Volunteer Field Guide to
Scottish Wildcat Action Feral Cat TNVR

Contents:

1: Introduction.................................................................page 1
2: Cat Welfare.................................................................page 4
3: Handling Feral Cats.......................................................page 5
4: Your Health and Safety....................................................page 6
5: Planning TNVR...............................................................page 7
6: Equipment needed for TNVR............................................page 9
7: Trapping........................................................................page 11
8: Transferring and Transporting Feral Cats...... page 17
9: Troubleshooting Difficult Situations.......................page 19
10: What to Expect at the Vet................................................page 23
11: Aftercare......................................................................page 24
12: Release......................................................................... page 25
13: Cleaning Traps and Biosecurity.................................page 26
14: Record Keeping and Follow Up.................................page 26
15: FAQ’s and How to answer them.................................page 27
16: The TNVR ‘Before you Start’ Checklist.................page 28
Appendix 1: Ageing Kittens.............................................page 30
1: Introduction

What is TNVR?

TNVR stands for Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate and Release or Return, sometimes also known as TNR (Trap Neuter and Release), and is a non-lethal method of controlling feral cat populations by preventing an individual’s ability to breed and therefore reducing the reproduction rate of the whole population so the overall numbers decline over time.

“Trap, neuter and return (TNR) is a well-documented and researched method of population management. When properly conducted, targeting control of a whole colony, TNR programmes have proved to be effective in managing cat populations over many years and in many locations worldwide. A stable group of neutered cats may help limit others from entering the area, and can be managed successfully to avoid reproduction and nuisance behaviour associated with reproduction. On-going TNR and population control is needed to maintain stable cat populations”  The International Society for Feline Medicine

Why are we doing TNVR to help wildcats?

As feral and domestic cats are the same overall species as Wildcats (they are a separate subspecies), they can mate with each other and produce fertile offspring. This is called hybridisation (also known as crossbreeding/ interbreeding or introgression), and is a serious threat to the survival of our native Wildcats. If hybridisation continues unchecked, and with hybrids continuing to breed, with each successive generation, there are less and less Wildcat genes in each cat and less chance of the Wildcats surviving long term as a distinctive Scottish wild animal.

The TNVR programme is a key part of an overall conservation strategy known as the Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan which is being implemented to try to halt the loss of our distinctive Wildcats. TNVR work is being focussed in six key areas in Scotland (known as Wildcat Priority Areas) where we believe there are Wildcat populations with the best chance of being sustainable long term, with our help. Reducing numbers of fertile feral cats and poor quality hybrids key to the success of this plan.

The Aim of our TNVR programme is:

- To prevent feral cats breeding with native Scottish Wildcats (hybridising) which has been identified as one of the greatest threats to them.
- To prevent obvious poor quality hybrid cats breeding further with wildcats and other hybrids.
- To stabilise and then reduce the number of feral cats in Wildcat Priority Areas for the long term.
- To improve the long term health and wellbeing of those feral cats in situ via TNVR.

Neutering is also known as spaying/fixing/ dressing or de-sexing. All mean removing the cat’s ability to breed by removing its ovaries or testes. It is done under general anaesthetic and is a very safe and widely performed procedure by vets worldwide.
To contribute to the public’s awareness of Wildcats and their needs, and to help control future threats to them by promoting responsible pet cat ownership in local communities.

The Guiding Principles for our TNVR programme are:

- The welfare and safety of all cats is the highest importance at all times; we will minimise injury, stress, fear and trauma of all feral cats undergoing TNVR.
- The aim is to avoid accidental trapping of Wildcats and ensuring any Wildcats encountered are dealt with appropriately under their own specific protocols.
- The TNVR programme is well coordinated and targeted in order to be effective and maximise the percentage of the local feral cats treated - so it is effective as a means of population control.

Definitions: Which Cat is Which?

It is important to help the public understand that the Scottish Wildcat is not the same thing as ‘wild-living’ or ‘free-living’ cats - the latter are just domestic cats living without an owner in towns or countryside, and not true Scottish Wildcats.

Domestic cats can be pets, stray or feral – they are all domestic cats in origin, the only difference being pet and stray cats are socialized to people and feral cats are not.

A Scottish Wildcat is: A Wildcat is a unique native mammal. They are not the same genetically or behaviourally as domestic cats of any type.

A Pet cat is: A cat owned by someone, socialised to people and the legal property of the owner.

A Stray Cat is: A cat that was once owned but has been dumped or gone astray and is free-living. However, they are tolerant of people to some extent, and may be rehomable if well socialised. They may be treated under TNVR programme if no owner is found, or referred to an animal welfare charity.

A Feral Cat is: A free living cat with little or no direct human interaction or dependency, and not socialised so likely to avoid human contact. They are most often born in a free-living situation in the town or countryside. A feral cat is not likely to ever become fully socialised to humans, and cannot be rehomed successfully, unless they are caught at less than 8 weeks of age. Lethal control of feral cats is legal if they endanger game birds etc. A feral cat is by definition un-owned and ‘out with human control’.

A Hybrid Feral Cat: Is a free living feral cat with a small proportion of Wildcat genetics, and shows obvious appearances of being of mixed ancestry. They behave and are treated as feral cats. If they are allowed to continue cross breeding, they will further dilute the wildcat gene pool. They are assessed individually for the proportion of wildcat ancestry and those with low levels (‘obvious hybrids’) will be neutered as feral cats.

It can be hard to tell pet, stray and feral cats apart when they are trapped - any cat in a frightening and stressful environment may act aggressively and avoid human contact. However, pet and stray cats, given some time to relax, often show their level of socialization. Both owned cats and feral cats can look underweight, ill or have neglected coats, so assumptions should not be made on appearances.
Here are some tips to look for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Look for:</th>
<th>Feral Cat</th>
<th>Pet or Stray Cat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microchipped or wearing a collar</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have ear tip removed</td>
<td>possibly</td>
<td>No, but may have trauma to ears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from fights etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will approach people/cars for food</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language furtive and slinky at all times around people</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes eye contact with people</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will call, purr or meow to you</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen around during the day, rather than mostly at night</td>
<td>possibly</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When trapped it approaches the front of cage and call/touch you given</td>
<td>No- will</td>
<td>possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>hide in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the back</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will avoid human touch at all times, and reactive aggressively if touched</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a trap will respond to sound and/or smell of food packets etc.</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stays tense and un-relaxed whenever people around</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>if a cat is showing the majority of these signs it can be assumed to be feral</td>
<td>If a cat is showing more than one or two of these signs, you need to do further checks to determine if it is owned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: The rest of this guide assumes the cats you will be dealing with are feral cats (and low quality feral hybrids) as this is our target group for TNVR. We will refer to all these cats in this guide as ‘ferals’.

2: Cat Welfare

The overriding principle is: All cats are afforded legal protection from cruelty under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and should be treated humanely.

The TNVR programme must be carried out in such a way as to minimise stress, fear and injury at all times and the cat’s basic needs for food, water and shelter must always be met. The goal is for a cat to pass through the TNvR process as quickly and efficiently as possible, with the minimum of handling.

Feral cats are fearful of people by definition and this must be remembered at all times when trapping. The whole experience of being trapped and transported to a veterinarian will be stressful. Feral cats will not communicate their needs to you (e.g. if they are hurt, in pain, or frightened), so
you must be observant. It is essential that you stay quiet, calm, and conscious of the cats’ well-being at all times. It is important to know and recognise the signs of stress and fear in cats in order to respond and minimise these. A stressed cat may display one of more of the ‘Four F’s’: fight, flight, freeze, and fuss or fiddle (such as over-grooming or self-mutilation).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Extreme Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yowl or hiss and strike out at you</td>
<td>Go quiet in “shut down mode” but may ‘explode’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hide at rear of the cage, cower</td>
<td>Throw themselves violently around the cage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trembling, over-grooming</td>
<td>Self-biting/ mutilation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. If any signs of extreme stress are noted, action should be taken immediately to reduce stress.

