



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

The Tuscaloosa Spay Neuter Incentive Program (TSNIP) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to reducing the population of unwanted animals in Tuscaloosa. Fewer unwanted animals improves public health, reduces costs of animal control, sheltering, and euthanasia, and reduces suffering and disease in Tuscaloosa's animal population. We have been focused on using trap-neuter-return to reduce the population of feral cats, and educating students and community members about the importance of spay and neuter for all pets since TSNIP was founded in 2013.

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the process of trapping feral cats, having them spayed and neutered ("fixed"), and returning them to their original location. In our program, the cats also receive a rabies vaccine and have their left ear cropped flat to show that they are fixed. Fixed cats go back to their original location - this is important. Fixed cats become good neighbors. They still catch rats and snakes, but they are no longer fighting and howling at night, and they no longer spray to mark their space. Even better, they guard the resources there, so new cats don't move in, reproduce, and create a new "cat problem".

TSNIP started trapping in the spring of 2014, when Tuscaloosa clearly had a stray and feral cat problem. Metro Animal Shelter ("Metro") euthanized over 1,800 cats and kittens that year, in addition to the many they adopted out. It's easy to see where these cats came from. Using data from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) pet ownership survey, U.S. Census data, and PetSmart's Pets for Life survey on spay-neuter rates, we can calculate how many pet cats live here, and how many can reproduce. We find that the City of Tuscaloosa has approximately 16,000 pet cats. About 5,000 of these are NOT spayed or neutered and can produce kittens. Tuscaloosa County as a whole has approximately 33,000 pet cats. Over 8,000 of these are NOT spayed or neutered and can produce kittens. An average female cat has 4-6 kittens per litter, and can easily have 2-3 litters every summer. Most households will struggle to find homes for that many kittens; some will end up in the feral cat population.

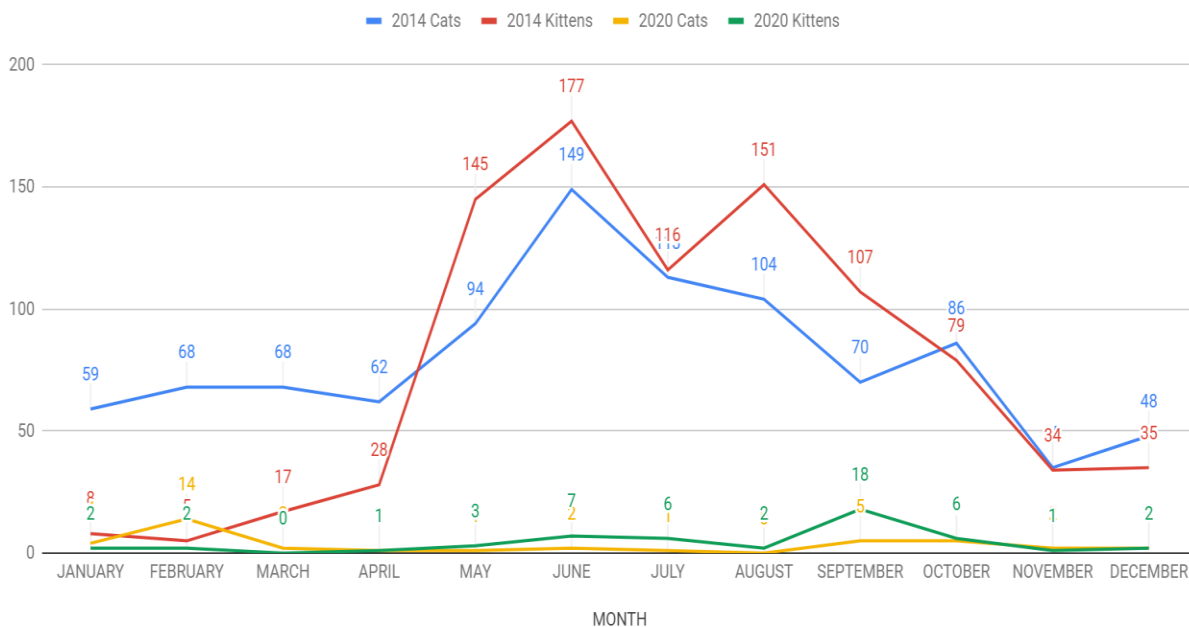


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TSNIP has worked to stabilize Tuscaloosa’s feral cat population since 2014. In 2020, after 6 years of TNR, Metro euthanized 39 cats and 50 kittens, rather than the 956 cats and 902 kittens that were euthanized in 2014 (reductions of 96% and 94%, respectively).

