

Is She Stray or Is She Feral?

It has been estimated that there are some 350,000 free-roaming cats in Maricopa County. Many of them are not suitable as pets, and are considered feral. With more than 50,000 animals killed in Maricopa County's open-access shelters every single year, it's not realistic, nor humane, to take these cats to a shelter. The answer is **TNR**. **T**rap the cat, **s**pay or **N**euter the cat, **R**eturn it to the location it was trapped. Then continue to provide food and water .

So how can you tell if she's feral, or just a stray?

The short answer is, of course, "it doesn't matter." Because the cat still needs to be sterilized to prevent it from producing more free-roaming cats. The following may help you to determine whether the cat is stray or feral, but remember that each one is an individual, and there may be circumstances causing appearance or behavior of either classification. Some examples include a pregnant cat about to give birth, a mother cat protecting her kittens, or an injured cat in pain. They may be more silent or vocal, agitated or still.

Stray:

A stray cat may belong to someone, may be lost, or may have been abandoned.

May be seen during the day.

May lie casually, comfortably, unconcerned with what you are doing. Or may approach if called or offered food. Unless she knows you, though, she usually will not get close enough for you to touch.

May look directly at you, making eye contact.

May meow and "talk" to you.

May look dirty and disheveled, as she's not accustomed to life on the streets, and may have recently become lost or homeless.

Feral:

A feral cat is not socialized to humans, and does not have an "owner".

Will usually only be seen from dusk to dawn, unless extremely hungry.

Is afraid of humans and will risk its own life to avoid people. Will watch you cautiously from a distance, and run if you attempt contact. If you put down food, she will wait until you are well away from the area before approaching.

Feral does not mean the cat is wild, vicious or aggressive. If cornered, they may lunge and hiss as a warning, in an attempt to scare you away, but they rarely attack unless they feel they must fight to survive.

Avoids eye contact. If you look directly at a feral cat, he will interpret it as confrontation.

Is not vocal, and usually makes no noise. Cats are considered "prey" to larger animals (including humans, in their way of thinking), so feral cats make every attempt not to draw attention to themselves.

Will likely be clean, although perhaps matted during summer.



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How to approach a free-roaming cat:

Stay calm, do not act or talk excitedly.

Do not wave your hands around, stay as still as possible, approaching slowly.

Talk softly.

Do not look directly at the cat, lower your head and turn your face away. Showing a cat your back means you do not want a confrontation, you are not there to challenge or fight.

Keep your eyes lowered, close them and slowly open only long enough to glance. Look at the cat from the side, or over your shoulder. Staring directly at a cat means you are challenging the cat and intend to fight.

Remain standing. You appear further away. When you squat or sit on the ground, or bend over to offer food, your face is closer to the cat, and she will think you are coming toward her. If she doesn't run, she may not be feral.

If the cat is feral or very timid and you are unable to touch it, please obtain a humane trap to capture the cat and have it spayed or neutered. A cat with an "ear tip", where the top of the left ear is flat, has already been sterilized and returned to its colony.

For more information about feral cats and TNR, including clinics that will sterilize feral cats, please visit our website at ALF.Petfinder.com.

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