Some examples of stress minimisation are:

- Keep loud noises to a minimum (e.g. never shout or have a loud radio playing in a car with cats)
- Keep the trap covered at all times as darkness is relaxing- avoid the temptation to lift the covers frequently to check the cat.
- Do not place trapped cats near strong smells, especially of potential predators such as dogs (e.g. not in same part of a vehicle). Do not smoke near feral cats.
- Confine cats to cages for the minimum required time, and release them as soon as it is safe to do so.

3: Handling Feral Cats

During TNvR, there is little or no handling feral cats –it is undesirable for the cat and you, and should be avoided wherever possible to reduce trauma and stress. The whole technique is designed to be ‘hands off’ and if you follow your training, you will never handle the cats directly. Remember feral cats can appear docile when very stressed but can be unpredictable and will still lash out, biting and scratching in self-defence- when they feel threatened this is entirely natural behaviour but can result in injury to you. Never attempt to handle a feral cat inside or outside the trap or cage, no matter how docile it appears- it may struggle and injure itself or you in the process. Take special care when transferring cats (see below for safe methods) from one cage to another as escapes are a real risk and an angry cat is much harder to re-catch.

It is especially important not to open the trap or try to touch a conscious or semi-conscious feral cat (for example during neutering recovery) as their disorientation can make them very defensive. The vet team will only handle these cats when they are heavily sedated or under anaesthetic.

Always wear gloves when handling traps with cat’s inside- even if covered- as their claws can pierce covers. A vet or vet nurse can demonstrate the safe handling / restraining positions for pet cats.

N.B. Always behave calmly, quietly and patiently around trapped cats and touch them and their cage as little as possible for their own sake.
4: Your Health and Safety

Planning is key: Have you checked the site beforehand and made sure it’s safe to work on? Make sure you’ve taken account of hazards like weather, road access, farm animals/vehicles and remoteness? Have you read the risk assessment for TNVR? Discuss any particular concerns with your project officer beforehand and consider pairing up for higher risk situations.

Travelling: One of the biggest areas of risk is driving to TNVR locations which may be remote or along rough tracks. Prepare your vehicle prior to a trapping period – remove anything you don’t need to carry (to maximise space and minimise weight/bumping), pack all necessary equipment and lay down layers of waterproof mats and something absorbent on top for traps to sit on. Remove items that may smell strongly of dogs etc. Keep in your car a large scale local map, your mobile phone, warm spare clothing, drinking water, and a sat-nav if appropriate. Is your vehicle roadworthy and suitable for the conditions? Do you have plenty of fuel?

Lone Working: Often when doing TNVR work you will be working alone- it is vital you follow the Lone Working procedures you’ve been trained in (Safety Cover) and that someone you know is aware of what you are doing and where, and when you are likely to be home. Ask for help and work together if you prefer not work alone. Always leave your itinerary and location with a responsible person, together with instructions of what to do if you do not return on time. Make sure your overall plans are known to your SWA Project Officer too.

Handling cats: Stay safe by avoiding all handling of cats, no matter how tame you think they are- remember that some cats go very quiet or freeze under stress but they can still lash out. The risk of bites, even from the smallest kittens, can be very high if you try to handle feral cats by hand – avoid this at all times.

Toxoplasmosis: This infection can be an issue for pregnant woman, as this parasite can be caught by people from cat faeces. Cat faeces can also carry a number of other potentially infectious organisms (e.g. Salmonella, Campylobacter) so all operators must practise good preventative hygiene. It is preferable for pregnant women not to be undertaking TNVR, and any pregnant woman must ensure while handling a traps or cats that they wear gloves and wash their hands and use disinfectant gel immediately afterwards. Do not eat, drink or smoke until after you have disinfected your hands.

Disease: Always change your clothes and wash your hands before handling your own pets when you get home, to avoid any risk of transferring cat diseases to them. The risk of you contracting any other diseases from the cats is very low so long as handling is minimal, and provided you take sensible precautions with faeces and other biological materials, such as wearing plastic gloves.

Injuries: The methods recommended for this TNVR programme should avoid the risks of bites and scratches, but accidents can happen. Anyone dealing with feral cats should be vaccinated against tetanus- ask your doctor for advice. Bites and scratch wounds should be washed immediately, and if signs of inflammation develop you must see a doctor. If you are bitten or scratched and are concerned always seek medical advice, as these injuries can often become quickly infected and can lead to serious illness in joints etc.
5: Planning TNVR

Planning before you start is vital for successful TNVR - it helps things runs smoothly both for you and the cats. There will always be unexpected surprises but you should be prepared for most eventualities and can prevent problems with good planning.

Step 1: Sightings: Knowing where to find your feral cats is the key! They can be found just about anywhere, from towns to remote rural areas, and be surprisingly clandestine. Some common locations are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farms</th>
<th>Industrial Estates</th>
<th>Landfill sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stables</td>
<td>Quarries</td>
<td>Game rearing facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisheries</td>
<td>Docks</td>
<td>Disused buildings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may be asked by your SWA Project Officer to trap in a location where feral cats have been reported by a member of the public or been detected on trail cameras, or you may suspect there are feral cats around and want to do a proactive sweep of a likely area. Start by looking at a map of the area and spotting potential habitats such as those above. Feral cats often go undetected or people don’t perceive them as a problem or don’t know who to report them to. Asking around a local community (houses, farms, workshops etc.) may yield a lot of useful information. Try to be sensitive in your questioning, and ask non contentious questions first. Always explain your reasons and offer to show them the humane traps used in TNVR – this can lead to people being more cooperative.

If following up on a public report of a feral cat sighting, make sure you find out: What kind of cat, how many cats and exactly where have they been seen? If at all possible talk to the original source and to more than one person to confirm details. Is anyone watching them or feeding them, and can they provide more information about the times the cats appear/ are fed etc.? If information is vague, consider using a camera trap (aka trail camera) to check what type of cats are around when-set it for a few days before you plan to trap.

Step 2: Negotiation of permissions: The first thing to do is to ensure that you have the permission of the landowner for cat trapping on their land- this sort of activity is not covered under the general access provision in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Ask your Project Officer (PO) for tips/help on how to negotiate these permissions. Is there anyone else you should let know you are working on TNVR such as a gamekeeper, warden, Police wildlife crime officer, ranger or local community group? This helps prevent suspicion of traps.

Step 3: Visit the site: Visit the site to check it out beforehand. Take note of any signs of cat activity and decide how many traps you will need and where you will place them. Make a written note of your plans and make a map of the site- draw a sketch map on which you can mark exactly where the traps will be set so that someone else can follow it if necessary.

Step 4: Communication: Let the locals know what you will be doing, using clear language and tell them WHY this is happening. This is vital to get them onside and to prevent you catching their pet cats. Ask them to keep their cats inside the house on specified trapping days, to ID their cats (you can hand out SWA paper collars) or ask them to give you a photo of their cat so you can easily ID
them if they are accidentally caught. Posters or letter box drops can be used to engage the locals too. Be aware that some people may be against TNVR on principle and may not be convincible, even if handled sensitively.

