

# Feral Cat Activist

Premier  
Issue

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The Newsletter for Feral Cat Caretakers / Spring 2001

The following is a talk given by guest speaker Nathan Winograd for a conference call titled, It Will Take A Community to Save Their Lives, initiated by Karen Sklar on January 11, 2001, for feral cat caretakers. The calls are scheduled for the second Thursday of every month at 7:00 PM Pacific Standard Time. There is no cost for the call other than the long distance charges. The calls last approximately 45 minutes. If you would like to be informed about these monthly phone calls (phone number and entry code) join Alley Cat Allies' listserve FeralPower! by sending your email to [Lnichols@alleycat.org](mailto:Lnichols@alleycat.org).

## IT WILL TAKE A COMMUNITY TO SAVE THEIR LIVES:

# Should We Re-release Feral Cats Who Test Positive for FIV?

**M**Y NAME IS NATHAN WINOGRAD and for the last several years until very recently, I ran the department of the San Francisco SPCA that handled all the community programs, legislative advocacy, and much of its media relations. The most important program I was responsible for, in my view, was the feral cat program. We altered close to 2,000 cats per year absolutely free. We offered our volunteers a 50 percent discount at the animal hospital for feral cats. We operated an extensive foster care network program that provided 100 percent medical care for the kittens, resulting in a decline in the citywide death rate for kittens of about 85 percent. We pulled feral cats out of the city pound who were on death row there and re-released them into their habitats, reducing the deaths of feral cats at

the city pound by 73 percent. We fought legislative proposals by the Audubon Society and others to round up the cats and kill them — and won.

I am an attorney by profession. Prior to joining the SPCA, I was a criminal prosecutor. And I worked generally on crimes of violence, which included things like assault with a deadly weapon, domestic violence, and cruelty to animals. I have also worked for the Stanford Cat Network, the Palo Alto Humane Society, the Animal Legal Defense Fund, the Greyhound Protection League, and have done projects for a number of other groups including Alley Cat Allies, Farm Sanctuary, and an upcoming project for Best Friends Animal Sanctuary.

That is who I am, and now let's get into FIV and what it means for feral cats.

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## Welcome to the *Feral Cat Activist*

By Becky Robinson

**T**HIS NEWSLETTER IS YOUR link to real solutions for the problem we have all individually identified but collectively want to change — the plight of feral cats. *Feral Cat Activist* provides you with practical information about feral cats, their health, the best equipment to use when humanely trapping feral cats, fund-raising for the cause, and much more.

The ultimate goal of Alley Cat Allies is to see that public policy embraces nonlethal control and that feline sterilization programs become the norm throughout the

United States and Canada (and the rest of the world). We will help you stay in the forefront of the trap-neuter-return (TNR) movement by publishing timely news and solid facts. Alley Cat Allies wants to help you be as knowledgeable as possible about feral cats and to persuade the undecided about the effectiveness of TNR.

Advocates of TNR come in all forms. Whether you are a housewife, business person, animal services employee, military person, or computer analyst, you can make a difference. *Feral Cat Activist* will keep you informed so that you can make a difference in your own way,

in your own community.

In this issue, Alley Cat Allies introduces you to Nathan Winograd who discusses the downside of testing feral cats for FIV, Bonney Brown of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary who imparts her knowledge on fund-raising, and much more.

In the Fall 2001 issue, we will profile individuals who have successfully incorporated nonlethal TNR programs into their communities.

We hope you enjoy this issue and find it stimulating and helpful. And, please take a minute to tell us what you would like to see in future issues — see page 3.

# Building a Mailing List from Scratch

By Bonney Brown of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary

**S**INCE MOST ORGANIZATIONS receive the bulk of their funding in the form of donations from individuals, your organization's mailing list is probably your most valuable asset.

