

EARTIPPING: FERAL CAT IDENTIFICATION PROTOCOL

Eartipping is the only effective method that currently exists to identify a sterilized feral cat in a managed colony. Immediate visual identification is necessary in order to:

- Show that the cat has been sterilized and vaccinated, and is part of a managed colony. Without an eartip, animal control could mistake the cat for one that is not being cared for and euthanize her immediately.
- Assist the caretakers in managing the colony. Because they are family members, cats in a colony often look very much alike—several black cats, black and white cats, brown tabbies, etc. An eartip indicates that a particular cat has already been trapped and vetted, preventing the trauma of a second trapping and unnecessary surgery. Alternatively, a cat with no eartip signals to caretakers that this cat has not yet been sterilized and vaccinated.

Because it is difficult to get close to feral cats, the sterilization ID must be obvious from a certain distance. *Tattooing* is not effective. *Eartags* can become infected, drop off, or tear the cat's ear. *Collars* are not safe or practical for feral cats, because as a cat grows and gains weight, the collar will tighten and could strangle him. *Microchipping* is only useful if the cat is trapped and taken to a shelter that scans for microchips.

Eartipping is performed under sterile conditions and does not significantly alter the appearance or beauty of the cat. Rather, it does much toward keeping her safe and healthy. No other method of visual identification has proven to be as safe or effective.

See the other side for clear instructions how to perform an eartipping procedure.

Veterinarians around the world endorse eartipping. See Dr. Julie Levy's comments, at right. Dr. Levy is a veterinarian, professor, and founder of Operation Catnip, one of the busiest feral cat spay/neuter clinics in the world. ■

“EARTIPPING IS THE ONLY RELIABLE CHOICE FOR IDENTIFYING FERAL CATS.”

Julie Levy, DVM, Ph.D., DACVIM
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I have been working with feral cats for many years now, in California, North Carolina, and Florida. Our efforts have sterilized and eartipped more than 15,000 feral cats. One thing that is very important is that all groups working with feral cats agree on a universal method of identifying sterilized animals.

Feral cats may interact with a variety of caretakers, vets, and animal control people during their lives. If every group has a different method of identifying the animals, there is no way to interpret what the marks mean. It is very traumatic for a feral cat to be retrapped and transported because of unclear markings. Tattoos are frequently unreadable in feral cats unless they are anesthetized.

Eartipping cannot be considered inhumane. It is performed under anesthesia at the same time as a major surgery and is certainly less traumatic than a spay or neuter. The worst possible thing is to perform unnecessary surgery on a cat that is already spayed because it was not marked with a universally recognized symbol, and this I have done.

I have experimented with tattooing (great for identifying individuals), but this must be done in addition to eartipping. However, many people forget that tattoo equipment should be autoclaved between each cat to prevent the spread of FeLV, FIV, and viruses we don't know about yet. Cold sterilization will not work when there is blood, tattoo ink, and hard to clean crevices on equipment. I have also used various eartags and buttons designed for mice and rabbits, but these became infected or fell out too often.

Rest assured that eartipping is considered essential by experienced feral cat advocates and is endorsed by all the major humane groups. This is NOT equivalent to ear cropping for cosmetic fashion in dogs. ■

EARTIPPING INSTRUCTIONS

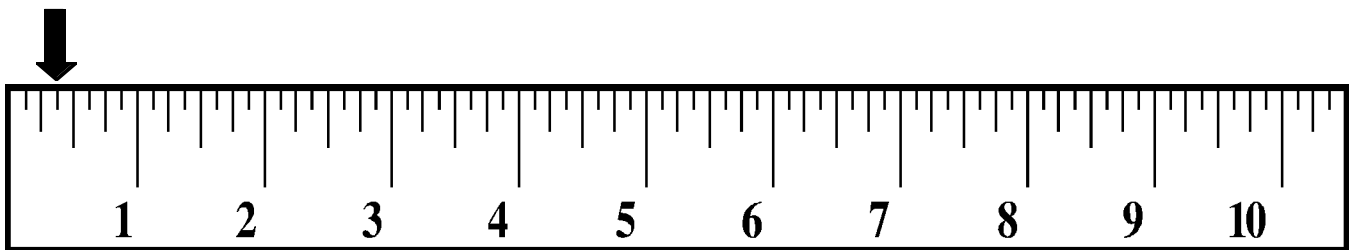
Eartipping is the removal of the distal one-quarter of the ear, which is approximately 3/8 inch or 1cm in an adult and proportionally smaller in a kitten. *

Eartipping is performed while the cat is already anesthetized for spay/neuter surgery. There is little or no bleeding.



WHILE THE CAT IS STILL UNDER ANESTHESIA

1. Place a straight hemostat across the left eartip exposing no more than 3/8 inch for an adult cat and proportionally less for a kitten. *



2. Use straight blade to cut the tip off leaving the hemostat on the ear.
3. Apply a small amount of Kwik-Stop Stypic Powder to the cut edge.
4. Remove hemostat.
5. Transport cat to grooming.