**Step 5: Backup:** Consider whose help you may need—can you do this alone or do you need a colleague to help share the load of trap checking and travelling? Do you need an extra person to help transport cats to the vets during their opening hours or to look after them overnight?

**Step 6: Equipment:** Do you have the equipment you need including the appropriate number of traps? A big colony might need a joint effort. Gather and test all your equipment and practice how it all works ahead of time—there is nothing worse than a faulty trap which goes off prematurely or fails to close smoothly, spooking the cat which will then be much harder to re-catch. You will be supplied with traps etc. by SWA, but it is your responsibility to keep them in working order—if they are faulty, contact your PO immediately. See checklist section below.

**Step 7: Vet Relations:** Have you contacted your local vet and agreed the day/ time for treating any cats caught? Your trapping should coincide with the clinic’s ability to see and neuter right away—or the very next morning, so the cats don’t remain in their traps for too long. You will be working with vets whom the SWA project has agreed a standard TNVR approach, however, each vet will have local needs and you need to make sure they are available to handle your feral cat IN ADVANCE as it is not acceptable to keep a cat caged if the vet is not available (due to holidays or other commitments) or to have to release a cat if no one is available to neuter it as it may not ever be re-caught.

**Step 8: Transport and Handling:** Have you worked out and set up a safe way to transport the cats to the vet and somewhere safe for them to return to until they can be released? If you do not have these facilities, have you contacted your local PO to find another volunteer willing to help?

**Step 9: Weather:** Have you checked the weather forecast to avoid extreme weathers?

**Step 10: Biosecurity:** Are your traps / covers clean and disinfected? Have you checked if the site you are working on has any rules about disinfecting boots etc.? Some farms and forest sites may have local rules, or temporary rule changes might be in place if a notifiable livestock infection is found.
6: TNVR Equipment Needed:

- A mobile phone with your vet’s numbers and your SWA Project officer’s number for backup.
- Outdoor clothing suitable for the season and waterproofs for you.
- A first aid kit.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PE): At least one pair of thick gloves (wear these for your safety while carrying cats in traps).
- Torch- for use in low light and for checking cats in covered traps
- Traps – see below for types SWA use for TNVR
- Transfer crush carry cage - see below.
- Trap Combs x 1 – see below
- Trap Cover- you will be given a plastic fitted one for use in the field along with natural vegetation etc. For transporting cats in cages and traps you will also need a dark blanket/ heavy sheet/ towel or similar. It must cover whole trap, not just the top.
- Bait (including a box/bag to put open pack in to contain the smell) and spoons etc. to use with it. Can opener if required.
- Extra cat food to leave if you are continuing trapping or pre-baiting
- Newspapers or tarpaulins and absorbent towels or puppy trainings pads etc. to put under traps, to line your vehicle.
- Trap Labels with SWA ID on and trap NUMBER and your name filled in.
- Rubbish container for food cans, soiled paper etc. Paper towels are also useful.
- Disposable plastic gloves for cleaning up cat faeces and handling soiled paper etc.
- Hand wipes and antibacterial gel for you to clean your hands afterwards.
- A pair of pliers, and some WD40 or Vaseline for traps, to keep them working smoothly.
- Ropes or cable ties to keep trap or carry cage doors securely locked during transport.
- Bungee cords (to secure traps in your car so they don’t slide around)
- **A SWA Cat Procedures Form** (on duplicate pad with number) for you to take to vet with cat.
- **Map of the site** – so you can mark where EXACTLY you’ve placed your traps. This is essential so someone else can follow up and check the traps if you can’t.
- **SWA information leaflets to hand out to anyone interested /who asked what you’re up to.**

**Cat Traps**

We use humane traps to catch cats that can’t be handled or approached- this is for the cat’s safety and ours! Traps must be designed specifically for cats –DO NOT attempt to use any other type of traps (such as squirrel/ mink/ fox/ homemade traps) as these won’t have the same safety features. All traps must be safe, well maintained and ideally light enough to be easily portable by you.

Cat traps take two forms – ‘automatic’ where the trap springs shut when a mechanism is triggered by the cat going inside, or ‘manual’ where a watching person pulls a mechanism once the cat is in the trap- examples of these include a ‘Mac’ trap and Multicatch traps with a pull cord. However, for almost all TNR situations for this project, automatic traps will be used.

**Examples of Automatic Traps**
The ‘Eeziset’ or similar brand type trap is the oldest and most widely used automatic trap in the UK. It is a safe and reliable trap with a good trap success rate. It can have a solid or mesh floor, and usually has a clear plastic rear door - this helps create a visual tunnel effect, makes checking the cat easier and can be pushed up to place bait in easily.

It works by the cat placing its weight on the treadle, which results in the spring loaded door closing. Some people dislike the internal door which can touch the cat’s back as it falls. Its drawbacks are that it is heavy (although now lighter) and noisy (though most recent versions have foam pads on the door frame to prevent this).

The ‘Eesicatch’ or similar brand trap has many of the same features but has been developed with an externally hung door. This door closes down from the outside, removing the risk of the door “catching” on the cats back as in some other types of trap. The door mechanism also closes more quietly. They can come with either solid or mesh floors, and have the clear plastic rear door.

Traps can also be purchased in a collapsible form which folds flat for transport; extended versions which are longer for really huge cats; and are available with a variety of coloured coatings. If you have any preferences or special needs, discuss this with your Project Officer.

**Combs:**

Also known as restrainer forks, trap isolators, trap dividers etc. These are metal (or sometimes wooden) forks which slot between the bars of any trap or cage/basket to block off one side or part of the container. This can be useful for preventing a cat escaping whilst servicing the trap (adding food, changing bedding, or adjusting the trap). They can also be used by vets to restrain a cat in one end of the cage for safe injection through the bars. In some cases more than one fork is needed. They are best used from the side, pushed through from one side and out through the other, but can also be used from top down. Great care must be taken to avoid injury if the cat lunges whilst the comb is inserted. Don’t be tempted to raise the sliding door for any reason once a cat is inside, without a comb in place, as a feral cat can try to squeeze itself in a panic through a very small gap and escape.
7: Trapping

Acclimatisation and Pre-baiting:

Acclimatisation or Habituation: Most people believe that by getting cats used to the appearance/smell of a trap in the area before you set out to trap the cats can help increase likelihood of trapping success. You can do this by putting a ‘disarmed’ trap in place for a few days/weeks beforehand (if you have time), with the sliding door removed and the trap door locked closed with a padlock ideally (to prevent any accidental trapping or misuse).

This can also help to remove any human smells or previous cat smells if you have very wary cats, and allow the trap to take on some of the local natural smells. Rinsing the trap in local burn can help to remove unwanted smells and replace them with local smells, as can local mosses and grasses to disguise and naturalise the trap.

If enough traps are available so you can leave them on site for long periods for acclimatisation this can be an advantage- it helps minimise movement of traps between sites and is good for infection control- also good for you in minimising carrying the traps back and forth.

Pre-baiting: Getting the cats used to associating the trapping location, and/or the trap itself, with food is very helpful. Many people put food out for feral cats for a week or more before they want to trap (such as dry cat food) as this gets the cats coming regularly to the site. They then stop supplying food 24hrs beforehand live trapping so the cat is hungry enough to enter the trap. This step is not essential, especially if the cats are already hungry, but when cats are hungriest in winter, it can certainly help.

The pre-baiting stage may be skipped if there is only a narrow window of opportunity to catch a cat, for example a female with kittens who may move soon, but remember special techniques and extra precautions are needed.

