracker. Read it all free when you join our pet health emails at cattcountycatnippers.org/articles/how-to-manage-a-feral-cat-colony

## Sources

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   https://www.alleycat.org/resources/why-trap-neuter-return-feral-cats-the-case-for-tnr/
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