

## Who Will Care for Feral Cats in My Absence?

**Becky Robinson, founder of Alley Cat Allies, offers tips on securing a replacement caregiver for a feral cat colony.**

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**Q:** My company is sending me for a three-month long training program in another city and I am panicked about who will care for my feral cat colony. How do I find someone to help me and what should I know in advance?

**A:** Life is sometimes filled with surprises and your situation should serve as an example to all feral cat caregivers of the importance of having a substitute caretaker in place to care for your colony. If your colony has become dependant on you for care, it is important to find a person who can step in when you are on vacation or out of town, or as much as we don't want to think about it, if you are ill, become disabled or pass away.

The best care you can give to the feral cats you look after is the arrangement for their ongoing care. Start with people who may already know about your colony that you can trust and who may be interested in volunteering. Check in with veterinarians, animal shelters, neighbors, pet-supply owners, friends and family in the area. Post ads in the newspaper, flyers around town, send messages to local e-mail lists, and post notices on local online bulletin boards. Check with Alley Cat Allies Feral Friends in your area. These fellow caregivers and trappers may be able to help.

Once you identify a substitute or replacement caregiver, follow these steps to ensure a successful transition for the cats: Gather all records. Be sure that all of the cats have been neutered and vaccinated. Ensure that all of their records are in order. Include photos of each cat and their name, behaviors and friends, or others cats he/she is bonded to in the colony.

Educate your substitute on your normal feeding schedule and ongoing care. Once you identify a replacement caregiver, explain what you do, which could include daily food, water, shelter upkeep, neuter of any new members, and the occasional veterinary visit. Provide the new caregiver with copies of all medical records (neuter certificates, rabies certificates and tags, microchip information if applicable, and a description and photo of each cat).

Decide on the details of your arrangement. Decide in advance who will pay for cat food. Also discuss which veterinarians are suitable to take a feral cat to and who will be covering the veterinary fees.

Sign an agreement. Write up a simple agreement stating that you are transferring to or sharing care of the cats with the new caregiver. Include specific information about the colony for clear identification.

Good luck! And be sure to pass on this information to others you know who care for feral cat colonies.