Perhaps you don't have a mailing list yet. Or your list is still too small to support your work. While it's a bit of work, it's entirely possible to build a mailing list from nothing at all. Here's how:

- You'll need a computerized mailing list database program to maintain the records. There are sophisticated programs available for fundraising, but in the beginning you can get by with a simple database program. As the organization grows, maintaining accurate donor records becomes critically important, and eventually you'll need to obtain fundraising database software.
- Start with all of your friends and relatives who like animals. Ask them for the names and addresses of others.
- Go through the Yellow Pages for the addresses of businesses that relate to animals: vet clinics, pet supply stores, groomers, trainers, etc.
- Set up information tables at area pet supply

stores, supermarkets, fairs, etc. Bring flyers, a donation canister and a colorful poster that says who you are. Don't forget to use attractive photos of animals. (No graphic photos please - you don't want to scare everyone off.) Be outgoing and engage people in friendly conversation. Record the address of everyone who expresses any interest in your work. Have a clipboard on the table clearly labeled "mailing list." You may want to have a separate clipboard marked "volunteers." The mailing list form should have prominent headings asking for their name, mailing address, phone number, and email address. (If they give you their number, it indicates that they don't mind being called. Personal phone contact can be a great way to cultivate donors!)

- Include the names of people your organization has helped, folks who come to your events, adoptive families, and donor prospects you wish to cultivate.
- Obtain dog license lists, available from many town halls for a small fee.
- Ask members to spread the word. Ask them for the names of friends who may like to receive

your newsletter.

- Host public meetings in different communities, and of course get the names and addresses of everyone who shows up.
- Trade mailing lists with a business or another type of organization.
- Get publicity for your organization. Articles in local newspapers, company newsletters, and e-mail newsgroups can generate new supporters.
- Create eye-catching flyers about your group's work. They should include a donation form. Select locations, get permission to put the flyers out, and assign volunteers to re-stock the locations regularly. Don't forget to include local vet clinics, groomers, public libraries, town halls, churches, supermarket bulletin boards, pet supply stores, health clubs, and local businesses.
- Arrange to speak at civic organizations' meetings, like the Rotary Club or women's community groups. It's a great way to connect with active people who are concerned about improving the community. Be sure to bring handouts about your group and get the names and addresses of anyone who expresses interest. ●

## Feral Cat *Activist*

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### Editor

Riti Dheshi

### National Director

Becky Robinson

### Executive Director

Donna Wilcox

Special thanks to Ellen Perry Berkeley.

### Visit us online

[www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)

### Alley Cat Allies

1801 Belmont Road NW, Suite 201  
Washington, DC 20009

### Our NEW post office box is:

PO Box 98179  
Washington, DC 20090-8179

Tel: 202.667.3630

Fax: 202.667.3640

Email: [alleycat@alleycat.org](mailto:alleycat@alleycat.org)

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## Caring for a Neonatal Kitten

**Y**OU FOUND AN ABANDONED OR orphaned kitten. What do you do now? When possible, a young kitten should remain with her mother. During the first few weeks of life she absorbs critical antibodies through the colostrum in her mother's milk that provide an important defense against common feline illnesses. She also depends on her mother for warmth and protection. However, if her mother is not able to care for her, she will depend on you for survival.

How do you tell if the kitten you have found is neonatal? The term "neonatal" refers to kittens from birth to three weeks of age. Born helpless, their eyes are closed and their ears folded over. By three weeks of age, their eyes and ears are open and they are moving around. Kittens under three weeks will need to be fed by hand, stimulated to relieve themselves, and kept clean and warm at all times. Kittens four weeks and older can be offered soft food.

If you discovered a neonatal kitten, you will need to ensure that the kitten's body temperature is between 100 -102 degrees Fahrenheit before you feed her. Warm her slowly by holding her against your bare skin or placing her in a box with a heating pad covered with a towel.

Never submerge her in warm water. If you are outside, your armpit makes a great incubator.

Neonatal kittens need to be fed every two to four hours. Cow's milk does not supply sufficient nutrients and protein. You will need to obtain Kitten Milk Replacement (KMR) from your local pet supply store as well as a feeding bottle and several plastic bottle nipples. To feed her, hold her on her stomach at a 45-degree angle and tilt the bottle so milk flows into the nipple. Do not squeeze on the bottle but instead, pull gently away on the bottle to engage her sucking reflex. After every feeding, you will need to stimulate her anal area with a moistened cotton ball. Kittens cannot urinate or defecate on their own until approximately three weeks of age.

