

Community Cat Network

Established six years ago to fulfil a need within the Irish animal-welfare niche, Community Cats Network introduced the Trap-Neuter-Return programme, which is growing in demand around Ireland



Maggie Dwyer, Emilie Peneau and Jim Dwyer.

Irish farmers can be difficult to impress at times, but when it comes to the Community Cat Network (CCN), and its Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programme, they are happy to make an exception.

Formed in 2012 by a group of cat lovers, CCN works with communities around Ireland to create awareness of the importance of neutering stray and feral cats offering advice and support, when needed.

CCN stay the course until all cats have been humanely caught, transported to a partner vet for neutering and, following a 24-hour recovery period, returned to the farm. As well as on farms, CCN operates its TNR programme in communities with individuals and businesses. There are a lot of cats to be neutered in Ireland. Every housing estate in the country will have a coterie of feral cats searching for food and shelter.

While there are always compassionate individuals willing



Multi-cat trapping.



Early neutering a community cat.

to feed the cats and offer other basic-care requirements, this can encourage breeding and, in turn, lead to increased demands on limited resources and further suffering among the feline population.

The original three founding members of CCN, Maggie and Jim Dwyer in west Cork and Emilie Peneau in east Cork, came together while engaged with another animal rescue organisation. It was their rescue experience that determined the introduction of TNR as an animal-welfare model.

TNR is a proven method of consolidating often meagre resources to target the maximum number of animals for maximum benefit. International studies, particularly in the US and Italy, have demonstrated the efficacy of TNR in reducing feline-population numbers in a humane way and, as a secondary benefit, improving the colony's health-and-welfare status.

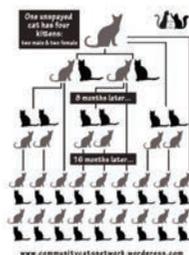
The concept behind the organisation came from a project its co-founders carried out in the small fishing village of Ballycotton, where the whole community came together to raise funds to care, monitor and neuter their feral cats. They wanted to create an organisation that would work closely with communities in order to help feral cats. The name, Community Cats Network, reflects this.

It uses the name commonly adopted in the US, for feral cats — community cats — while also emphasising the role communities can play through networking. As well as controlling the cat population, CCN aims to make people responsible for their community cats and promote the important role they play in the community. CCN does not remove the cats (or kittens), nor do they fund entire projects. Instead, they work with people to find a feasible solution to their problem, helping them to organise a payment plan or supporting them in organising a fundraiser. As a result, communities are more likely to keep monitoring the colony of cats, informing CCN if one needs veterinary attention or if there is a new arrival.

EARLY NEUTERING

The founding members of CCN initially spent time studying the work of international groups before embarking on the establishment of CCN. The organisation developed a series of policies and procedures drawn from best international practice. Some worked, others did

Early Neutering



Did you know?
 A female cat can become pregnant as young as four months old. She can have up to three litters a year. Unneutered male cats have a tendency to roam and spray. Neutering male and female cats has many health benefits for your cat. Every year, thousands of kittens are born. Many will not reach one year old. For the lucky ones, not enough homes can be found.

**Don't be part of the problem,
 Be part of the solution!
 Neuter your cat now!**

Organisations, such as International Cat Care and Cats Protection, recommend neutering kittens between 12 and 16 weeks old - or even earlier for feral kittens or kittens that are being rehomed - to avoid any unplanned pregnancies. Kittens can now safely be neutered at an early age and an increasing number of vets offer early neutering. Contact your practice now to discuss the procedure and make an appointment now - before it is too late!



Designed by Community Cats Network. Visit www.communitycatsnetwork.wordpress.com for more information about feral cats and our programme of Trap-Neuter-Return.

Figure 1: Early neutering poster.

Chip or Tip

Marking the neutering status of all cats

Every year, many stray and feral cats go through the stress of an unnecessary second surgery because their neutering status was not marked.

To avoid this unnecessary stress (and cost), the neutering status of all cats should be marked by microchipping domestic cats and ear-tipping outdoor and feral cats. This means that if the cat ever strays, a vet or rescue can immediately identify them as neutered.

Microchipping



A microchip is a small device that is inserted under the skin and provides an identification number. This number must be registered on a national database with your contact details and the medical history of your pet. When a friendly stray cat is found, it can be scanned by a vet or animal rescue and immediately reunited with you thanks to this identification number. It is more suitable for pets and cats that can be handled. The implantation can be done at the time of neutering at an affordable additional cost.



Ear-Tipping

Ear-tipping is a universal method used to recognise feral cats that have already been neutered, thus preventing an unnecessary second trapping and surgery. The tip of the left ear is cut, making the cat identifiable as neutered from a distance. It is more suitable for cats that cannot be handled.

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Figure 2: Chip or Tip poster.



Farm cats.



Recovery area.

not, and CCN amended its practices accordingly. CCN pioneered the practice of early neutering, whereby, kittens from 500g upwards were neutered by Irish vets in practices used by the organisation.

This procedure has saved the lives of countless kittens by removing the need to reproduce and decreasing demand on limited resources.

Eartipping or microchipping are important parts of CCN's neutering programme. CCN was set up to deal with feline over-population in a practical way. Established models of rescue and sanctuary tend to be static operations responding to the public's desire to sadly 'dump' unwanted pets. This quickly leads to rescue organisations becoming overwhelmed by the sheer volume of unwanted animals. TNR takes the fight to the root of the overpopulation problem to the housing estates, to the farms, to the industrial estates and to the solitary country cottages.

Over the six years of CCN's existence, some 5,000 cats and kittens have been neutered and returned to their

respective colonies. For an organisation that began life with a couple of dodgy cat carriers, CCN has grown into a very professional entity.

Every year, our volunteers deal with thousands of phonecalls, texts, Facebook messages, emails and people calling to front doors. To cope with the demand for rehoming cats, CCN has introduced a Private Rehoming Platform that puts people in touch with potential adopters. While not a rescue service, CCN occasionally fosters cats and kittens. These animals are all neutered, vaccinated and microchipped before rehoming. Every effort is made to match the felines with appropriate homes.

In some instances, where veterinary services were not available, CCN brought vets to the colony where field hospitals were set up. Through social media, CCN has promoted best practice for dealing with feral cats and feline healthcare, in general. CCN always operates in the best interest of the cat and our volunteers are encouraged to keep up to date with the latest research in zoological and veterinary practices.