

Steps for Successful and Safe Trapping

Once you've assessed the situation and devised a plan with all key stakeholders, it's time to proceed with trapping and transporting. Following the below instructions and guidelines will help ensure the safety of the cats and you.

Preparing to Trap

Pre-Exposure Rabies Vaccinations

These are recommended for those working with feral and stray cats, and for veterinary staff and wildlife rehabilitators who handle small mammals. The chance of contracting rabies from an infected cat is extremely slight (the last documented occurrence in the U.S. was in 1975); however, it is always best to take all precautions.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis is given to provide protection for any possible exposure to rabies. It also protects people when post-exposure therapy is delayed.

For those who have been bitten by a rabid animal, if they have already been vaccinated, they need only receive two additional injections as post-exposure treatment.

If you have not had pre-exposure vaccinations, and you are bitten by a suspected rabid animal, an initial dose of rabies immunoglobulin, along with the first rabies vaccination, is given on day zero. After that, **THREE** vaccinations on these exact days: 3, 7, and 14. (Note: The first day of vaccine administration is referred to as day zero).

Rabies from animals is usually transmitted to humans through actual bites, although the virus can be transmitted by scratching or contact with saliva. In either case, your doctor will most likely administer a series of vaccinations to be safe.

If you are bitten by an animal you suspect may have rabies, see your doctor **IMMEDIATELY!** And with any injury, immediately wash the wound with hot, soapy water for several minutes, and clean it with peroxide. Apply an antibiotic cream and cover the wound with gauze and tape.

If a wound caused by a cat requires medical treatment, animal control may confiscate the cat. Some animal control agencies still insist on killing a cat to test for rabies rather than quarantining the

cat. When you visit a doctor or emergency room for treatment of a cat bite, the medical practitioner may have to report the bite to the authorities, especially if it is discovered that the cat has not been vaccinated against rabies and has no known medical history. Again, some animal control agencies are adamant that a cat with an unknown medical history must be killed if she injures someone.

You can try to convince the authorities to hold the cat in quarantine, but they may insist on a six-month holding period with very strict holding procedures. In any event, a quarantine period of at least 14 days is advisable for a feral cat who has bitten someone.

Refer to “Zoonotic Diseases” for more information.

The Correct Equipment

If you are only trapping a couple of cats, you may borrow a trap from a friend, a feral cat group, or an animal control agency. Remember, though, that some agencies may require that the cat be brought to them in the trap for euthanasia. If your local agency has this policy, you will need to find another group to borrow a trap from or purchase one. Also, please feel free to have this agency contact Alley Cat Rescue; we have a shelter outreach program to assist and inform shelters about the Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) protocol as a better way to control outdoor cat populations.

If you are trapping a large colony, you should probably buy several traps for your own use. If you use several traps at once, you can catch the cats far quicker and this will make it easier for you, before the remaining cats become trap-shy.

Remember, never try to catch a feral cat or kitten by hand. These animals are usually very afraid of humans and can inflict painful bites.

Supply List:

- One humane trap per cat, properly labelled with your contact information and a short note explaining that you are trapping cats as part of a humane TNR program, and the cats will not be harmed.
- One bed sheet or large towel for each trap. The cloth should be large enough to cover the entire trap on all sides. Covering the trap will calm the cat and lessen the risk of injury.
- One large blanket, bed sheet, or plastic cover to protect your vehicle seats.
- Folded newspaper to line the bottom of each trap.
- An easy-open can of tuna in oil, sardines in oil, mackerel, or other enticing bait.
- A spoon, or use the lid from the can to scoop out bait. (Do not leave the can in the trap.)

- A flashlight or headlamp. If you are trapping early in the morning or late at night, you'll need the flashlight to identify the cats you've caught.
- Masking tape to use to identify and label traps.
- Tracking sheets to identify cats and to record information.
- A pen and a marker.
- Extra cat food and clean water to leave for any cats remaining in the colony and not being TNR'd at that moment.
- A pair of thick gloves.
- A roll of paper towels and hand sanitizer.
- A few twist ties (bread ties).
- Pliers, a pocket knife, a can of WD40. (Optional but comes in handy when you need to make a quick trap repair.)

Always inspect your equipment prior to trapping. Make sure traps are working properly and gloves are free from major holes or tears.

Establishing a Regular Feeding Schedule

Establishing a routine feeding schedule will make trapping easier. Feed the cats at the same time and place each day and for at least one week prior to trapping.

