

PREPARATIONS FOR TRAPPING

Before trapping begins, a number of pieces must be in place. You need to find a holding space that is warm, dry, secure and large enough to house the number of cats you plan to trap. Spay/neuter appointments must be scheduled, traps borrowed or purchased and transportation arranged.

Establish a feeding pattern - Feral cats are much easier to trap when they've been trained to eat in a predictable pattern. If you know where and when the cats show up, then you also know the best time and place to set out your traps. To train them, put out their meals in the same location at as consistent a time as you can manage. Try to pick a time that will work best for the trapping.

Withhold food - Feral cats are naturally wary of entering the narrow confines of a box trap. Before most will go in, they need to be hungry enough to overcome their fear. It is critical to withhold food the day before the trapping so they'll be very hungry the next day. Check the site periodically to make sure no one stops by and leaves out a bowl of kibble. Continue to provide fresh water daily.

TRAPPING

Leave enough time - Always plan on at least three days to trap an entire colony. When mass trappings fail to get all or almost all of the colony, it's often because the trapper only allowed for one day and something went wrong, like bad weather, unexpected foot traffic, loud construction noise or a similar disruption.

Prepare the traps - Line up the traps in a row a comfortable distance from the colony's feeding area, rear doors facing the same direction. If possible, do this out of sight of the cats. Do a quick check to make sure the traps are all in working order, then tuck a folded towel between the handles of each trap. If you have a trap with a narrow trip plate, tape a piece of cardboard just before the plate to the trap door. Finally, lift the rear doors, place bait inside and then close and lock the rear doors. Use a smelly bait like tuna, mackerel or chicken.

Place the traps in the territory - Put all the traps out in the territory at the same time. You should have one or two more traps than there are cats, so it's easier to catch the last few. Position the traps around the feeding area, along pathways normally traveled by the cats and in other nearby areas where the cats are known to gather. Don't leave a trap sitting out in the open, but lean it up against something, like a wall, fence or curb. Make sure they're resting on level ground and no objects will block the front doors from closing. Once a trap is in place, make a trail leading to the front door from a few feet away by crumbling a cat treat or dripping the juice from canned fish.

Action! - Remain in the area and **NEVER** leave traps unattended, but don't watch too intensely. The cats will sense your anxiety and it may cause them to hesitate to enter a trap. Adopt a casual attitude like nothing unusual is going on. Don't go in and out of the territory, adjusting the traps, but wait and let the cats check out the traps and discover the bait. Remember, if they're hungry, they'll be interested.

When you catch one - When the front door shuts behind them, most cats will panic and try frantically to get out of the trap. **QUICKLY COVER THE TRAP COMPLETELY WITH A SHEET OR TOWEL, WHICH SHOULD CALM THE CAT DOWN. NEVER** release a cat because you're afraid it will injure itself.

Hot spots - After a cat is caught, remove the trap (with the cat inside) to a safe location. Place a new trap at the same spot where the prior one had been placed. Often there are "hot spots" where cats are more attracted to going in.

Continue trapping - As long as you're seeing cats interested in the bait, stick around and leave the traps out. To hasten their capture, consider breaking out a drop trap if you have one with you. After there are no more candidates around, pack it up and come back the next day for whoever remains. Keep trapping each day of the project, continuing to withhold food (but be sure to leave water outside the traps). Don't stop until either everyone is caught or the rest of the cats have been fixed and released back outside. If you missed anyone by the time the colony is returned, give it a rest until the cats have resumed their normal routine.

CARING FOR TRAPPED CATS

Once a cat is caught, the trap will double as a cage while he awaits surgery and during his recovery afterwards. That's why it's important to have a pair of trap dividers and use traps that are 30 to 36 inches in length and at least 10 inches wide.

Using traps as cages may feel uncomfortable at first to a novice trapper, but feral cats actually prefer tight, dark spaces when confined, not large open ones. Keep the traps covered with sheets and feed and clean twice a day and the cats will be fine. The alternative of putting each cat in a cage is more expensive in terms of equipment needed, requires a much larger holding space and carries an increased risk of escape and injury to the cat and the trapper.

RETURNING THE CATS

After their surgeries, the cats should be held for at least 24 hours and, if there are no complications, no more than 72 hours. Releasing immediately after the surgeries may be expedient for the trapper, but subjects the cats to great risk. There is no opportunity to assess if there are any post-surgical complications and no recuperation time after the cat has undergone anesthesia and a major procedure. On the other extreme, holding a feral cat too long could increase her stress level to the point of causing illness.

With females, check the site of their spay incision prior to release. Remove any newspaper from the floor of the trap and have a helper lift the trap up in the air. Using a flashlight if necessary, take a close a look from underneath at the incision. If there is any excessive bleeding or inflammation (redness), **don't release her**bring her back to the veterinarian to be checked.

Always return the cats back to their colony site and never release them at a new, unknown location. Some of the cats may disappear for a few days after release, but will return.