CatColony

PRACTICAL GUIDE

TNR, step by step

How to manage a feline colony ethically and effectively: census, trapping, neutering and return, within the framework of Spain's Law 7/2023.

Trap → Neuter → Return

BEFORE YOU START

What is TNR?

TNR stands for **Trap-Neuter-Return** (known in Spain as CES or CER). It is the only scientifically backed method to stabilise and gradually reduce the population of a feline colony without culling or displacement.

Why it works

- Neutered cats **stop breeding**: the colony stops growing and shrinks naturally over the years.
- The **"territory effect"** is preserved: a stable colony keeps new, unneutered cats from taking over the area (the vacuum effect).
- The **nuisance behaviours** of heat disappear: fighting, urine marking and night-time yowling.
- The colony's **overall health** improves: every trip to the vet is a chance to vaccinate, deworm and identify.

What doesn't work

- **Removing the cats**: the territory is left open and other unneutered cats move in within weeks.
- **Stopping the feeding**: it doesn't reduce the population, it only scatters it, sickens it and makes it more visible.
- **Relocating the colony**: the cats come back or die trying; it is only justified by a real, unavoidable risk.

⚖️ Legal framework: Spain's animal welfare law (Law 7/2023)

Law 7/2023 of 28 March on the protection of animal rights and welfare recognises the **community cat** for the first time in Spain and sets out concrete obligations:

- ✔ Municipalities must run **ethical feline colony management programmes** based on TNR.
- ✔ Community cats must be **neutered and identified with a microchip**.
- ✔ **Culling is prohibited**, except on justified veterinary grounds, as are mistreatment and displacement.
- ✔ **Collaboration** between public administrations, animal protection organisations and caretakers is encouraged.

Also check your regional regulations and local by-laws: they may add requirements (caretaker registration, trapping permits, etc.).

1. Census · 2. Prepare

1 Take a census of the colony

Goal: know how many cats there are and which are not yet neutered

For **one or two weeks**, watch the colony at feeding time, when almost every cat shows up. Record each cat on the **census sheet** that comes with this guide: description or name, sex if you can tell, whether it has the **ear tip** (the sign it is already neutered) and any distinguishing marks.

- Take **photos** of every cat: they are the most reliable way not to count one twice.
- Set a **steady feeding schedule**: it makes the census easier — and later, the trapping.
- Ask neighbours and other feeders: they may know cats you never see.

> **Tip** · A reliable census avoids the most expensive mistake: calling the campaign finished while fertile females remain unneutered. A single female can have two or three litters a year.

2 Prepare the trapping

Goal: have the appointment, supplies and equipment before you trap

- **Veterinary clinic**: lock in dates and number of slots before setting a single trap. Many clinics and councils have agreements with reduced prices for colonies.
- **Permits**: if the colony is on public land, inform the town council; some by-laws require authorisation or caretaker registration.
- **Equipment**: trap cages (one per expected cat plus a spare or two), blankets or large towels to cover them, carriers, strong-smelling food (tuna, sardines, pâté) and sturdy gloves.
- **Fasting beforehand**: don't feed the colony for the **24 hours before** trapping. Hungry cats walk into traps; cats with full bellies don't.
- **Recovery space**: a quiet, dry, temperate place (garage, storage room) where the cats will spend their post-op recovery inside their cages.

> **Tip** · Plan trapping from Tuesday to Thursday: if a surgical complication arises, the clinic will be open over the following days.

3. Trap · 4. Neuter

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Trap safely

Goal: trap without stress or risk, for them and for you

- Place the traps at the **usual feeding spot**, at the usual time, with the bait at the far end.
- **Never leave a trap unattended**: watch from a distance and go over as soon as it closes.
- Cover the cage with a **blanket** immediately: in the dark, the cat calms down within seconds.
- **Do not open the cage** under any circumstances, not to comfort the cat or to feed it: a frightened cat is lightning fast and can hurt you.
- Prioritise **females** and cats without an ear tip. If you trap one already tipped, release it on the spot.
- If a cat won't go in, try **manual-door traps**, change the bait or take a few days off: trap-shy cats take patience.