During this period, the colony should be assessed. Determine if some cats are tame (friendly) and can be adopted into homes, and plan ahead for fostering any kittens you trap. Create a spreadsheet to record such information as the name of the cat, description, spayed/neutered, etc. This information will help establish proper health records for your colony.

Trapping

The first step to trapping is to withhold all food for 12 to 24 hours before setting a trap. This will ensure that the cats are hungry enough to enter a trap. 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, know that you are doing what is best for them. Continue to provide the cats with clean, fresh drinking water.

Perform the trapping during the late evening or early morning; this usually coincides with a regularly scheduled feeding. Get the trap(s) ready near your vehicle or away from the trapping site before placing them there, as you don't want to scare off any cats if a trap goes off accidentally.

Place the trap on a flat surface. Unlatch the rear door and take it off so you can get your hands inside the trap. If your trap does not have a rear door, then you might want to secure the front door open with a twist tie so that it won't keep falling shut while you work.

Fold several pieces of newspaper lengthwise and place them inside the bottom of the trap. This disguises the wires and trip plate. Do not use newspaper if it is windy, or make sure to use several sheets that will stay down and not scare the cats.

Place approximately one tablespoon of bait in the rear center of the trap. You can place the food directly onto the newspaper or use a lid or small container. Next, drizzle some liquid from the bait the entire length of the newspaper inside the trap. Place about 1/4 teaspoon of bait in the middle of the trap and 1/4 teaspoon inside the front of the trap. This strategy is meant to entice the cat into the trap, making her way to the larger amount of food at the rear of the trap. However, it is important not to put too much bait in the front or middle of the trap, because this may satisfy the cat and she will leave without setting off the trap.

Set up the traps at the trapping site, most likely in the feeding area. Place the trap on the ground and make certain it is stable and will not rock or tip. Cover the entire trap with a sheet or towel, leaving the opening uncovered and ensuring the cover won't interfere with the door shutting.

If using multiple traps, stagger them, so they are facing in different directions. Try to think like a cat and place the traps where they will be tempted by the smell of the bait. Move quietly and slowly, and try to remain relaxed so your behavior won't frighten cats away.

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

Traps should never be left unattended for more than one hour under any circumstances. It is good to check the traps frequently and quietly, from a distance. Never leave a cat in a trap unattended. Also, traps may be stolen, damaged, or set off; a trapped cat also might be released by someone who doesn't understand your intentions.

Trapping feral cats may take some time. Be patient. Once a cat appears, it may take a few minutes for her to go into the trap. Make sure the trap has sprung, and the cat is securely trapped, before you approach.



Desirée Stapley

Trapping cats at Adams Morgan colony, Washington, D.C.

Do not attempt to transfer a trapped cat to another cage or carrier unless you are very experienced in dealing with feral cats and have the proper equipment to do this. A transfer cage is the best item to use for safe transfer. It fits snugly up

against the trap and a sliding door on each piece of equipment will allow a safe transfer. You should have another person assist with this task.

Before moving the trapped cat, ensure the trap is covered with a sheet or large towel. Covering the trap will keep the cat calm. Still, it is normal for the cat to thrash around inside the trap. It may be tempting to release her but she will not hurt herself if the trap remains covered. If a cat has already hurt herself, do not release her. Most injuries from traps are very minor, such as a bruised nose or torn claw. The cat will calm down eventually. Use twist ties to ensure the rear door is secure.



Alley Cat Rescue

ACR colony cat, Thomas Cattington, trapped for a vet visit.

Once you have trapped as many cats as you can, transport them in the traps to the veterinary hospital. Remember to inform your veterinarian that you are releasing the cats in 24 hours so that she

uses dissolvable sutures and surgical glue during surgery. If you trap cats at night and need to hold them until their appointment in the morning, keep them in their traps and make sure they are in a dry, warm location. They can stay in a shed, basement, or isolated room if the weather is poor. Do NOT leave trapped cats in extreme cold or heat.

Postoperative Care

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 prior to being released. If the cat needs further care (longer than 48 hours) you will need to transfer her into a holding cage.

Kittens must be kept warm during recovery because they are vulnerable to anesthetic-related hypothermia. A heating pad can be used to keep kittens warm, but be sure it is not too hot. Kittens also must be fed around four to six hours after surgery. Feeding the kittens after they have recovered from the anesthesia is recommended to prevent hypoglycemia.