To properly raise a neonatal kitten, you will need to purchase *The Guide to Handraising Kittens* by Susan Easterly, an indispensable book that will guide you through every stage of a young kitten's first weeks. This book is fully illustrated and includes information on first aid, fostering, hand-feeding, weaning, health care, development, and taming feral kittens. It can be purchased from Alley Cat Allies for \$9.00 (includes shipping and handling). ●

## ALLEY CAT ALLIES NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

Your contribution can save a life! Without our generous and loyal allies we could never have done so much for the cats we all cherish.

Please send your tax-deductible gift of:

\$25       \$50       \$100       \$500       \$1000       Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

M/C # \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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PHONE # \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Alley Cat Allies 1801 Belmont Road NW, Suite 201, Washington, DC 20009 202.667.3630

**Alley Cat Allies strongly recommends that all individuals working directly with feral cats receive a pre-exposure rabies vaccination. This is a series of three shots in the arm and can be obtained for a fee from your local public health department. For more information, call your county's public health department.**

## Reader Survey

**Alley Cat Allies wants to know what you want!**

What topics would you like to see in *Feral Cat Activist*? How can we improve? We want to make sure that this newsletter serves everyone whether you are a novice or a seasoned feral cat caretaker. So please, give us your input – email [alleycat@alleycat.org](mailto:alleycat@alleycat.org) or mail us your response, attention: Activist Newsletter.

Photo by Don Lewis

## 2001 Conferences

● The No More Homeless Pets Conference sponsored by Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and hosted by Animal Rescue of Tidewater will be held **May 18-20 in Virginia Beach, Virginia**. Registration is \$100 by April 18 and \$125 by May 18. Workshops include feral cats, marketing shelter animals, creating adoption events, fundraising, and taking a leadership role in your community.

For more information email [info@best-friends.org](mailto:info@best-friends.org); call 435.644.2001, ext. 129; or fax 435.644.2078.

● The 3rd Annual Federation of Humane Organizations (FOHO) Conference on Animals will be held **May 19th in Bridgeport,**

**West Virginia**. Donna Wilcox, Executive Director of Alley Cat Allies, will be the keynote speaker. The conference will cover a variety of issues, including feral cats, alternative medicine for animals, operating a low-cost spay/neuter clinic, animal care, and much more. Also, tour a mobile spay/neuter van.

For more information call 304.265.4731 or 304.845.6306, or log onto [www.sbccom.com/animals](http://www.sbccom.com/animals).

● Doing Things for Animals will hold its 7th annual "No-Kill Conference" **August 16-19 in Hartford, Connecticut**.

Alley Cat Allies will conduct a workshop titled "Tips for Safe and Successful Trapping." The

90-minute session will cover the basics of trapping, the latest "tricks of the trade" in trapping, how to outmaneuver the most elusive feral cat, and the best trapping equipment.

For more information browse [www.dtfa.org/pages/conf.html](http://www.dtfa.org/pages/conf.html).

● Mark your calendars for the "2001 Southern Regional Leadership Conference: Forming State Networks to End Cat/Dog Overpopulation," to be held **September 28-30 in New Orleans, Louisiana**. The conference will cover how to develop or join state networks, develop business plans, and raise funds.

For more information email [www.spayusa.org](http://www.spayusa.org) or call 800.248.SPAY. ●

# Useful Resources from Alley Cat Allies

**F**OLLOWING IS A LIST OF INFORMATION frequently requested by feral cat caretakers. It can be obtained from our web site ([www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)) or via mail for a nominal fee. Please copy and distribute our resource information as needed (with credit given to ACA).

## Factsheets

**Build an Inexpensive Shelter**—Shelters benefit feral cats who live outdoors. These instructions walk you through the building and insulating process.

**Community Benefits of Feral Cats**—While caring for feral cats in your neighborhood, be sure to remain friendly with your neighbors. This factsheet explains what steps to take to prevent problems with neighbors and it suggests products that discourage cats from disturbing neighbor's yards.

**Do-It-Yourself Cat Fence: For Domestic and Homed Feral Cats**—An inexpensive solution to keep cats safely within the confines of your backyard. Includes a list of necessary tools and instructions. Also includes information on purchasing a ready-made cat fence.

**Guidelines for Veterinarians Treating Feral Cats**—Perfect for veterinarians who are interested in helping feral cats but do not know how. It includes information on handling, ear-tipping, etc.

**Health Care for Feral Cats and Zoonoses: Potential Health Hazards for Humans**—Before trapping, know the precautions you must take.