When pre baiting or acclimatising cats, always disarm the traps - take out the clear plastic door, either take it away with you or place it on top of the trap under the cover, close trap door securely, by tying (cable tie) or ideally padlocking it up to the roof, and place food near open entrance or inside the trap.

N.B. In all cases where you are leaving a disarmed trap in situ make sure the trap door is tied up and REMOVE the sliding clear plastic door so that there is NO CHANCE WHATSOEVER of a trap being accidentally triggered or mis-used during this period.

Where to Place a Trap

Place your traps where the cats are most often being seen, where cats are fed, in likely sleeping areas (e.g. straw sheds), or on known travel routes. Make sure you keep well clear of any farm operations by agreeing these sites first with the farmer/site owner/occupier.
Place traps where they are safe from interference, and from hazards such as flooding, dogs and extreme weather. Do not place traps in places where they can fall (e.g. on a roof, high shelf, on top of a steep bank) or slippery surfaces, as a frantic cat throwing itself around inside can dislodge a trap. The trap should also be somewhere safe for you to reach to check it twice a day.

When positioning the trap, it is essential it is level and doesn’t wobble as the cat will be less likely to enter the trap if it is wobbly. You can use small sticks or stones to level it off as long as they don’t interfere with the trap mechanism. A rock or weight on top is desirable to help stabilise it and prevent the wind disturbing it. You can sandwich a trap between two posts knocked into the ground to stabilise it if necessary. If the trap has to be on a slight slope, make sure the door (trap door end) is the lower.

If you are using multiple traps, stagger them and have them facing different directions. Try to place the traps where they will attract a cat and can be camouflaged, for example, near cover vegetation.

Traps may sometimes be stolen, damaged or sabotaged. Prevent this with good communications with locals beforehand and if in a high risk area, secure the cat trap to the floor or padlock it with a chain to something immovable. Padlocking the door open when not in use also prevents interference and proves you’ve taken every precaution to prevent misuse.

**Trap Flooring:**

Most traps can be used with nothing extra added to the floor. If using a solid floor trap, a thin layer of newspaper can help make the inside of the trap easier to clean but can rustle and bunch up. Leaf litter or moss can also be used but you must ensure no twigs etc. jam the treadle/trap mechanism. If using a trap with a mesh floor, gently wiggle the trap down into the grass/soil to buffer the wires at the bottom, and spread leaf litter/moss if desired. Remember, anything underneath or added to the inside of the trap shouldn’t interfere with its smooth working: also check that nothing can blow into the trap and foul the mechanism/treadle.

Care must be taken to clear straw, twigs, stones or any item from the area in front of the trap under the closing door. If a twig stops the door from descending it will fail to lock and the cat will escape.

**Bait:**

Ideally cats should not be fed for a few hours before any surgery, however a small amount of food is ok, and the vet can work around this as long as they know when the cat last ate. For example if you trap overnight and take the cat to the vet first thing in the morning, it will be safe to operate on the same day. If you trap it early that morning and it ate say at 6am, it will be safe to operate on late that same day. A cat trapped in the late afternoon it would be given an anaesthetic the next morning.

Lay a trail of food leading into the trap but use only a very small amount of food otherwise the cat may be satisfied before making it to the trip plate at the end of the cage and leave before triggering the trap.

Place a small amount of bait (approximately 1cm cube, or 1 tablespoon full) at the very back of the trap -beyond the treadle plate as close to the rear clear plastic door as you can. This ensures the cat
will step on the treadle plate while attempting to reach the food and the mushy consistency prevents the cat from clawing up big pieces of bait and avoiding triggering the trap. Place a few tiny morsels spread near the entrance and leading into the trap, or drizzle the oil/juices from the bait in a wavy zigzag pattern up to the trap treadle to entice the cat in.

Types of bait for feral cats: Everyone seems to have their own favourite bait, but the general rule is the smellier and fresher the better! If one type doesn’t work for you, experiment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Bait</th>
<th>Advantage/ Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicken —cooked or raw</td>
<td>Goes off &amp; dries up quickly in warm weather. Can be clawed up easily avoiding triggering trap. If using raw chicken use gloves and wash hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road-kill pheasant/ partridge etc.</td>
<td>Free but make sure from safe clean source and may be easy for cat to claw up avoiding trigger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinned cat food</td>
<td>Easy to get but goes off quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry cat food</td>
<td>Lasts a longer time- ideal for pre-baiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuna in oil</td>
<td>Really smelly and attractive to cats, oil preserves it longer. Mushy and easy to spread on trigger plate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackerel, sardines, pilchards in oil</td>
<td>Smelly and mushy. Expensive. Avoid those salted and with fancy flavours added</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. Do not use food dishes in the trap as they may foul up the mechanism and can injure a frightened cat once caught. Place bait directly on the floor of the trap. A small soft piece of paper or foil can be used beyond the treadle plate but this may interfere the treadle.

Traps need to be fully wiped out and/or washed regularly (on site) to stop the bait going rancid.

Feeding feral cats is only used as a temporary measure to facilitate TNVR and should not be continued at the same site beyond the time necessary to TNVR any feral cats present.

Covering Traps:

All traps should be covered to protect the cat inside and to help create an enticing tunnel effect which cats like. Cover the trap on the top and sides, leaving both ends clear, which helps it to appear like a tunnel. Trap Covers should be waterproof and thick enough to provide shade in hot weather etc. Covers of any sort must not rustle or flap in the wind as this puts cats off.

NB: When checking a trap, NEVER pull back covers completely or too quickly - gently lift one corner of the cover to avoid causing panic.

Make sure any coverings don’t interference with trap mechanisms- check it is working.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of cover material</th>
<th>Best used for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardboard</td>
<td>Temporary cover only, disposable. Tend to flap in the wind and put cats off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towels / blankets</td>
<td>Not waterproof so temporary only- best just for transport. Human/detergent smell can put ferals off. Wash &amp; reuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readymade Plastic cover</td>
<td>Great but expensive. Can make the trap obvious- disguise with moss etc. Easy to clean, which is good for biosecurity. Sometimes need a cover for handle hole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural vegetation/moss/bracken/straw</td>
<td>Good to disguise the trap, especially for remote area ferals. Shouldn’t be used as only cover as not waterproof. Can be combined with plastic covers well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plywood</td>
<td>Good long lasting cover- can be combined with vegetation etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Labelling Traps:**

Each trap will be permanently identified with the SWA project as the owner so the public people know its aim and that it is being legally used -this can help prevent tampering too. Each trap will be stamped with the SWA logo/ name and a unique number which cannot be removed. It is also best practise to have a waterproofed label notice, with “The responsible Operator is: (your name and telephone number)” and your own identifying code. You will be supplied with these labels to use.

**Checking the Trap- How Often?**

The current standard minimum interval for any live trap to checked is every 24hrs, however it is considered best practise to do so every 12hrs. This will be standard SWA practise and is designed to balance the welfare of trapped cats and practicalities.

In some remote locations it will not be possible to get to traps every 12hrs – if so, you must discuss your plan with your PO and make sure if you only check every 24hrs, extra precautions are taken. The interval between trap checks should NEVER EXCEED 24hrs.

Most cats are crepuscular, i.e. they are most active in the evenings and mornings so it is worth trapping around the clock, but only if you can attend the trap twice a day.

A common interval of trapping is likely to be from the previous afternoon to the next morning i.e. overnight, since rural feral cats roam widely and are often very nocturnal, so they are generally best targeted with traps set overnight. You can check traps more frequently at less remote locations e.g. farms, such as breakfast time and early evening, but checking too often will deter the cats.