> **Important** · Between March and October there may be kittens. Before trapping a lactating female, locate the litter: kittens don't survive on their own for more than a few hours.

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Neutering and identification

Goal: every cat leaves neutered, ear-tipped and identified

- At the clinic the cat is **neutered** and, under the same anaesthesia, given the **ear tip** (a small straight cut at the tip of the ear, the international standard that identifies a neutered community cat from a distance).
- Make the most of the visit: **microchip** (mandatory under Law 7/2023), **vaccination**, deworming and a general check-up.
- **Recovery in the cage**, in your quiet space: about **24–48 h for males** and **48–72 h for females**, with water, food and the cage half covered.
- Keep each cat's **veterinary report**: date, treatment and chip number. It is your history and your proof for the town council.

5. Return and follow up

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Return to the territory

Goal: return every cat to its place and keep the colony stable

- Release each cat **exactly where you trapped it**, ideally early in the morning and with no onlookers. Open the cage, step back and let it leave on its own.
- Resume the **normal feeding schedule** that same day: routine is what keeps the colony together and manageable.
- Update the **census**: neutering date, chip number and each cat's status.
- Watch the colony over the following weeks: if a **new, untipped cat** appears, repeat the cycle with it as soon as possible. A newcomer takes days to neuter; a new litter takes months of work.
- Friendly cats and kittens under ~8 weeks can be considered for **adoption** instead of return.

The 5 most common mistakes

- **Trapping without a confirmed vet appointment**: you end up releasing unneutered cats and they become trap-shy.
- **Feeding on trapping day**: the traps stay empty.
- **Calling the colony finished without a census**: a single fertile female undoes a year's work.
- **Releasing somewhere "safer"**: the cat will try to come back and the territory will be left open for others.
- **Working alone and without records**: without shared data, a caretaker handover loses the whole history.

🤝 You are not alone

Talk to the **local shelters** and to your **town council's** animal welfare department: Law 7/2023 puts colony management programmes in their hands, and many organisations lend trap cages, share veterinary agreements and train new volunteers.

PRINT AND TICK OFF

TNR campaign checklist

Before trapping

- [ ] Census complete: number of cats, sexes and ear tips recorded
- [ ] Photos taken of every cat
- [ ] Appointment and slots confirmed with the veterinary clinic
- [ ] Town council informed / permit obtained if required by by-law
- [ ] Enough trap cages (+1 spare), checked and working
- [ ] Blankets, carriers, smelly bait and gloves ready
- [ ] Quiet recovery space ready
- [ ] Colony NOT fed for the previous 24 h

Trapping day

- [ ] Traps at the feeding spot, at the usual time
- [ ] Traps watched at all times
- [ ] Cages covered with a blanket as soon as they close
- [ ] Already-tipped cats released on the spot
- [ ] Checked whether any female is lactating

At the clinic

- [ ] Neutering done
- [ ] Ear tip done under anaesthesia
- [ ] Microchip implanted and registered
- [ ] Vaccination and deworming applied
- [ ] Veterinary report for each cat kept

Afterwards

- [ ] Recovery completed (24–48 h males, 48–72 h females)
- [ ] Each cat returned to its exact trapping spot
- [ ] Normal feeding resumed the same day
- [ ] Census updated with dates and chip numbers
- [ ] Weekly watch for new, untipped cats

💡 The **census sheet** that comes with this guide covers step 1 and the follow-up afterwards. Print one per colony and carry it with you on every visit.

CatColony

Paper falls short when the colony grows

CatColony is the feline colony management platform for shelters, volunteers and municipalities: everything this guide asks you to do by hand, digitised and shared with your team.

Digital census

A record for every cat with photos, chip, ear tip, medical history and neutering status, always up to date.

TNR campaigns

Plan trapping, log veterinary visits and track neutering progress cat by cat.

Teamwork

Invite your volunteers: each person sees the colonies they care for and changes sync instantly.

Public map and reports

Share your colonies on a map and receive citizen reports; generate reports for the town council.

Start for free today

Free plan forever · no card required · your first colony up and running in 2 minutes

catcolony.app/register