

# Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Days



Normally, six times a year there is a collaboration of local organizations and volunteers who meet at the Santa Maria Animal Center to spay and neuter the feral cats of our county. This day includes assistance from Santa Barbara County Animal Services Staff and volunteers, Santa Barbara County Animal Care Foundation, V.I.V.A. (Volunteers for Inter-Valley Animals) volunteers, Catalyst for Cats volunteers, and an assortment of local Santa Barbara County veterinarians and staff who volunteer their time to make a difference in our community.

Feral cats colonize in specific areas because there is an adequate food source. Citizens who reside within a colony may become angry because they feel the feral cat population is a nuisance. Cats may spray, howl, fight, and poop where they are not welcome. The common thought is to trap the cats and turn them into a local shelter or re-release them elsewhere in the community. In truth, this is a temporary fix and only opens the door for new feral cats to enter the colony. The best solution is to work with a local trap-spay/neuter-release organization. With this management program for a nominal fee cats are trapped, spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and in most cases returned back into the same colony. This allows the neighborhood to control the birth of unwanted feral kittens and helps to decrease the negative behaviors related to mating, illness, and overcrowding within the colony, while allowing the cats to coexist quietly within the area. Proponents of this method say it effectively controls feral populations because cats can no longer reproduce, yet they continue to defend their territory against incoming cats, thus a maintained feral colony will stay the same manageable size until the cats live out their lives.

Any domestic cat that has reverted back to a wild cat is referred to as feral. A feral cat originates from a onetime domesticated cat that was either lost or abandoned. Without a guardian, they have had to learn to scavenge and fend for themselves. Living in the elements, the average survival is only 2-4 years. An unaltered female feral cat can produce up to 3 litters a year. Approximately 50% of each litter dies shortly after the birth, the remainder fall victim to disease, predators, starvation, and moving vehicles. Females spend most of their life pregnant and hungry. The unneutered Tom's spend their life fighting and competing, and the resulting malnutrition and untreated wounds eventually kill them. Because of these harsh situations, the resulting kittens are taught to survive by becoming very wary of humans and learning to defend themselves. One pair of unaltered cats breeding exponentially can produce thousands of offspring that in turn produce until the numbers become mind boggling.

Humane experts believe the only permanent solution to the feral cat problem starts in the home as pet guardians become diligent about fixing their pet cats. Please do your part by spaying and neutering.