

LEARN MORE  
([HTTP://OFFERS.INDYSTAR.COM/SPECIALOFFER?](http://offers.indystar.com/specialoffer?GPS-SOURCE=BENBOCT&UTM_MEDIUM=NANOBAR&UTM_SOURCE=BOUNCE-EXCHANGE&UTM_CAMPAIGN=READLOCAL17)  
GPS-  
SOURCE=BENBOCT&UTM\_MEDIUM=NANOBAR&UTM\_SOURCE=BOUNCE-  
EXCHANGE&UTM\_CAMPAIGN=READLOCAL17)

# Trap, neuter, return program saving lives of stray cats

[Vic Ryckaert](#), [vic.ryckaert@indystar.com](mailto:vic.ryckaert@indystar.com) Published 3:07 p.m. ET Sept. 24, 2014 | Updated 11:14 a.m. ET Oct. 2, 2014



Not long ago, Johnson County killed hundreds of healthy cats just because they didn't have homes.

This year, these strays are instead being captured, neutered and returned to their colonies.

"We're not killing cats," said Michael Delp, Johnson County's Animal Warden. "Not killing a healthy animal is always the right thing to do."

The change comes thanks to a trap-neuter-return policy adopted by Johnson County officials a year ago. The ordinance, which took effect in September 2013, has had a sweeping impact.

Johnson County destroyed 446 cats in 2012 and 332 cats in 2013, most of which were healthy strays. The toll was even higher in prior years. In 2008, the county killed 1,409 cats.

This year, animal control destroyed 64 cats, all were sick or injured.

Before, feral cats were rounded up by animal control officers. Today, those officers can address other problems while volunteers capture the strays.

With about 14,000 feral cats in Johnson County, Humane Society of Johnson County Board President Janet Gorrell said there's still a lot of work to do.

"These cats have lived outside and know how to survive," Gorrell said. "They have a right to live."

These are wild, skittish and anti-social cats. Some wandered away; some were abandoned; some were born in the wild.

They'll eat what food is left out but otherwise avoid contact with humans.

They form colonies, from a few cats to a few dozen. They squabble over food or fight for mates. The cat mating ritual is often a late-night affair accompanied by loud screeching sounds.

Sterilizing the cats eliminates most of the problems and keeps the population from growing.

[New animal shelter chief inherits slew of challenges](https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2014/08/21/new-animal-shelter-chief-inherits-slew-challenges/14389867/)

(<https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2014/08/21/new-animal-shelter-chief-inherits-slew-challenges/14389867/>)

Last winter, Heather Thompson and her family started leaving food out for a stray cat that roamed her White River Township neighborhood.

The cat had kittens. Soon, Thompson was putting out food for the mother cat and four others.

"We can't let this get out of control," Thompson said. She called the Humane Society, and Gorrell spent Tuesday trapping cats outside Thompson's home.

"This is a better way," Thompson said. "I don't think they are bothering anything. It's fine to just keep their population in check."

Johnson County works closely with the FACE low-cost spay and neuter clinic and IndyFeral, which has been capturing and returning strays in Marion County since 1999.

Cats are trapped, spayed or neutered, vaccinated for rabies and returned to their neighborhoods. The doctors also cut about a quarter inch off the tip of the left ear, which is a universal sign that this feral cat won't be making kittens.

Volunteers do the work. Surgeries and other costs are covered by donations and grants.

The Humane Society of Johnson County has captured, neutered and returned 480 cats since the new rules took effect a year ago.

"You've got to look at the big picture and think of the offspring of these cats that we've fixed," Gorrell said. "With each cat, we've stopped a litter."

*Call Star reporter Vic Ryckaert at (317) 444-2701. Follow him on Twitter: @VicRyc.*

### **How to help**

The Humane Society of Johnson County needs donations and volunteers to help trap and transport feral cats. To volunteer or donate, visit [www.hsjc.org](http://www.hsjc.org) (<http://www.hsjc.org/>), or call (317) 535-6626.

For more on IndyFeral, visit [www.facespayneuter.org/indyferal](http://www.facespayneuter.org/indyferal) (<http://www.facespayneuter.org/indyferal>) or call (317) 638-3223.

Read or Share this story: <http://indy.st/1sqApBs>