If you are unable to check the traps the following day (or the vet is unavailable) lock the trap open, leave food and leave in situ to help acclimatise and attract the local cats.

**Backup:**

Ideally arrange with a volunteer colleague a backup system – they undertake to step in to help with your traps if you hit an emergency, and vice versa. If for any unexpected reason you can’t get to your traps to check them (illness, breakdown, emergencies) it is essential another able person can get to your traps on your behalf- hence the need to have a written record/ map of the trapping site. Traps must not be left unchecked – the welfare of the cats is always paramount.
Weather:

Avoid trapping in extreme weather conditions - for your safety and comfort as well as the cats. It is possible for a cat to die from hypothermia or heat stroke when confined in a trap outside. Never leave a trap in full sunshine on a hot day - they can get surprisingly hot and you cannot leave water bowls in traps for them.

N.B. It is vital that you can be absolutely sure of getting back to the trap in 12hrs time to check it- if there is a risk you may get cut off by snow etc.- DO NOT TRAP!

However, winter is an ideal time to trap cats as they are often hungry. In cold conditions you can use 1” or 2” thick clean polystyrene under and around the trap or place the trap on a bed of straw or wood, for extra insulation from cold - but it must be level and not wobble or interfere with the mechanism. Add extra layers of waterproof covering to the trap too, and in cold conditions, only place traps in sheltered locations such as dense woodlands or sheds, or increase the frequency of your trap visits, or trap during the warmer daylight hours only.

Remember that you are less likely to be successful if it is raining really heavily – as cats don’t like getting wet and so are less likely to be ‘out and about’! After an extended period of rain can be a great time to trap as cats are very hungry and active.

Involving Others:

You are responsible for the traps at all times and you cannot depend on others to check your traps unless they are super reliable, motivated and trained. If you choose to share trap checking you must organise an efficient, accountable system and follow this up. If local people offer to help, thank them and perhaps organise to get them to do extra ‘in-between’ checks to start with and show them exactly what needs to be done. If they do routine trap checks for you, get them to call or text you the result of each check so you know it’s been done. Ask all other people to stay away from the traps, keep the traps disguised, and work in a low key way which doesn’t draw attention to their location - this is for the cat’s welfare.

How Long to Trap For?

This depends entirely on the logistics of your site and the cats you are dealing with, and your available time. Never try to trap for longer than you can be sure to devote to regular trap checks. There is no harm in stopping and starting ‘live trapping’ (by which we mean the trap is baited and set so it can catch an animal) and alternating it with some days/ weeks when it is ‘disarmed’ (i.e. locked open, the mechanism disabled and trap unable to be sprung) and left with some food to get the cat used to it, or even removed. Here are some examples:

- A single feral cat reported in a remote area (identified on camera trap) might need a week’s pre-baiting, then 3-4 days of live trapping (coinciding with the days of the week the vet is open for surgery), then another 3-4 days with the traps left disarmed and baited (‘rest days’ for you) then repeat with another block of live trapping etc., for several weeks or until the cat is caught.
• A large colony of cats in a village or farm location may need multiple traps set intensively over a full week or two with more than one person helping, and even longer for trap shy individuals. This may need to be repeated in a few months’ time as cats are almost never all present at one time.

• Your local vet only does surgery on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so you set traps in several different locations only on Mondays and Wednesdays only each week, rotating around locations you know may have feral cats. During the rest of the week the traps are either disarmed with food left or removed.

In a feral cat colony, especially if they are used to be being fed, you may catch the first wave of cats quickly and easily. The next wave will be wiser and alerted to the traps - you might want to try an extra period of acclimatisation as discussed above to regain their trust of the traps before starting again.

N.B. If you are not having any success, consider varying: trap location, bait type, timing of trapping etc. – seek advice from others. The target cat may have moved- consider camera trapping too to assess which cats are still around.

Once You’ve Caught Your Cat:

• Ideally you will be able to see if the front door of the trap is closed from a distance- binoculars can be useful. If it is closed, assemble everything you will need, and then approach quietly and calmly.

• Lift a corner of the cover and assess the cat- you may need a torch but don’t shine this directly into a cats eyes.

• First check for any sign of ear tipping which means the cat may have already been neutered and if so, release it straight away if the cat is apparently well.

• Secondly check for any signs of it being a local pet cat such as a collar, or try to match it with a photo ID you have been given- release it if it is a pet cat.

• It is normal for feral cats to thrash around inside the trap. You may be tempted to release a thrashing cat because you fear that she will hurt herself, but cats calm down once the trap is covered, so do this immediately once you’ve done a quick check. Most injuries from traps are very minor, such as a bruised or bloody nose or a scratched paw pad, and can be treated by the vet during the process.

• What cat have you caught? Follow your training to assess if it is a wildcat, obviously a pet cat, or a feral- each has a different procedure. You may need to release the cat immediately if it’s a non-target cat- follow release technique below.
• Once you’ve done your quick assessment, cover the trap completely as this should have a calming effect on the cat. Remember: do not attempt to handle the cat or be tempted to keep disturbing it for a look- leave it in peace as much as possible.

• If the vet is open and ready to receive the cat, transfer it straight away. If not (e.g. it’s at night or too early in the morning) either take the cat home (treat as in Aftercare below) or to a ‘holding’ volunteer as previously arranged.

8: Transferring and Transporting Feral Cats

All feral cats should be transferred to the vet as soon as possible to minimise time spent in the traps. Occasionally you may have to keep a cat overnight until the vet opens- leave the cat in trap or cage and treat it as for discussed below in the Aftercare section, providing water but minimal food.

You can transport the feral cat you have caught direct to the vet in the trap if it’s not too soiled. However, if you want your trap to keep working in situ (especially if there is more than one feral cat around) or if it is too big/ heavy for you to carry easily, you may want to transfer the cat to a separate container. The vets will prefer to receive a cat in a clean cage too. This must be done with extreme care as this is the stage in the process where escape of a cat is most likely.

You will need what is known as a ‘crush’ cage or ‘restrainer basket’ - here called the ‘cage’. These are designed to move the cat from the trap to the cage without touching it at all.

How to Transfer a cat:

The transfer to the cage must be done with great care

• Always place the back of the cage against a solid object (wall, tree, wheel of car etc.) on level ground, and cover it with dark sheet or blanket. Place the trap against it, with the clear plastic end towards the cage, and put your or someone else’s foot behind the trap, so nothing can move.

• You take control of the rear plastic trap door - then slide the cage door upwards and out but keep handy.
- Get any other people present to move away from the cage and to the far end of the trap. Gradually slide the cover off the trap (keep your leg protected from the cat’s claws). The cat usually sees the other dark end of the cage as a safe option and darts through to it.
- Slide the cage door down and then slide the clear plastic trap door down and secure them both – double check this before separating the trap and cage by drawing them back and away.
- Do not prod, kick or wobble the trap, or shout at the cat to make it transfer. Blowing air gently on the cat can work. Never use a comb to prod or push a cat in a trap or cage.
- Cats in this degree of confinement may choose to lash out rather than retreat, so be careful.

It is very important to keep the cage covered at all times, as this provides an attractive safe haven at one end and the best chance for the cat to stay calm. Some cats will take longer to ‘see’ the dark end of the cage and may fear turning their back on you - some even turn and back into the cage. Avoid changing your strategy, just hold the door ready, keep your body to the trap end and the cat will manoeuvre away from you eventually to the cage end.

N.B. Be patient and focussed and don’t rush it. Let the cat find its way in its own time.

