

# Whose Cat is That?

That cat slinking through your garden this morning? He may not belong to your neighbor.

Some owners allow their pet cats outdoors, but the kitties you see roaming your yard or sneaking across alleys aren't all headed home to their families to enjoy lives of tuna and cream, soft pillows, and toys galore.

Many of these cats—millions, in fact—are not wandering pets, but feral cats. These kitties are the offspring of pet cats or other ferals who weren't spayed or neutered in time to keep them from breeding.

Except for young kittens, who can often be tamed, feral cats are typically not suited for indoor lives with human companions—they're afraid of people, and will usually run away from them. They live in groups called colonies, which tend to exist where food—from a restaurant dumpster, for example, or cat food left on the porch—is available.

Feral cats exist in communities across the United States; there are probably some in your neighborhood. Some studies have indicated that 80 percent of the kittens born each year are the offspring of feral and stray cats—a significant source of cat overpopulation. Females may become pregnant as young as 5 months of age and have two to three litters a year. This is hard on their bodies, and more than half of the kittens are likely to die. The numbers put tremendous stress on animal shelters and rescue groups, and can raise their cat intake and euthanasia rates.

Fortunately, you can make a difference: learn about trap-neuter-return (TNR), an effective method for improving the lives of feral cats and reducing their numbers.

At a minimum, feral cats who are TNRed are spayed or neutered, so they can no longer reproduce. Typically, they're also vaccinated against rabies, surgically ear-tipped on one ear—the universal sign of a cat who has been TNRed—and then returned to their territory, where they are looked after by a caretaker.

Feral cats in managed colonies are far better off than those forced to fend entirely for themselves. Dedicated caretakers feed and provide shelter for these cats, monitor them for sickness, and trap new cats who appear. If the captured cats are feral, they are TNRed; if they're lost or abandoned pets, they may be reunited with their families, or adopted into new, loving homes. If you or someone you know is feeding homeless cats, please make sure they're spayed or neutered. Many communities have clinics that perform free or low-cost spay/neuter surgeries for feral cats.

For more information and to find a local feral cat group that may be able to help you, talk to one of our staff or visit [humanesociety.org/feralcats](https://www.humanesociety.org/feralcats).



THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES

