

## FERAL AND STRAY CATS — AN IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE

[www.alleycat.org/resources/feral-and-stray-cats-an-important-difference](http://www.alleycat.org/resources/feral-and-stray-cats-an-important-difference)

Since it can be difficult to determine a cat’s socialization during a stressful event such as trapping, it’s a good idea to observe cats on their own outdoors using the guidelines below. These guidelines are not hard and fast rules. More monitoring may be necessary to determine if a cat is socialized. When in a frightening or stressful environment—such as a trap—a friendly stray cat may act like a feral cat, avoiding people and possibly even showing aggression to avoid being touched because they are afraid. Just one of these traits is probably not enough to draw a conclusion.

Bottom line: If a cat you don’t know approaches you or if you can touch her, she is most likely not feral. Not all stray cats will do this though, especially at first—each cat will act differently in different situations.

### SOCIALIZATION TO HUMANS

<i><b>STRAY CATS</b></i>	<i><b>FERAL CATS</b></i>
May approach people, houses, porches, or cars	Will not approach and will likely seek hiding places to avoid people

### SOCIALIZATION TO OTHER CATS

Will likely live alone, not be part of a group	May belong to a colony
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### BODY LANGUAGE

Might walk and move like a housecat, such as walking with tail up - a sign of friendliness Will probably look at you, blink, or make eye contact	May crawl, stay low to the ground, and protect body with tail Unlikely to make eye contact
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### VOCALIZATION

May be vocal, meow, or “answer” your voice	Won’t meow, beg, or purr
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### SCHEDULE

Will be visible primarily during the daytime	More likely to be nocturnal; occasionally out during the day
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### PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Will probably be dirty or disheveled  Will not have an eartip	Will probably have a clean, well kept coat A male with a big head and thick neck, muscular body, and/or scars from fighting is more likely to be feral, since these are traits associated with intact males. He may also have a spiky coat from high testosterone levels and less time spent grooming; may also have “stud tail”—hair loss, greasiness, or bumps at the base of the tail due to hormones. May have eartip if spayed or neutered as part of a Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return program
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### TOUCH BARRIER

It may be possible to touch cat eventually or she may tolerate small amount of touching with an object	Cannot be touched, even by a caregiver
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### FEAR AND ANXIETY

May hiss or growl to show anxiety	May hiss or growl to show anxiety
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### PREGNANCY, NURSING, KITTENS

	A pregnant or lactating female is more likely to be feral, since only 2% of feral cats are spayed/neutered
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