**Humane Trapping Instructions**—Guidelines for the process of trapping; this includes obtaining supplies, withholding food, trapping, and returning the cat.

**Rabies and Feral Cats: Facts and Control**—Provides statistics, prevention, and solutions to the rabies problem as it affects feral cats and urban wildlife, as well as humans.

**Relocation Guidelines for Safe Relocation of Feral Cats**—These guidelines detail the steps required for a successful relocation when necessary for feral cats.

**Taming Feral Kittens**—Walks a foster parent through every stage of taming a feral kitten (under 8 weeks of age).

**Tricks of the Trade: Essential Feral Cat Care for Long-term Management**—Now that you have successfully trapped, sterilized, and vaccinated a colony of feral cats, ACA provides tips on how to provide long-term care including

food, housing, health, etc.

## Lead Articles (from Previous Newsletters)

**The ABC's of TNR**—The perfect introduction to trap-neuter-return (TNR).

**To Test or Not to Test: Is Testing for FeLV and FIV in Feral Cats Always Necessary?**—Introduces you to both Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and helps you to decide if testing for these diseases is necessary.

**Early-Age Spay/Neuter & Neuter Before Adoption**—Read about a practice that is endorsed by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and can dramatically lower the number of felines born every year.

**Getting Ahead of the Game**—Details the origins of the feral cat as well as the reasons trap-neuter-return, and not trap and euthanize or trap and home, works.

**How to Talk to Absolutely Anyone about TNR**—Explains how to approach and educate people who are uninformed about the benefits of TNR.

**Tracking our Success**—Focuses on feral cat advocates who have made great strides.

**Understanding Cats and Predation**—See what the experts say about feral cats and predation. Includes excerpts from *Understanding Cats*, by Roger Tabor, as well as quotes from several other feral cat and wildlife experts.

## Other

**Feral Friends Application**—Do you have time to help another caretaker? Whether you can give advice, lend out traps, or help with trapping, those first-timers out there would really appreciate your help.

**Guidelines for Adopting a Cat or Kitten/Application and Adoption Contract**—If you foster cats and worry about the adoption process, these papers should help ease your mind and ensure a healthy home for the animals.

**Feral Cat Feeding Station**—Keep your feral cat's food and water clean and away from the elements by building this feeding station.

**"Need the Help of Your Neighbors" Flyer**—Need help finding someone to implement a TNR program in your area? You may want to post a flyer like this one.

**Feral Cat Colony Tracking System**—A necessary log for identification purposes. This spread-



Photo by Don Lewis

sheet will make it easy to record important information about the feral cats you care for.

**Drop Trap: Instructions on How to Make and Use**—These frequently requested instructions show how to make a trap that is sure to catch even the wariest of cats.

**Surgery Recovery Instructions**—Learn how to care for a feral cat after he or she has been sterilized.

**Farm Homes/Stables Needed Flyer**—Post these flyers when you're seeking a relocation site for feral cats.

**American Animal Protection Funding Organizations**—Funding information for organizations.

**Quality Storage Buildings**—For those who can't physically build a shelter, this brochure provides an example of a suitable shelter that can be ordered or bought in a store.

**Orange County, Florida Statistics**—Statistics on a successful and cost-effective TNR program in Florida. ●

## Join a College Campus Listserve

Alley Cat Allies moderates an online discussion group focusing on college campus feral cat caretakers and groups. The listserv allows you to communicate with other individuals or groups across the nation in similar situations, and to share stories and receive or give advice. To join this list, please email [zcarson@alleycat.org](mailto:zcarson@alleycat.org), attention: subscribe campus cats.

## Should We Re-release Feral Cats Who Test Positive for FIV?

**Winograd** continued from page 1

Should we release cats who test positive — and I say test positive specifically, because we are not talking about cats who have the disease or even are positive, but cats who test positive and that's a very important distinction. I do not believe it is ethical to kill outwardly healthy cats, and it does not matter whether they are FIV+ or not. While we are going to talk about FIV only, keep in mind that, in the end, I draw the same conclusions about FeLV as FIV — we should not test for it as part of the spay/neuter process as a general rule. We should re-release the cat even if the cat tests positive and shows no symptoms.

