



Photo: Tom MacDonald

### How can I help?

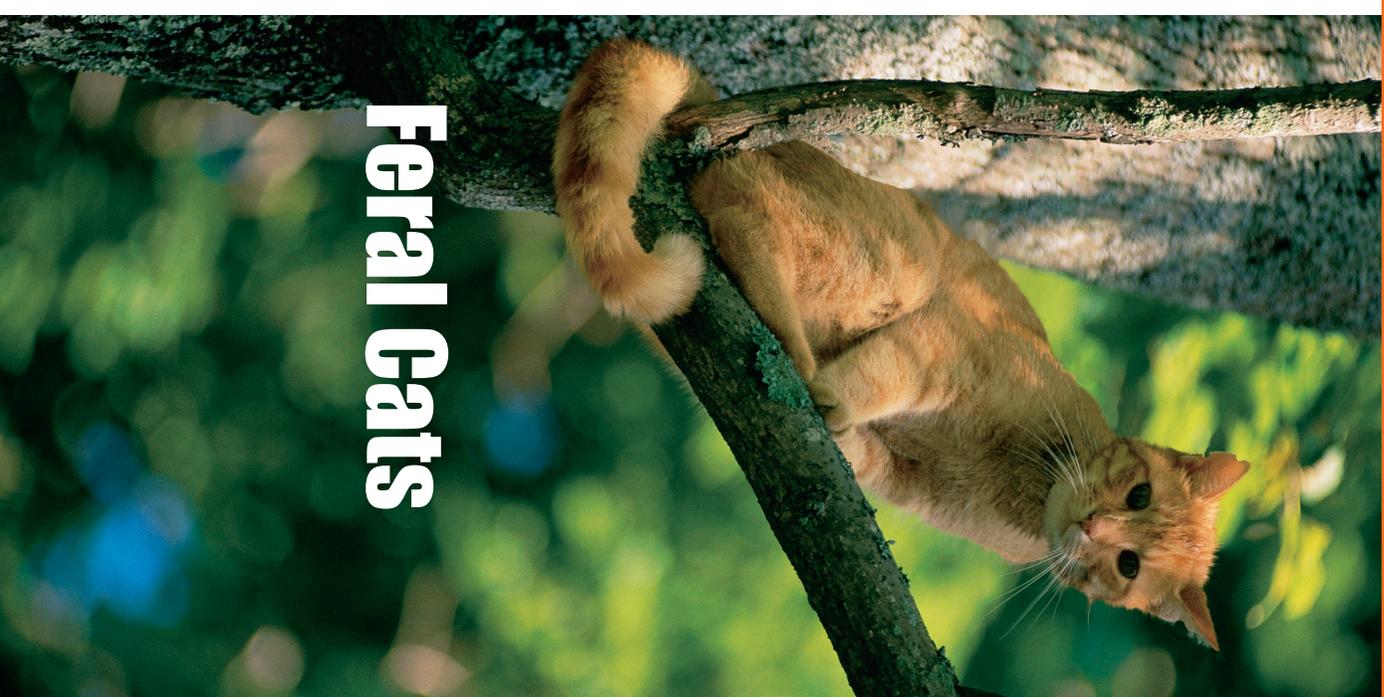
Organizations involved in TTVAR programmes always need volunteers to set out traps, transport cats, and help feed and manage a colony.

The Feral Cat Coalition and Alley Cat Allies are two groups that provide more information on feral cats and on how to set up TTVAR programmes. Their website addresses are: [www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com) and [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)



**Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre**  
ATLANTIC VETERINARY COLLEGE • UNIVERSITY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

The Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre exists to provide tangible benefits to animals, through research, service and education. For further information, please visit our website at:  
[www.upei.ca/awc](http://www.upei.ca/awc)



# Feral Cats

### **What is a feral cat?**

A feral cat is a free-roaming cat that has never lived with humans.

### **Where do feral cats live?**

Feral cats live in towns and rural areas. They form colonies wherever they can find food and shelter, for example in parks, restaurant alleys, hospital grounds and barns.

### **Where do feral cats come from?**

An ancestor of a feral cat may have been a stray, lost, or abandoned cat that once had an owner. These cats have kittens and form colonies usually centered around a food source. When cats in a feral colony leave or die, new cats come in from other colonies or from the pet cat population.

### **Why do colonies get so large?**

A female cat can have up to 18 kittens a year. Approximately half of these kittens survive. They can produce their own litters within a year.

Feral cats usually live only 3 to 5 years because of accidents, disease, predators or starvation. The size of a colony is limited mainly by the amount of food available.



### **What do feral cats eat?**

Cats in urban colonies raid garbage containers, scavenge for food or are fed by concerned people. Many feral cats also kill and eat small mammals such as mice, voles and shrews. They may hunt birds and reptiles to a lesser extent. The effect of feral cats on the wildlife population is still under debate.

### **Are my cat and I at risk if we are in contact with a feral cat?**

Feral cats can carry diseases. If your cat comes in contact with a feral cat, s/he has an increased risk of catching these diseases, especially if s/he is not vaccinated. Possible risks to people who come into contact with feral cats or their feces include ringworm, rabies, and parasites such as hook-worm. The risk of you catching these conditions from feral cats is low, unless you have a disease like HIV/AIDS that affects the immune system.

### **How can we control feral cat populations?**

Killing feral cats does not control their population because other cats come in to take their place. However, if a colony has a stable population of neutered cats, these cats stay and no more cats come in.

There are organizations that help feral cats and try to control their populations. These organizations

use a programme called Trap-Test-Vaccinate-Alter-Release or TTVAR. Most veterinarians support TTVAR programmes as a way to deal humanely with feral cat overpopulation.

In a TTVAR programme, feral cats are caught humanely in live traps. They are brought to animal hospitals where they are vaccinated, neutered and tattooed or ear tipped for identification. Many programmes also test the cats for certain diseases like feline leukemia. Cats which test positive are euthanized (put to sleep). Following neutering, the cats are released into the area where they were trapped. Volunteers feed and monitor the cats.

Stray cats or feral kittens caught during the programme may be adopted if they are sociable. However, feral kittens which have had no human contact before they are 8 weeks old are difficult to tame and are not good choices for pets.

Research is being done on alternatives to a TTVAR programme. These include a birth control pill that is placed in food, and a vaccine that prevents pregnancy.

Cat being neutered in a TTVAR programme at the Atlantic Veterinary College, Prince Edward Island. The programme is sponsored by the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at the College, in cooperation with the Cat Action Team, Charlottetown, PEI. For more information see [www.cats-pe.ca](http://www.cats-pe.ca).

Photo: UPEI Photography