Transport:
- Keep the trap covered completely with breathable fabric such as an old towel, to provide a dark calm area for the cat to help to reduce stress.
- Make sure your trap or cage doors are securely closed - ideally cable tie them shut so they can’t work loose in transit. Cable ties or strong clips can be useful for this.
- Trapped cats must not be transported in the enclosed boot of a car or the open back of a truck. Transport them in a well-ventilated or air conditioned area such as the rear seat or lower the rear seats to make the boot area better ventilated, roomy and visible for traps.
- Be careful when sliding traps/cages with mesh floors into vehicles- the cats paws and claws can snag on carpets and seats injuring them.
- Leave the radio off and avoid all loud noises in and around the vehicle if possible and strong smells.
- To further reduce stress for the trapped cat and reduce the chance of disease transfer, do not transport a trapped cat with other pets.
• Ensure the cat trap cannot slide around by anchoring the trap with a seat belt or using bungee straps in a cargo area.

• If transporting in a car, ensure the seat and carpet is covered to protect from urine, faeces and vomit. Line the area of the vehicle you will use with a waterproof layer and then an absorbent material such as towels, puppy pads etc. to enable it to be completely cleaned for you and the cats health.

• If you are transporting more than one cage at a time in the vehicle, make sure there is a barrier of material between them to minimise stress between cats.

9: Troubleshooting Difficult Situations:

Pet Cats:

If you accidentally catch someone’s pet cat, it should be obvious after a quick assessment. If it is wearing a collar or matches one you have been given a photo of by local householders, let it go immediately.

If you suspect by its behaviour it is a pet cat (it is calm in the trap, responds to human voice and approaches you), check your information, and if possible, ask around- someone may recognise it. It is illegal to neuter an owned cat without the owner’s consent so it must be released even if you cannot locate the owner. If so, and it is safe to handle, you can put a paper collar on it before releasing it so its owners knows it has been caught and what is going on in the area with TNVR. These can also encourage their assistance by: keeping the cat in, ID’ing it, getting it neutered in future.

If a vet finds a microchip in a cat brought in for TNVR, neutering must not take place, and its owner should be contacted. If this is not immediately possible, the cat should be transferred to a welfare shelter whilst further enquires are made or released back on site- seek advice if you are unsure.

Accidental trapping of other animals

There is a small chance that while setting a trap to catch a feral cat, you may inadvertently catch another animal such as a bird, squirrel, badger, rabbit or pine marten. This is another reason for being vigilant in regularly inspecting the trap. All other native species must be let go without harm- simply open the trap and stand well back. If the animal is injured you will need to seek veterinary advice before releasing it. Grey Squirrels and American Mink are non-native invasive species so may not legally be released- take them to the vet or seek your Project Officers advice immediately.

Occasionally other species will eat your bait without triggering the traps (such as mice etc.). Move the trap to somewhere this is less likely.

Not catching anything, but bait is disappearing

Is the trap set correctly? Is the treadle mechanism too stiff- try some lubrication. Are small mammals like mice eating the bait without triggering the trap- try moving it? If you still have no joy, consider putting a trail camera on the trap to see what is going wrong.
**Catching more than one cat in a trap**

This can sometimes happen, especially if you have a colony situation or catch a mother and kittens. When this happens the cats are not usually aggressive towards one another, and mothers and kittens should be left together. If necessary you can transfer one cat to another cage using the usual method – you may need some assistance to do this.

**Big colonies**

It is worth remembering that the first few cats from a colony to be caught are often the easiest – so do try and catch as many as possible in your first session. Try multiple trap locations, and recruit a second person to help you. If the remaining cats get trap shy, try an extra period of acclimatisation to regain their trust (disarm the traps and continue feeding) for a week or two.

**Pregnant Cats**

Pregnant females may be trapped and safely spayed by the vet as normal at any stage of gestation. Follow the Vets instructions for any extra aftercare.

**Cats with Kittens/ Nursing Mothers.**

You may come across TNVR situations where there are females with kittens and you will need to use special techniques and take extra precautions. If you detect a cat with kittens during your pre trapping surveillance you must seek advice from your project officer before proceeding.

Where possible we avoid TNVR trapping when feral cats are most likely to have tiny dependant young kittens to avoid the stress of the young kittens getting cold and hungry without their mother for 24hrs or so. Taking a mother cat from her very young kittens does carry the slight risk that the kittens could be predated in her absence. On the other hand, not catching a mother cat carries the risk of her moving her kittens (they do this frequently) and disappearing, therefore losing the opportunity to neuter her for her, and her kittens, long term benefit. Consider monitoring the cat with a trail camera to assess when the right time to act is.

Ideally, it would be better to wait until the kittens are at least 4 weeks old before attempting to catch the mother. If you catch mum and there are tiny kittens around – pick them up using gloves and place them in a separate cage with a cover – take to vet with mum and put next to mums cage at all times and reunite them once she comes around from anaesthetic post neutering.

If a lactating mother cat is trapped without her kittens or if the kittens can’t be located, she should still be neutered and released as quickly as possible. It is often difficult to tell if a female is lactating until they are being examined by a vet under anaesthesia. If a cat is found to be lactating, the kittens should be located if at all possible - make a good search of the area whilst mum is at the vet. There is some evidence that nursing kittens may be shared between several females in feral colonies and older kittens will survive adequately until the mother is returned.

Kittens of 4-8 week may follow their mothers into a trap as they stick close to her until after they are weaned. You can also use multiple traps in the same location if there are older kittens present –
ideally one for each-as they will be big enough to trigger a trap. Older kittens (8-12 weeks) seen out and about on their own can be trapped and treated as adults for neutering.

In some situations (such as semi feral farm cats) a larger style trap to catch mum and kittens together may be appropriate- seek advice and specialist equipment from your PO before attempting this technique.

If resources and experienced personnel are available, feral kittens less than eight weeks of age can be socialised and rehomed. SWA does not have such facilities but local cat welfare charities may. Socialising kittens between the ages of 8-12 weeks is more challenging, and may be less successful in the long term, so neutering and release should be undertaken for this age group if the local cat welfare charity does not have the space to take them. Kittens over 12 weeks should be neutered and released as adults back at source.

Timid or Trap Shy Cats:

Some cats can become trap-shy (too frightened to go near or enter a trap) and continuing to try to trap them is likely to put them off even further. Take a break and go back to the acclimatisation stage for a week or two. Start by feeding the cat away from the temporarily disarmed trap, moving the food closer each day until it is in the trap, then at the back. Always feed in the same place and time. When you are ready to trap again, withhold food for 24 hours.

Ask yourself: Is there something about this specific trap that is deterring the cat- does it wobble, smell or has been positioned in the wrong place for that cat?

Other tips include:

- Sometimes the noise of the door shutting may frighten more timid cats. This can be overcome with a strip of padded adhesive on the contact points of the door.

- Camouflage the trap to make it more enticing. Try to blend the trap in with its surroundings by hiding it under vegetation, under a leaning piece of wood, or in a box so the cat feels like he is entering a dark hole. To further disguise the trap, cover it with branches, leaves, moss or other natural materials. Even simply covering the trap with dark cloth or camouflage material can do the trick.

- Place the trap in a more secluded location - a quieter or more protected location can raise the cat’s comfort level enough to enter.

- Consider using the smelliest most tempting bait depending on what you originally used, try tuna in oil, mackerel, canned cat food, sardines, anchovies, or cooked chicken.

- Try using attractive scents such as: Catnip or the pungent herb valerian- this is available in tincture form from health food shops.