2014 Cats, 2014 Kittens, 2020 Cats and 2020 Kittens



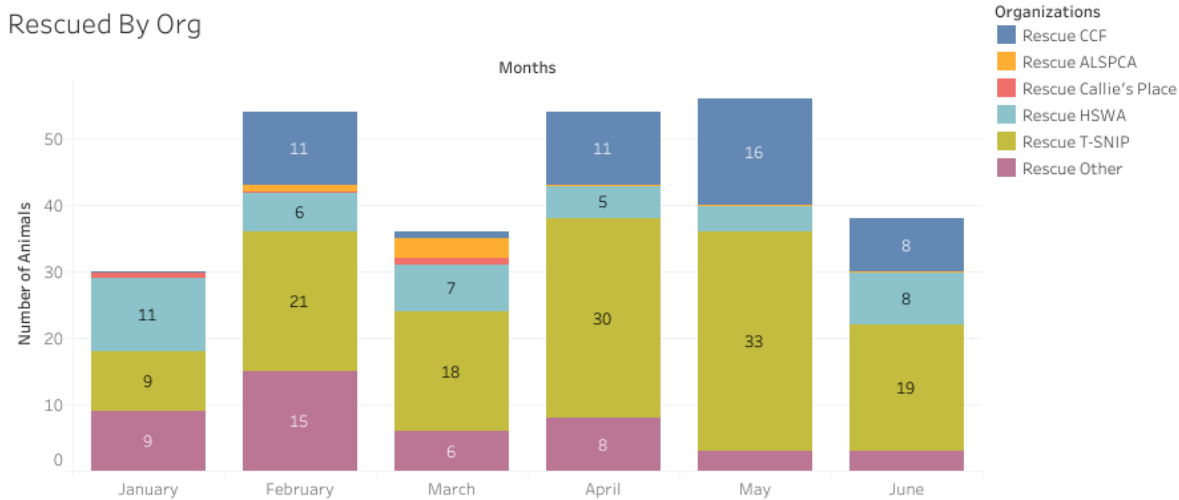
Feral cat intake has dropped dramatically from 698 in 2015 to 314 in 2019. Metro has added many great foster and adoption programs that have helped to reduce euthanasia, but this shows that feral cat populations are truly reduced as well.

Moreover, TNR works best when the feral cats are returned to their original location. This stops the cycle of new cats moving in, having kittens, and needing to be removed. So when feral cats are brought to Metro, TSNIP takes them to be fixed, and returns them to their location. This does two things: It stops feral cat reproduction in our community, to slow the growth of feral cat populations. It also opens space at Metro, so the shelter can focus on adoptable cats. Keeping cages open gives Metro time to find adopters so that cats don’t have to be euthanized for lack of space.



This 2018 graph from the Metro Animal Shelter shows that TSNIP (green) took 10-30 cats from the shelter each month:

A comparison of rescue groups. Currently T-SNIP has pulled the most animals from the shelter as part of its Trap-Neuter-Release program in Tuscaloosa City and Northport.



TSNIP was started due to the efforts of concerned citizens who approached the City of Tuscaloosa to ask for a solution to the rising euthanasia rates at Metro Animal Shelter. The rising euthanasia rates were a concern for the Cities of Tuscaloosa and Northport, and Tuscaloosa County, as well. Increasing animal intake and euthanasia at Metro Animal Shelter is costly for our community. There are many animal lovers in our community, as we can see from the strong rescue groups and hard-working volunteers here. However, feral cats don't qualify for most rescue groups. And bringing feral cats into a shelter doesn't help - these cats don't do well in captivity, and are not socialized well enough to be adoptable. Because there are so many roaming, unfixed pet cats, removing feral cats doesn't stop cat reproduction on the streets.

TSNIP fills the gap between rescues and animal control. With TNR, TSNIP can effectively reduce feral cat reproduction. This solves both problems - the feral cats don't stay in the shelter, stressed, upset, and waiting to be euthanized. Instead, they are fixed and back to their home area, where they will block the cycle of reproduction. This means fewer cats and kittens flooding Metro Animal Shelter, Humane Society of West Alabama, and Callie's Place for adoption. The cats that do come in have a better chance of adoption and good outcomes. TSNIP also works to educate our community, with Dr. Jeff Parker's leadership, about pet overpopulation and the importance of spay and neuter for all pets.



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TSNIP collaborates with Metro Animal Shelter and our local rescue groups to manage feral cat problems. Our hotline gets calls about pet cats and dogs as well as feral cats. We refer people to the impressive spay-neuter programs run by Metro Animal Shelter, AL Spay Neuter in Irondale, and Cans for Kritters in Brookwood to get help with fixing their pets. We connect people with rescues like the Humane Society of West Alabama, Canine Compassion Fund, and No Greater Love when they need help with placing animals. We are fortunate in Tuscaloosa to have a strong network of rescue groups and a creative shelter as partners.

TSNIP would not exist without the hard work of concerned citizens who volunteer their time to monitor and trap feral cats; the generous support of local veterinary clinics, who perform surgical procedures at a discounted rate; the collaboration of Tuscaloosa Metro Animal Shelter, and the hard-working officers responsible for Animal Control throughout Tuscaloosa and Northport; and especially funding from the City of Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa County, and the City of Northport. This funding is key to providing a county-wide TNR program and education for our community. With a consistent presence, we have been steadily reducing Tuscaloosa's feral cat populations and euthanasia rates and plan to continue this work.

Looking forward, we are exploring ways to provide spay and neuter services to pets in underserved communities in Tuscaloosa County. As long as there are free-roaming, unfixed pets, there will be unexpected puppies and kittens. Private citizens are rarely prepared or equipped to spay and neuter entire litters of unexpected animals. We will continue our education program to encourage citizens to value spaying and neutering their pets. We will continue our collaborations to help people find the services they need to control our community's animal population.



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Education Committee

The Education Committee works in collaboration with Dr. Jeffrey G. Parker of the University of Alabama. Dr. Parker specializes in training and mobilizing youth for community service and civic involvement.

The COVID pandemic changed a lot of the Education Committee's plans this past year. Despite this, graduate student Amber Ingram completed her Albert Schweitzer Foundation fellowship with Dr. Parker's help. She developed the Understanding the Plight of Stray, Feral and Abused Cats and Dogs program. Her program includes a printed bound workbook and set of interactive activities for local boys and girls club youth and children in foster care. These activities relate to responsible pet ownership, feral cat and dog life cycles and reproduction, anti-dogfighting, and trap-spay/neuter-return feral cat population management. They can be used by students ages 9-17 in many settings. The other planned programs will be implemented as health guidelines and school regulations allow.



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