First of all, Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV), as its name implies, is a virus. It is from a family of viruses, called retrovirus, which means they have a specific enzyme that allows them to insert themselves into cellular DNA, and thus do their damage.

Early infection can materialize as mild flu-like symptoms: lethargy, lack of eating, a fever. These tend to be transient, they go away and the cat appears normal. Cats who die "from FIV" actually die from other diseases or secondary infections since the virus suppresses their immune system and thus makes them susceptible to other illnesses. The most common is pneumonia. But cats can get many secondary infections and even neurological problems leading to seizures and death.

The virus is generally transmitted through cat bites and birth. And there are relatively inexpensive tests that are done at the time the cat is brought in for spay/neuter to test for it. It costs the San Francisco SPCA, for example, about \$12 per test kit per cat.

Some studies claim that since birth and cat bites are the most common modes of transmission that FIV is more common where there are large numbers of stray cats. However, at the San Francisco SPCA we realized that the incidence rate of positive cats is the SAME for feral cats as it is for the pet cat population; about one and one-half percent to three percent of all cats who are tested.

Now that is a very low number of cats who test positive, and that's the first reason why the expense of testing (\$12 per cat) is not cost-effective. Only about two cats in one hundred will test positive. So you are really spending a lot of resources which could be better spent on things that will impact and improve the lives of cats a

lot more than testing.

Last year, for example, we altered approximately 2,000 feral cats. At \$12 per test, we spent \$24,000 on testing for only about 40 incidents of a positive test. \$24,000 could have bought us 369 traps. Or we could have purchased 48,000 pounds of kibble, enough to feed a colony of 20 cats for 31 years. Or we could have sent our feral cat packet — which includes 12 factsheets, on trap-neuter-return (TNR), neonatal kitten care, feral cat advocacy and more — to every shelter and rescue group in the U.S. and still have enough money left over to buy a new

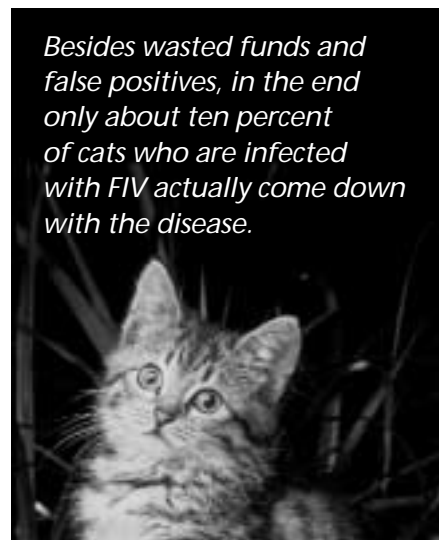


Photo by Don Lewis

*Besides wasted funds and false positives, in the end only about ten percent of cats who are infected with FIV actually come down with the disease.*

car. We could have hired a full-time employee to trap cats five days a week, eight hours a day and bring them into the shelter for spay/neuter. If they caught four cats a day that is an extra 900 cats a year. Or, if you pay \$35 per surgery, you could alter 685 feral cats. From a resource point of view, testing is wasteful.

But there is a further twist to the story because of those 40 cats who test positive, about 20 percent will be false-positive cats. In other words, eight cats will not be FIV+ but will test positive, that's eight dead cats. If you include kittens, you will kill more virus-free cats because the incidence of false-positive tests is higher with kittens under 12 weeks old (they carry the antibodies from their mother without actually having the virus). If I can borrow from the lexicon of my days as a prosecutor, we have sent the innocent to the gas chamber. And that's unforgivable.

Besides wasted funds and false positives, in

the end only about ten percent of cats who are infected with FIV actually come down with the disease. Ninety percent — nine out of ten infected cats — will lead completely normal lives. Many will destroy the virus.

So, of our 40 positive cats, eight are false, that leaves 32 infected cats. Of those, 28 will lead completely normal lives. That leaves us four infected cats, out of 2,000 who may suffer from the disease. We have spent \$24,000 and killed 36 normal, healthy cats to isolate four who are infected and likely to get sick. And, of those four, if we provide good nutrition (high quality kibble which we could purchase with the money we save by not testing) and we monitor the colony, we could treat and care for these cats if, and when, they become symptomatic, which may take years. If they are not symptomatic, they can live a long time.