- Withhold food for up to two days before you set the trap so the cat is really hungry.

- If you think the cat would be more likely to enter a larger type of trap, seek advice/ loan of one.
**Trap Savvy Cats:**

Trap-savvy cats have cleverly mastered the art of removing the food from the trap without triggering it. Make sure you are using mushy bait that is harder for them to remove. Use a trap with a solid floor and treadle plate. For a particularly trap-savvy cat, you might consider withholding food for up to two days prior to trapping or changing the type of trap.

**Ill or Injured Cats:**

Any cat that is injured or ill must be taken directly to a vet - do not try to administer 1st aid or treatment yourself as this can be dangerous for you and the cat. A Vet will decide if the injury or illness can be treated under the normal TNVR regime or requires euthanasia on welfare grounds.

**Trap Interference or Sabotage**

This can happen but good practise can go a long way to preventing it: such as giving clear information to locals, ensuring permissions are in place, clearly identifying traps etc.

However, if you think this may be an issue or have any suspected incidents take the following additional precautions: always padlock open doors when not in use; take a photograph of each trap when its set in a new location with its ID number visible so you have a clear record; report any damage, theft or misuse to the police and get an incident number - ask your PO for help if necessary.

**Where there are Wildcats too**

If you are working in an area that is likely to have both Wildcats and feral cats, you need to take extra precautions. It is illegal to intentionally trap Wildcats without a license and any accidental catches must be released.

- Trapping should always be targeted at locations where feral cats have been reported.
- Always plan ahead by consulting your local Project Officer and fellow volunteers who can tell you what Wildcats sightings areas are best avoided. Keep in touch regularly for the latest info.
- Camera traps may be used to research the area first to ensure you have a feral target cat - if Wildcats are in evidence, seek PO advice before trapping as you may need to work together.
- Take extra care with disinfecting traps and covers to minimise the risk of disease transfer. Each trap must be washed and disinfected between uses.
- Traps that have a high risk of trapping Wildcats may need to be checked more frequently (e.g. every 8hrs) consult your PO for advice.
- Any suspected Wildcat or hybrid cat caught – inform your PO IMMEDIATELY, and if they are not available, the Project Manager.
10: What to Expect at the Vet

Once the cat is delivered to the vet, you need to sign the Cat Procedures Form (Duplicate pad) to authorise the treatment of the cat on behalf of the SWA project - for which the project pays the vet directly. The vet will then let you know a time to collect the cat - you will not have to pay the bill.

What the vet will do to the cat:

1: The vet will administer an injection through the cage mesh to sedate the cat so it can then be handled and safely anesthetised.

2: The vet performs neuter surgery (spey for females, castration for males) under full general anaesthetic, using dissolvable sutures so there is no need for a revisit to remove stitches.

3: During the aesthetic, ear-tipping is done (removing 3/8 inch or 1 cm from the tip of the left ear; proportionally smaller in a kitten) which identifies that the cat has been neutered and treated. This can later be seen from a distance and avoids the cat being accidentally re-trapped unnecessarily.

4: During anaesthetic vaccinations are provided. Although a course of 2 vaccinations is normal for cats, one dose will provide at least some cover for the cat and greatly increases its chances of a healthy life. Vaccines have been donated to our project by manufacturer MSD Animal Health.

5: The vet will treat any minor injuries and health conditions that can be dealt on the spot. Involved treatments requiring repeated intervention or hospitalisation are not feasible for feral cats.

6: Cat will receive a one off worm and flea treatment for internal and external parasites if necessary.

7: Whilst under aesthetic the vet will take a small blood sample, and some swab samples from each cat for lab analysis as part of our study of feral and wildcat disease and genetics.

8: Cats found suffering with terminal or untreatable illnesses or injuries will be humanely euthanized.

9: The Vet will ‘condition score’ the cat which is a method of assessing its overall health and weight. If a cat scores less than two out of five, it may have an underlying health problem requiring treatment or euthanasia.

10: The cat will be returned to the cage once it begins to recover from anaesthetic and will be released to your care once it is recovering well. On discharge the vet will give you some standard instructions on what to look out for postoperatively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition Score 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td></td>
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</table>
11: Aftercare

When you collect the cat from the vet, they will give you specific instructions about how long that individual cat will need to be kept in before it can be released and anything special to be aware of.

Some vets prefer to keep cats in hospital overnight after surgery and will discharge them to you ready to be released back at the trapping site straight away. In other cases the vet may release them to your care to be supervised at home for 12-24hrs before release- be sure to discuss which is appropriate for the individual cat.

Generally the guidelines are that males can be released 12-24 hours after surgery - a male cat can often be taken back to its site and released late the same day.

Females can be released 24-48 hours after surgery but this is dependent on veterinary advice for each individual case. It is usual to keep females in their cages or traps and release them the next day.

After surgery:

- The cat should be returned directly to a clean cage or trap with some bedding and put in a quiet place until it is fully conscious.
- Transport the cats safely back to your secure, indoor location where they will be in a safe environment, dry, and away from danger such as toxic fumes, other animals, or people or loud noises . e.g. bathroom, basement, garages, spare room etc. Make sure it is quiet and inaccessible to other people and animals. Ensure that all entries in and out (doors, windows, ceiling tiles, etc.) are closed at all times in the unlikely event that a cat should escape from its trap.
- If you would like to give the cat more space to recover, join two cages together SECURELY.
- When the cats are recovering from anaesthesia they are unable to regulate their body temperature well so keep their recovery area sensibly warm but not hot.
- Place newspaper underneath the cage to catch the inevitable stool, urine and food residue.
- Alternatively you can transfer cats to a spare clean trap if the newspaper/ bedding is really soiled during recovery-use the same method described above.
- Check at intervals to make sure that the cat is in a comfortable position and there is no obvious bleeding; keep an eye out for signs of infection (swelling redness, weeping), illness, and lack of appetite. If a cat is vomiting, bleeding, having difficulty breathing, or not waking up, get veterinary assistance immediately. It is normal for cats to sleep a lot after anaesthetic.
- Keep the cage covered at all times to minimise stress. Never open the trap doors or allow the cats out of the trap. Do not stick your fingers through the bars or attempt to handle cats.
- Food and water can then be safely provided once the cat if fully conscious. This is usually up to 8hrs post operation. Put this in the cage taking care not to allow the cat to escape: Use the isolator door, or a comb to keep the cat at one end then lift the back door of the trap very slowly and allow only a small gap—one-half to one inch at most—at the bottom. Slide a shallow plastic lid with a little bit of food on it through the gap without putting your hand inside the trap.
• In rare circumstances (such as surgical complications), when a cat needs longer care (longer than 48 hours), you will need to transfer it to a larger holding pen or hospitalisation basket (or you can join two cages together). These larger cages have the advantage of having an extra door so one end can be isolated allowing you to change food/bedding etc. without the cat escaping. If you cannot do this, contact your PO who may have another volunteer who can host this type of cat.
• Nursing mothers can be returned to their kittens as soon as they are fully conscious. Give her extra space. Kittens should be fed as soon as they are conscious.
• Make sure all cats are fully conscious, clear-eyed, and alert before release. Ideally they will also have eaten something too.
• Make sure any ID information goes with the cat in its cage so it can be released at the correct site—especially important if you have multiple cats in TNVR at once.

12: Release

Always release the cat in the same exact place you trapped it, as this is its territory. Cats relocated in a strange environment tend to leave the new site and may become distressed, injured or even starve. It is SWA policy not to relocate any feral cats on welfare grounds.

