Humane Trapping Instructions for Feral Cats

Alley Cat Allies
The National Feral Cat Resource

Trapping feral cats, in order to have them sterilized and vaccinated is the first and most important step in a humane, nonlethal management plan for the feral cats that you feed. While trapping may seem intimidating, following the steps Alley Cat Allies has provided will help make your efforts successful.

Before you trap

We recommend that you establish a routine feeding schedule. Feed the cats at the same time and place each day for at least one week prior to trapping.

You should assess the cat(s) you are trying to trap. Determine if some cats are tame (friendly) and can be adopted into homes. Decide how you will handle kittens you trap. Use the Alley Cat Allies tracking sheet to give each cat in the colony a name and document his or her features. This information will help you with the veterinary records as you begin your TNR program.

Create a sign stating "RESCUE IN PROGRESS—DO NOT REMOVE," and attach a copy to each trap. Insert the sign into a plastic freezer bag, or other protective cover before placing on the trap so that it will be readable even in wet weather.

Supplies

In order to trap effectively you will need the following:

- One humane box trap per cat. You will be more successful if you trap as many cats as possible in the first trapping session. You may also space out your traps by using a specially designed wire sided transfer cage, designed to fit with a humane box trap, so that there is no risk of the cat escaping as she moves into the transfer cage;
- A can of tuna in oil, sardines in oil, mackerel, or other enticing bait;
- Newspaper to line the bottom of each trap;
- A large towel or cloth for each trap or transfer cage, large enough to cover the entire trap on all sides. Before a cat has been trapped cover the trap's top and sides. This will calm the cat and lessen the risk of injury once it is inside the trap.
- Lids or small containers to hold bait (optional). You may also put bait directly on the trap or newspaper;
- Flashlight. If you are trapping early in the morning or late at night, you will need the flashlight to identify the cats you have caught;
- Pens or pencils and cage slips for each cat, and masking tape to attach cage slips to each trap;
- Tracking sheet to ID cats and to record information;
- Spoons or a scoop for the bait, and a can opener if you need one;
- Extra cat food and clean water to leave after you trap for any cats you have already TNR'ed or were unable to trap this time;
- Tools such as pliers, a pocketknife, and some WD40 for traps that might not work properly. Always check traps prior to arriving at trapping site;
- And, hand sanitizer, jug of water, and gloves for your protection.

See the Resources section at the end of this factsheet for information on purchasing traps.

Withhold food

You must withhold all food from the cats you intend to trap 24 hours before trapping. This will ensure that the cats are hungry enough to enter the traps. Also, surgery will be easier on the cats if they have not eaten for the past 24 hours.

While this may be hard, particularly if the cats appear hungry, remember you are doing what is best for them. Continue to provide the cats with clean, fresh drinking water.

Start trapping

To begin, prepare the traps near your vehicle or away from the trapping site. Place the trap on a flat surface as you bait and set it. Do this so that if a trap does not properly work or goes off too easily it will not scare off the cats.

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Unlatch the rear door and take it off so you can get your hands inside the trap. Be sure to relock the rear door before trapping. If your trap does not have a rear door then secure the front door open with a twist tie so that it won't keep falling shut while you work.

If you use newspaper, fold it lengthwise and place it inside the bottom of the trap, to disguise the wires on the bottom of the trap. Do not use newspaper if it is windy.

Place approximately one tablespoon of bait along the very back of the trap. You can use a lid or container for this if you wish. Now drizzle some juice from the bait along the trap towards the entrance in a zigzag pattern. Place about one-fourth teaspoon of bait in the middle of the trap on the trip-plate, and one-fourth teaspoon about six inches inside the front of the trap. The cat will move his or her paws trying to get the zigzagged bait, thus springing the trap. It is important not to leave too much bait in the front or middle; this may satisfy the cat and she will leave without setting off the trap.

Now take the traps to the trapping site, near the feeding area. Place the trap on the ground and make certain it is stable and will not rock or tip.

If you are using multiple traps, stagger them, and place them facing in different directions. Try to think like a cat and place the trap where it will be tempting. Move quietly and slowly, and try to remain relaxed so your mannerisms will not frighten cats away.

Set and cover the traps. Leave the area quietly. The cats are unlikely to enter the traps if you are standing nearby. You may want to go sit in your car or take a walk for a while. If you are trapping in your yard you can go inside.

Traps should never be left unattended for more than two hours under any circumstances. It is preferable to quietly check the traps more frequently from a distance. You do not want to leave a cat in the trap for too long. Also, traps may be stolen, damaged, or set off. Someone who does not understand your intentions may release a trapped cat.

Trapping a feral cat may take some time. Be patient. It may take the cat a few minutes to go into the trap. Make sure the trap is sprung, and the cat securely trapped, before you approach the trap. If you come out too soon you may frighten the cat away.

