

All About TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return)

TNR is a catch-and-release program for community (“feral”) cats that helps prevent cat overpopulation. This process is used to curb springtime explosions of kitten births (known as “Kitten Season”) and allows humans and outdoor cats to cohabitate more harmoniously by eliminating mating behaviors that may negatively impact a home or neighborhood. You can help by identifying free-roaming cats in your area, scheduling a surgery appointment, and trapping them.

Step One: Make an Appointment.

To schedule a feral cat appointment we have a community cat form on our website that opens every Monday (or first business day of the week if there is a holiday) at 9am. Each person is allowed to request an appointment for 2 cats each week and you will be contacted if you have been scheduled for an appointment. Our recommendation is to get on the website a few minutes early to ensure you can request an appointment because they fill up quickly.

Do not attempt to trap a cat without a scheduled appointment. It is not safe to house a feral cat for more than a day or two in a humane trap. If the cat is in the trap longer than 12 hours then you must provide access to food and water. If you have already caught a cat, but do not have an appointment with any spay/neuter clinic or veterinary office, you can try to coordinate an appointment through one of Richmond’s Community Cat groups online:

<https://groups.io/g/RVACOMMUNITYCATS>

If you do not have a humane trap, you can rent one from our Clinic for a period of thirty days. A deposit is required, but will be refunded to you when the trap is returned. To rent a trap, visit our Clinic between 10AM and 3PM on any weekday.

If you are using your own trap, please make sure the weight of the trap is clearly marked on the top. It is critical to know the weight of the trap so that we can reasonably estimate the weight of the cat inside.

Step Two: Prepare to Trap

Think carefully about where you intend to house a feral cat before you trap. The cat needs to be sheltered from the elements and from other wildlife. You can bring the trapped cat indoors to a basement, garage, or bathtub. Prepare the area by laying down newspaper, cardboard, or puppy pads to protect the floor from urine or feces.

Plan to trap the cat you want to catch the day or night before your scheduled appointment. Do not leave the trap unattended for long periods, especially in inclement weather. If the cat is in the trap longer than 12 hours then you must provide access to food and water.

If you have been feeding the cat you are attempting to trap, withhold food the day before you trap. A hungry cat is more likely to venture into an unknown space for food. Set the trap, and place it in the same general area that you typically offer food. Bait the back of the trap with food – the smellier the better, but try to keep the portion small. It is recommended that you place a towel or light blanket over the top, sides, and back of the trap, leaving only the opening exposed, to encourage a cat to go in.

Trapping 101

For cats that are less social or more skittish, it is recommended to acclimate them to the presence of the trap by opening the door and securely fastening it so that it cannot close. You can place food in the back of the trap to encourage cats to get closer without risk. On the day you plan to catch the cat, remove the secure fasteners and set the trap as you normally would.

Once the cat is in the trap, it is recommended to use zip ties or a secure clip to secure the trap so the cat cannot escape. Cover the trap completely with a towel or light blanket to help the cat feel more secure. A cat may become reactive or volatile and injure itself on the trap if it is not secure and covered.

Prepare your vehicle prior to transport by laying down a garbage bag or tarp covered with newspaper, cardboard, or puppy pads. Do not transport feral cats in uncovered truck beds.

Step Three: Gotcha! Snip snip.

Do not attempt to take away food from a trapped cat the night before an appointment. It is more important to be safe than to try and remove a can or other item from a trap with a scared cat. Never open a trap once a cat is caught until you are ready to release the cat back into its environment. If the cat is in the trap longer than 12 hours then you must provide access to food and water.

Drop-off for all pets and community cats is 8AM the day of the appointment. You are welcome to leave the cat in your car and wait in line if the weather is unpleasant. We require a completed copy of the Patient/Client Discharge Form for each trapped cat. A downloadable version of our paperwork is available on our website, in the right-hand column, or you can pick up a paper copy in advance of your appointment at our Clinic.

We can only accommodate one cat per trap. If you have accidentally caught two cats with one trap, please call our Clinic staff at (803) 379-9725 option 2. We will advise you on your options, and on our ability to help.

Pick-up (discharge) for community cats is at 4:30PM. All cats must be picked up by 5PM at the latest.

Step Four: Release

Be prepared to leave the now-sedated cat in its trap overnight after surgery. Do not release the cat before the following morning. A cat will still be disoriented and weak for up to 12 hours after anesthesia. Use the same location you kept the cat the night before to hold the cat until it is safe to release.

It is safe to sprinkle wet or dry food into the trap in the evening. Again, never open a trap with a cat inside until you are ready to release it.

Take the cat to the exact location where it was trapped in the early morning the day after surgery. Cats are more active at this time, and human beings less so, making this the safest time for release. Always point your trap away from any roads before you open them. Keep fingers and hands away from the opening of the trap. It may take a moment, but once the cat gets its bearings, it will take off.

Thank you for helping care for Richmond's community cats!