Open the front door of the trap or cage and pull back the cover. Or, remove the whole covering and both doors, and walk away. Do not be concerned if the cat hesitates—allow it time to re-orientate itself. Cats often make a very hurried dash once the cage is opened—be prepared for a fast exit! Ensure the trap door is facing away from you when it is opened and never place your hand into the trap in an attempt to flush/drag the cat out!

You can then leave extra food at the release site if desired, and can return to check up on the cat in subsequent days (or ask a local to keep an eye out for you) or use a camera trap. After TNVR cats often disappear for a few days but will eventually settle back into their old routines.
13: Cleaning Traps and Biosecurity:

Cats are fastidious and may not use a heavily soiled trap. Also, a dirty trap could cause infection to spread between cats, so cleaning minimises the risk of disease spread. We do not recommended the use of heavy duty chemical cleaners as these smell strongly and can put cats off.

Be sure to clean out your traps after use- i.e. each run of a few days trapping in the same location or after each cat has been caught. A good hose down or scrub with warm water and washing up liquid, removing all caked on mud and dirt is essential, and then drying in sunshine which will help minimise contamination. Remember some cat diseases can survive for 10 days on dirty surfaces.

You should take extra care to clean traps between different sites, when a cat has had any blood in the trap, or if an ill cat has been in a trap (such as one the vet has had to euthanize). Clean extra thoroughly with water as normal, then spray with Virkon disinfectant (supplied) on all surfaces. Allow to soak for 10 mins and then rinse with clean water and allow to dry in the sun for a few days to loose smell. Your PO will supply you with Virkon and the instructions for its safe use.

Some people argue that not cleaning out the traps between animals can be useful as it may leave cat scent which is of ‘interest’ to other members of the colony. This approach is not recommended.

Once cleaned, check your traps - are they in working order? Do any repairs before storing or reusing. Mechanisms can benefit from some Vaseline or similar to keep them from rusting.

14: Record keeping and follow up

Keeping records is vital part of TNVR- it helps quantify your efforts, chart your successes, map trends across larger areas, qualify you for expenses, and contributes to reports and public understanding of our projects work. It can also help protect you from accusations or disputes, and help if someone else has to take over your traps for any reason (illness, moving etc.).

On your monthly record sheets or in a log book, you will need to record:

- Where you put traps – preferably grid reference- with individual trap numbers
- Dates when traps are out (including both acclimatisation days and ‘live’ trapping days)
- Numbers and types of cats caught- photos are really helpful if possible
- A note of which vets treated which cats, and what was done (neutering, euthanasia on welfare grounds etc.)
- Where and when the cats were released.
- Any subsequent history of the cat/ colony such as sightings if possible.

We encourage you to keep a map of your wider TNVR area and to mark in general locations you’ve targeted. We also encourage you to make local maps (your PO can provide you with OS map printouts) or sketch maps of actual trapping locations with exact trap points marked on for your own use, and to provide anyone else who may need to check your traps with enough details to do so easily. Ask your PO if you’d like some help with maps etc.
15: FAQ’S and how to answer them

You will be asked lots of questions by the public and landowners about wildcats and feral cats in the course of TNVR volunteering. You will have access to the SWA FAQ’s about Wildcats for general background, but some of the most common questions relating to TNVR are:

Q: Why don’t you just cull the cats?

A: There is evidence that culling feral cats creates a ‘vacuum effect’ that draws more new unneutered cats to an area, potentially increasing the overall population. TNVR will reduce the feral cat population in the long term if enough cats are neutered and ferals will hopefully be replaced by Wildcats over time. TNVR is also more acceptable to the majority of the public than culling.

Q: Can you take the trapped cats away as I don’t want them back?

A: No, it is SWA policy not to relocate feral cats on welfare grounds- there is evidence to show these cats can suffer if they are taken to a new area. All feral cats are returned to their location of capture to hold those territories and act as a ‘buffer’ to new fertile cats moving in, thereby helping to protect the local Wildcats. If the cats can’t be returned to the same area, SWA will not do TNVR.

Q: Can I keep the feral cat you catch?

A: Truly feral cats are extremely difficult to socialise and rarely settle in homes. If you would like to adopt a stray cat, contact your local animal welfare charities who have lots of cats looking for good homes.

Q: How do I stop you catching my pet cat?

A: TNVR volunteers will let you know when trapping of feral cats is to take place. You can choose to keep your pet cat in on these nights, put an identification collar on it or a temporary collar, or give the TNVR volunteer a photo/ description of your cat so that if it is accidentally caught it can be immediately released unharmed. Ensuring your cat is well fed will also make it less likely to be interested in the traps.

Q: Can you neuter my pet cat for me?

A: No, we do not fund the neutering of peoples pet cats, but we do very strongly encourage it. If you would like advice or information on neutering, how to go about it and its benefits for your pet, contact us, your vet, the SSPCA or Cats Protection (CP). Your local CP branch also runs a scheme of very heavily discounted neutering for people on low incomes- help is available, just ask.

Q: Isn’t it cruel neutering the cats?

A: No. It is a routine operation done on millions of pet cats worldwide every year, and is very safe. There is a lot of evidence that neutered cats live longer, and healthier lives than those left to continually breed, fight and compete for mates. It is widely accepted to be a key part of responsible cat ownership. Feral cats recover quickly from neutering and go on to live normal lives.
16: The ‘Before You Start’ Checklist:

- Have you got all the equipment you need?  
- Have you been in touch with your SWA PO?  
- Have you got good up to date sightings info to help you target your work?  
- Have you got landowner permission?  
- Have you contacted the locals/checked for Domestic/pet cats?  
- Have done a site check and planned your approach, taking into account any special circumstances?  
- Have you thought about your own Health and Safety?  
- Have you notified/planned with your local vet?  
- Have you acclimatised/pre-baited?  
- Can you check the trap every 12hrs?  
- Have you arranged transport/holding facilities?  
- Is all your equipment clean, functioning well and ready to go?  
- Done a weather and road condition check?

If the answer to all these is yes - you are ready to trap - good luck!

Thank you for being involved in this very practical way in helping cat welfare and helping protect the Scottish Wildcat!

The Scottish Wildcat Action team
Your Training Notes:

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Appendix 1: Ageing Kittens

- **Under one week**- Eyes shut, ears flat to head, skin looks pinkish. Part of umbilical cord may still be attached. Weight < 4oz.
- **1 week-10 days**- Eyes beginning to open, ears still flat. A kitten this age is smaller than your hand. 4 to 6oz weight.
- **2 weeks**- Eyes open bright blue colour, kittens will crawl a bit on their tummies, and basically just sleep and nurse. No teeth yet. 6 to 8oz. weight.
- **3 weeks**- Eyes are fully open, ears are erect, teeth are becoming visible, may just be beginning to come through the gums. Kittens this age are just starting to walk and will be very wobbly. 8 to 12 oz weight.
- **4-5 weeks**- Kittens have begun to pounce and leap. Kittens this age will begin to eat regular cat food, and will begin to use a litter box. They are still quite small at this age. They will weigh anywhere from 1/2 lb to 1 lb.
- **6-7 weeks**- Kittens are quite active and weigh about 1 pound to 1 an 1/2 pounds. Their eye colour, changes from blue to its permanent colour. May still be friendly and approach people. They are very playful at this stage.
- **8 weeks**- Kittens at this age weigh approximately 1 and 1/2 pounds to 2 pounds. If they have not been exposed to humans, they will likely be feral and unapproachable.
- **12 weeks**- Kittens begin to take on long legged lanky appearance and will be seen out and about without their mother.