That last point is important because it goes back to our philosophical starting point: do feral cats lead miserable lives? Or is it OK to be feral? But before I go there, let me anticipate some discussion.

Testing for FIV, the line of thinking goes, is not only about preventing suffering in infected cats, it's also about preventing the spread of the disease. But because the primary modes of transmission of FIV are bites and births, spaying and neutering alone will actually go a long way to prevent the spread of FIV because altering affects both: reducing or eliminating fighting as well as roaming and mating. On top of that, because feral cats develop immunities if they survive kittenhood, cats become more resistant to viral diseases, as time goes by, and FIV is no exception. Which further reduces transmission.

And, in the end, if we take the position that we should kill FIV+ feral cats, while we do not have the same rules for pet cats, aren't we establishing a double standard? Aren't we saying that feral cats are worth less than pet cats? And, it is exactly that type of thinking that all of us have been fighting against for years.

Finally, I want to talk about the life of the feral cat. Ultimately, I do think that the decision of whether we should re-release FIV+ cats back into their colonies, like the question of whether we should test at all, is really an ethical one, and not a medical one (although I am sure that there are veterinarians out there who would crucify me for saying that).

I do not share the point of view that feral cats lead miserable lives. Number one, our experience with over 8,000 cats and hundreds of caretakers is that feral cats often lead long, contented lives. There are risks that street cats face that indoor cats do not. However, ultimately they

See **Winograd** on page 6



*The National Feral Cat Resource*

1801 Belmont Road NW, Suite 201  
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**Winograd** *continued from page 5*

are no different than other wildlife. Some of these animals do not lead extraordinarily long lives but we would never think about euthanizing them for their own good. Another double standard for feral cats. I believe that feral cats deserve our compassion and protection no matter how long their lives may be. If you share the view that being feral is OK, that life on the street is better than death at the pound, then the ethical conclusion is that if an outwardly healthy cat tests positive ethics demands that we give him a year or two or more living the high life in the sun, while we continue to monitor him as we would any of our cats.

If he should get really sick, and there is a 20 percent chance he doesn't even have the disease and another 90 percent chance that even if he does, he'll fight it off, we can re-trap him and then make the decision about euthanasia. Killing him for his own good because he might get sick months or even years down the road is the same mentality that dominates animal control shelters — kill them now because they might suffer later. That is not what we are about as feral cat lovers and caretakers.

Feral cat advocates have always been the champions of life. FIV+ cats should not suffer the

prejudices of the animal control mentality that says death is better than a less than perfect life. Our philosophy has always been live and let live.

I do want to make it clear that if the cat is symptomatic, if the cat is outwardly sick and tests positive, the analysis changes. If the cat tests positive and is showing outward symptoms of the disease, secondary infections such as pneumo-

nia, urinary tract problems, or some other illness, I would not advocate that the cat be released.

To the extent that the caretaker can do so (and it may be easier with all the money we save from not doing mass testing), the caretaker's goal should be to treat the cat as you would a pet cat. See a vet, check the diagnoses, see if he is suffering, and how long the feral cat has to live. If it is his time, euthanasia is appropriate. The Webster's dictionary definition of euthanasia is the killing of an individual animal in a relatively painless way because the animal is suffering — emphasis on suffering — from an incurable disease, for reasons of mercy. That is Webster's dictionary definition of euthanasia. It is also my definition.

If the caretaker cannot do that, a symptomatic cat who is positive will likely deteriorate in the colony. However, if the symptoms are mild, then the approach should be wait and see. Keep the cat in someone's garage or a spare room or wherever you do recovery to make sure the symptoms are not transient.

What we do as feral cat caretakers and advocates is not easy. But we do it because we care — because we love cats. There is a lot of fear around FIV. And I would encourage you not to let your cats become the innocent victims of that fear. Their lives are too precious. ●

**Ideal Tool to Promote  
TNR in Your  
Community**

Educate your community about trap-neuter-return (TNR) with ACA's new 10-minute video, *The Humane Solution: Reducing Feral Cat Populations with Trap-Neuter-Return*.

It's ideal for local cable stations to include in their programming. Contact your local cable station and request that it add *The Humane Solution* in its scheduling. To purchase the \$13.00 video, contact Alley Cat Allies.

