



Glynis sets a humane trap for the ferals at the barn

Barnstorming

Glynis Davies takes us behind the scenes as the dedicated team at our Gwent Branch tackles a colony of feral cats

My name is Glynis Davies and I am the Co-ordinator of Cats Protection's Gwent Branch in south Wales. As a branch, we cover a huge region with both urban areas including the city of Newport and numerous towns and villages as well as rural locations including agricultural land and many farms. We have a huge number of feral cats in our area and many of you may have read a few years ago about a colony of 78 that we trapped and neutered at Alphasteel, a disused steelworks, which received coverage on *BBC News* and newspapers throughout Wales.

Farm ferals

The latest colony we are working on is a farm outside Newport. It started just before Christmas when I, with a colleague, Terri, responded to a call from a 93-year-old couple who lived in a small hamlet and were feeding nine stray cats. We successfully trapped and neutered these and then, in February, received a call from another couple feeding another four strays who lived less than 200 yards from the first couple. For such a small place – fewer than 20 houses – this seemed a lot of cats! So we played detective and discovered that there was a farm a few fields away, got directions and went there to investigate. As we drove up the winding farm track,

commenting that we couldn't see any cats around, I glanced to my left and said "Look in the barn!" We pulled up, parked in the yard and watched as about 30 cats ate, slept on hay bales and played in the barn.

The next step was to call on the owners. The farmer opened the door, closely followed by his wife and son. We chatted, explaining we were from Cats Protection, that we had been neutering in the village following complaints of stray cats and that we had seen the cats in their barns which we believed were spreading through the village. The couple were initially a bit unsure of us, but when I explained that we offer a TNR programme – Trap, Neuter and Return back to site, they began to relax. They said we wouldn't catch the cats but we told them about the humane cat traps we use which are 'baited' with food so they then agreed that the situation had become out of hand with so many cats breeding, and allowed us to proceed.

Trapping time

I had a day off work on 14 February, as did another volunteer, Gary, so we earmarked that for a major trapping session. Valentine's Day was bright and sunny, so after getting up at 7am, I walked my dogs, fed my own cats and fed and played with a litter of seven kittens I am currently fostering. After all the litter trays had been cleaned, it was time for me to grab a quick cup of tea and start loading the car: traps, transfer baskets, sheets, newspapers and several assorted types of food.

Terri, Gary and I met at the farm at about 10am. Wearing wellies, as the weather had been wet for the previous few days, we paddled through inches of squelching mud into the barn. We set four traps in various spots around the barn and then, clutching sheets, we retreated to a safe distance so the cats didn't feel threatened by us. Within minutes we had our first cat. Covered quickly with a sheet, Gary carried the trap to the car. It always amazes me that once a trap is covered, how quickly the cat calms down. Gary and I then set up a transfer basket lined with newspaper and put the opening end to the opening end of the trap. Holding on securely to both trap and basket, we then opened both, so that the cat would move from the trap to the basket, freeing up the trap to be used again. Four cats were trapped in quick succession.

Then it started to slow down, as inevitably, the other cats became more wary. We opened a can of tuna and put some in all the traps. Tuna and sardines are good bait as they are both smelly and most cats can't resist! Sure enough, we soon had another cat caught but, on checking this trap, found it was a kitten.

We transferred it to a basket, had a chat with the farmer and, as it was under eight weeks of age, agreed that we would take it and socialise it, rather than returning it to the farm. Socialising a feral kitten to enjoy life in the domestic environment is very rewarding, but takes lots of time and patience! We eventually caught two more cats, so after updating the farmer and tidying up to ensure we left no rubbish, we loaded all the cats into the cars and drove off to the vets we use for most of our neutering.



Photo: Paul Gerner

Vet visit

At the vets, we unloaded the traps and baskets – except the one holding the kitten – and took them in. Forms were duly signed requesting that all cats were neutered, wormed, treated for fleas and ears tipped. This is an internationally recognised identification that a feral cat has been neutered and obviously means

that we can identify and release a cat immediately should it go into a trap again. While many feral cats become trap-shy, some will venture forth, risking re-trapping.

All the cats were left at the vets and I would get a call later if there were any problems with them – fortunately there weren't – and Terri would collect them the following day for release back at the farm. So, I eventually got back home about 2.30pm... to start the next round of feeding, litter trays etc, plus, of course, to settle the new little farm kitten which on checking was a female and flea her as she spat and hissed at me! Chance then for a well-deserved cup of tea and to deal with the seven messages that had been left on the CP helpline – some just wanting advice, others wanting to put cats on our waiting list to come into CP care and a couple interested in either adopting a cat or kitten or requesting help with the costs of neutering their cats. A typical busy day in the life of a Cats Protection volunteer! ●



The team: Terri, Gary and Glynis