Adult cats can be given a small amount of canned food, which is easier to digest than dry food, eight hours after receiving surgery. However, the cat may not have an appetite. When you open the carrier or trap to put in food, be careful that the cat does not escape. Keep your hands out of the trap and always re-lock the door.

Normal behaviors during recovery include: deep sleep, head bobbing, wobbly movements, fast breathing, and shivering. Slight spotting and bleeding from the left ear tip is expected but should stop by the time of release. There should be no continued bleeding from the surgery area, and prolonged recovery time (still inactive and lethargic, six-plus hours after surgery) or getting drowsy or weak again after waking up is not normal. If any abnormal behavior is suspected, contact your veterinarian immediately, as the cat may need intravenous fluids.

Once the cat has fully recovered and she appears to be alert, clear-eyed, and not displaying any abnormal behaviors, she may be released. Release the cat in the same place you trapped her. Pull back the cover and open the rear door. Step away from the trap quickly and quietly. Do not be concerned if the cat hesitates a few moments before leaving. She is simply reorienting herself to her surroundings. It is not uncommon for the cat to stay away for a few days after release; she will return eventually. Continue to provide food and water, she may eat when you're not around. Do not release a cat during inclement weather, and always have the phone numbers of your veteri-

narian or a nearby emergency clinic on hand in case of emergencies.

Additional Trapping Tips

If some cats won't go into the traps, you may want to try feeding them in unset traps for several days before trapping. Feed the cats in the same place and time as always. Tie up the doors to the traps so they stay open, and place the food inside. When the cats see other cats eating inside the traps they will 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, which provides the trapper with more control. Refer to the Helpful Resources section in the back of the handbook for more information on drop traps.

Never release the cat into a new area. If the cat needs to be relocated, please refer to "Guidelines for Safely Relocating Feral Cats." Relocating cats without following the proper steps can endanger a 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. So do try to relocate several cat buddies at the same time.

Avoid Trapping During Spring

Spring is also known as “kitten season.” Try to trap before or after this season so that you allow the mothers to nurse their young properly. Around mid-May is usually when the majority of kittens are old enough to eat on their own.

If you do trap a lactating mother you have several choices:

- Release the cat without sterilizing. You may struggle to retrap her, however.
- Have her sterilized, requesting that your vet uses the flank incision. This will allow the mother to be back with her kittens the next day and she can continue to nurse them.**
- Have her sterilized, if you are able to locate the kittens and they are old enough to be safely fostered without the mother (around eight weeks old).
- Keep her (and you'll have to catch her kittens) in a foster home until the kittens are weaned, and then spay the mother (and sterilize the kittens).

If you trap a pregnant cat, here are your options:

- Release the cat without sterilizing. Again, you may struggle to retrap her.
- Keep the cat and have her spayed. If she is in the early stages of pregnancy, the pregnancy can be terminated.**

- Keep the cat and allow her to birth her kittens in foster care. Once the kittens have been weaned, the mother can be spayed, and the kittens sterilized.

**It is important to discuss these options with your veterinarian prior to trapping, so you can devise a plan. Your vet will determine which is the safer option for the mother cat.

Springtime also means increased activity of other wildlife. If you should accidentally trap a non-target animal such as a raccoon, opossum, or skunk, carefully open the back door and release the animal where it was trapped. Most wildlife are afraid and will run away. Do not release the animal in another area. Taking animals away from their homes is cruel and inhumane. They may have families around and they are usually immune to local diseases. Moving them causes disorientation and they do not know where to find food sources.

Do Not Use Tranquilizers Before or During Trapping

Tranquilizers have the potential for being extremely dangerous for outside cats. The cat will not fall unconscious immediately. It will take some time for the cat to react to the drug. During this time the cat may become disoriented and cross busy roads or get into other dangerous situations. Some cats need smaller doses, others need larger doses. You will not know how much to feed the cat. In any event, tranquilizers are not

recommended. Some people get desperate with hard-to-trap cats. Just be patient and realize that your persistence will pay off, and that it may take a long time and require using different tricks before the particular cat is trapped.

If you have a female cat who is constantly giving birth to kittens and you cannot catch her, this may be a time to consider the contraceptive drug, Ovaban. But remember, this is only to be used for a short period. Long-term use can have serious side-effects. (Refer to “Chemical Sterilization” for more information.)



Judy M. Zukoski

It takes a real stroke of luck to catch two feral cats in a single trap!