

FERAL CATS

Feral versus stray:

A feral cat is a domestic cat that has returned to the wild, or the descendants of such an animal. It is not a stray cat, which is a pet that is lost or abandoned. Feral cats hide, seldom meow, beg, or purr and are unlikely to make eye contact with people. Some have a “V” shaped cut or on its right ear which indicates a neutered male. A spayed female will have the “V” on her left ear. A straight tip to either ear is also used as an indication of a sterilised cat.

Dumped, unwanted pet cats are not accepted into existing colonies & mostly do not survive. The dominant cats shun or kill newcomers and keep them away from any source of food.

Control and management of feral cats:

Recognised organisations use the Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) method. This involves trapping feral cats, sterilising & vaccinating them & tending to any medical needs then returning them to their colony. TNR lowers the population & lessens the noise & smell of the colony as un-neutered males tend to fight & mark their territory with hormonal urine. TNR also means that the colony has a “caretaker” who will monitor & take action to help cats that are ill or injured as well as spotting & rehoming dumped domestic cats. This results in fewer complaints from the public & the quality of life of the cats is improved.

Diet:

Feral cats are useful in keeping rodents’ numbers down in built up & rural areas. Many farmers and businesses rely on cats to keep their premises free of rats and mice.

“Contrary to popular belief, feral cats do not ‘wipe out’ bird populations,” says respected feral cat authority & Mossel Bay Feral Cat Trust’s Gean MacLeod, “that is a myth as cats only hunt birds as a last resort when hungry”.

Cats in managed colonies are usually fed by volunteers which creates security & brings the cats into the open so they can be monitored.

What should you do if you have a colony near you?

*Rita Brock, also a feral cat expert and SPCA volunteer spends many nights helping manage the colonies in & around George. She says the first step is to contact your nearest SPCA, Feral Cat Trust or animal welfare if nobody is monitoring the cats.

*It is helpful if you observe the cats & report any that are needy. The carers are always grateful to get some assistance.

*If you decide to feed these cats you must be aware that this will encourage them to breed quicker than normal. You may start with 1 or 2 and then find that you have 30 or 40. It is very cruel to stop feeding cats that have become dependent on you as many may never have learned to hunt for food & will die from starvation. The cats will be forced to look for food and may dig in rubbish bins & become a nuisance. Consider your neighbours – will they support your efforts or will you be enticing cats close to people who may harm them?

- *Keep rubbish bins and any outdoor container containing food closed.
- *Organisations that help feral cats are all non-profit associations & dependent on the public for funds. Please contribute if you can.

What should you NOT do if you have a colony near you?

- *Feral cats are wild so do not pick them up. You will probably be scratched or bitten. Many feral cats carry FIV also known as 'Feline Aids', Feline Leukaemia, rabies, snuffles & / or toxoplasmosis (which can be passed onto humans through contact with cat faeces).
- *If you find kittens in the bush please do not move them. Their mother maybe nearby looking for food or moving her kittens to a safer place. Removal of her kittens will distress her & she may suffer from mastitis as her milk glands become engorged. This is painful and can make her ill. Some folk try to bottle feed the kittens which can cause milk to fill the lungs which will kill them. Leave the kittens where they are and observe them. If no mother appears after many hours then call for help.

Under no circumstances should you:

- *Kill feral cats. This is illegal & anyone found doing so will be prosecuted under the Animals' Protection Act
- *Trap cats - this should also be done by recognised organisations who know how to deal with them.
- *Keep a "lost" cat or give it to someone else. It is well known that many supposed 'animal lovers' end up abusing stray & feral animals.

The role of the Feral Cat Organisations & the SPCA:

They often gets calls asking for feral cats to be removed from premises as they are: eating food that is for sale / messing in shops / making an area smell of cat urine etc. They are expected to take a trap to the premises and collect the cats immediately. The reality is far more time consuming and complicated & huge costs are incurred.

Removing a colony will not remove the problem. If the cats are taken, new ones simply move in, & the cycle repeats. TNR is the only solution. If the colonies are left, they will get bigger & the cats will become sick & hungry. A proper colony must be organised & controlled to prevent cats from suffering.

Trapping: Most trapping is done in the evening. The traps must be set & then follows the long wait for the cats to come & enter them. Only 1 or 2 cats are caught & taken to the SPCA where they are kept overnight until being seen to. This must be repeated often and the traps must be disinfected each time (or the next cats will not enter as they can smell the previous cat). Some colonies can consist of 40 cats, so it is a process that takes time.

The other huge factor is the cost involved in this exercise:

Traps have to be made to correct specifications. /Staff members have to be paid to work after hours / The medical care costs a lot.

The GR SPCA has had to decide that anyone with a feral cat problem **MUST CONTRIBUTE TO THE COST OF SORTING IT OUT.** They do not want to make a profit, but must cover their costs. It is a huge task that they simply cannot afford to fund.

"We will soon begin a new type of membership supporting Feral Cats," said GR SPCA Chairperson Heather Church, "but this will be insufficient. More fundraising projects

will have to be organised,” she added.

A separate fund has been started to cover the cost of this undertaking. Anyone wishing to contribute is urged to deposit an amount into our bank account, with the reference “feral cats”. Please include your name and contact details to allow us to thank you.

**Garden Route SPCA /First National Bank: George / Branch code: 210114
/ Account number: 620 075 14955**

Who do I contact for help in George?

GARDEN ROUTE SPCA:

SPCA Ossie Urban Rd, Tamsui Industria, George 044 878 1990/3
After hours emergency No is 082 378 7384
Or Rita Brock 082 806 3144

Knysna:<https://www.facebook.com/KnysnaAnimalWelfare>

KAWS: 044 384 1603 After hours emergency No 073 461 9825

<http://www.knysnaaws.com/>

Mossel Bay:

Harbour Cats (Non-profit Organisation)

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Harbour-Cats/119418144809119>



**POPULATION EXPLOSIONS HAPPEN WHEN THE FERAL CATS ARE NOT
STERILISED**



FERAL CATS SHOULD BE GIVEN DRY, GOOD QUALITY FOOD



V SHAPE CUT IN EAR TO SIGNIFY A NEUTERED MALE



UNCONTROLLED BREEDING IF NOT STERILISED



PROPER, CAREFUL TRAPPING IS IMPERATIVE.