Special trapping tips

If certain cats will not go into the traps, try feeding them in unset traps for several days before trapping. Feed the cats in the same place and time as always. Wire the doors to the traps open and place the food inside. The cats will see other cats eating inside the traps and will likely try it themselves. Once they become accustomed to the traps they will be easier to trap.

If you are still unable to trap a cat or if the cat has learned how to steal bait without springing the trap, consider using a drop-trap instead. Alley Cat Allies has instructions available on how to build and use a drop-trap to catch the obstinate feral cat.

After trapping

After the cat has been caught, cover the entire trap with a towel or cloth before moving it. Covering the traps will help to keep the cats calm. It is normal for the cat to thrash around inside the trap. It is very tempting to release him but he will not hurt himself if the trap is covered. If a cat has already hurt himself, do not release him. Most injuries from traps are very minor, such as a bruised nose, scratched paw pad, or bloody nose. The cat will calm down once the trap is covered.

If you trap a severely injured or sick cat rush him or her to the veterinary clinic.

Once you have trapped as many cats as you can, transport the cats in the traps to the veterinary hospital. If you need to hold the cats overnight, keep them in their traps and make sure they are dry and warm. They can stay in a basement or isolated room if the weather is poor. It is possible for a cat to die from hypothermia when confined in a trap outside in cold weather. A simple guideline—if it is too cold outside for you, then it is too cold for the cats. Do not leave cats in traps exposed to excessive heat or sun.

After surgery, allow the cat to recover overnight in the same trap, still covered. Usually the veterinarian's staff will replace any soiled newspaper in the bottom of the trap with fresh newspaper. If they do not do this, ask them to. Fresh newspaper will make the cats more comfortable during recovery.

Female cats usually need to be held for 24 to 48 hours after surgery. Male cats can be returned to the trapping site 12 to 24 hours following surgery as long as they are fully awake and do not require further

medical attention. Make sure all cats are fully conscious and alert before release.

If the cat needs further care (longer than 48 hours) you will need to transfer her into a holding pen or cat playpen.

Release the cat in the same place you trapped him or her. Open the front door of the trap and pull back the cover. If the trap has a rear door, pull the door up and off, pull off the cover, then walk away. Do not be concerned if the cat hesitates a few moments before leaving. He is simply reorienting himself to his surroundings. It is not uncommon for the cat to stay away for a few days after release; he will return eventually. Keep leaving food and water out; he may eat when you are not around.

Never release the cat into a new area. If the cat needs to be relocated, please use Alley Cat Allies' factsheet Relocation: Guidelines for Safe Relocation of Feral Cats. Relocating cats without the proper steps can endanger the cat's life. She will try to return to her old home, and may become lost or attempt to cross major roads. Also, feral cats form strong bonds with other cats in their colonies. Separating a cat from her colony members and leaving her alone in a new environment will cause stress, depression, and loneliness.

Benefits to sterilizing the stray and feral cats you feed:

- Decrease the overall population of feral cats by stopping the birth of more kittens.
- Decrease mating behavior, like yowling, roaming, and spraying urine, which may cause complaints.
- Decrease the risk of certain types of cancer for cats in your colony.
- Improve the overall health of the feral cats in your colony. Sterilized cats live longer, healthier lives.
- Maintain medical records on your cats, proving they are healthy and vaccinated.
- And, stop the tragedy of kitten mortality.

Resources

Alley Cat Allies' video "Trap-Neuter-Return: A Humane Approach to Feral Cat Control" will walk you through the steps of trapping, vetting, and caring for a feral cat colony. You will see colony caregivers plan and conduct effective trapping.

Information available from Alley Cat Allies:

- Help finding veterinarians who will provide free or low-cost spay/neuter
- Guidelines for veterinarians who treat feral cats
- Information on feline health and zoonotic diseases
- Fact sheet on Taming Feral Kittens
- Information on juvenile spay/neuter
- Rabies factsheet
- Guidelines for conducting your own free or low-cost, high-volume spay/neuter clinics
- Information on how to nurture cooperation with neighbors and property owners
- Relocation guidelines
- Instructions for building cold-weather shelters
- Alley Cat Allies' quarterly newsletter containing helpful articles and updates
- Alley Cat Allies' bi-annual newsletter for feral cat caregivers

Humane box traps are available from the following companies:

Tomahawk Live Trap Co.
PO Box 323, Tomahawk, Wisconsin 54487
Phone: 800.272.8727
www.livetrap.com

ACES (Animal Care Equipment & Services, Inc.)
P.O. Box 3275
Crestline, California 92325
Phone: 800.338.ACES
www.animal-care.com

Heart of the Earth Marketing
205 High Street
Fruitdale, South Dakota 57717-4208
Phone: 800.526.1644
www.animal-traps.com

Holding pens or cat playpens can be purchased from: Drs. Foster & Smith: 800.381.7206 and R.C. Steele: 800.872.3773.