



The Basics of Trapping

Preparation for trapping

- If possible, get the cats used to being fed at the same place and time of day. You might try leaving the trap **unset** and covered with a large towel during routine feeding so that the animal will get used to seeing and smelling it in the area. Don't feed the cats the day/night before you are going to trap so the cats will be hungry. Be sure to notify others who may feed the cats to refrain from feeding also..
- Plan to trap so that you don't have to keep the cat too long before surgery. Trapping the night before is usually the best approach. Cats should not eat 12 hours prior to surgery.
- Prepare the area where you will be holding the cats before and after the clinic. A garage or other sheltered, warm, protected area is best. Lay down newspapers to catch the inevitable stool, urine and food residue. You may want to use pieces of wood to elevate the traps off the newspapers. This allows the mess to fall through the wire away from the cats. Spraying the area ahead of time with a cat-safe flea spray (like Adams or Ovitrol) will discourage ants.
- Prepare the vehicle you will use to transport them as well. Plastic may be an additional precaution. But remember that you will need to use newspapers or some other absorbent material in addition. (Urine will roll right off of the plastic and that isn't what you want)
- Plan your day of trapping carefully. Remember that if you trap an animal and release it for some reason, it is unlikely that you will be able to catch it again . . . they learn very quickly.
- If there are young kittens involved, remember that they should not be weaned from the mother before 4-6 weeks of age. If you are trapping a lactating female, you may want to wait until you have located the kittens and they are old enough to wean. If you wish to tame and foster the kittens to adopt out, they should be taken from the mother at 4-6 weeks. If you wait until the kittens are older than 4-6 weeks before trying to tame them you will find the job progressively harder with age.

Setting the traps

- Plan to set traps just before or at the cats' normal feeding time. This is often at night. Dusk is usually the best time to set traps.
- Don't trap in the rain or the heat of day without adequate protection for the trap. Cats are vulnerable in the traps and could drown during storms or suffer from heatstroke in the sun. Use common sense !
- Fold a piece of newspaper to line the bottom of the trap just covering the trip plate. Cats don't like walking on the wire surface and the paper helps to keep their feet from going through when you pick up the trap. Be sure that the paper does not extend beyond the trip plate. Too much newspaper can interfere with the trap mechanism or prevent the door from closing properly. Do not use newspaper if it is windy.
- Plan placement of traps on a level surface in the area where the cats usually feed or have been seen. Cats are less likely to enter the trap if it wobbles. If trapping in a public area, try to place traps where they will not be noticed by a passersby (who may not understand that you are not trying to harm the cat). Bushes are often places where cats hide and provide good camouflage for the trap.
- Use smelly food to bait the trap. We find that canned tuna is very effective and relatively inexpensive. It is best not to put any bowls inside the trap to hold food since the animal can easily

hurt itself on it in a panic or while recovering from anesthetic. You can use a small paper plate – or even a section of a paper plate.

- Soak a small scrap of newspaper (2-3 inches by 3-4 inches) in the Tuna juice and place it on the ground where you plan to place the rear of the trap.
- Spoon a small amount of food onto the soaked newspaper scrap and place the trap on top of the food so the food is as far back in the trap as possible while still not accessible from outside the trap. (You want the cat to go all the way into the trap to avoid being injured when the trap door closes.) Press the trap down onto the food so that it squishes up through the wire. The idea is to make the food a little hard to get so that the cat has to go into the trap as far as possible and has to work at getting it long enough to trip the trap. (Some cats are very good at getting in and out of traps without getting caught. We don't want to make it too easy for them to get away with that trick. Also, having the food essentially outside of the trap prevents the cat from eating it in the trap before surgery and is less messy.)
- After baiting the trap, open the trap door by sliding the rings on either side of the door all the way to the top. Lift the door. When door is open, notice the bar that runs the length of the inside of the trap on the left side. Turn the bar so that the L-shaped end is turned outward and the foot plate is raised. Slightly lower the door so that the small nub on the door balances against the L-shape on the bar. This holds the bar in place. The nub holds the door in an open position which also raises the trip plate. When the cat steps on the plate it will cause the nub to turn and release the door and close the trap. Try poking the foot plate with a stick to see if the weight of the stick causes the door to close. If it does, you've done it right.
- After setting the trap, cover it with a large towel or piece of towel-sized material. Fold the material at the front end of the trap to expose the opening while still covering the top, sides and back of the trap. The cover will help to camouflage the trap and serve to calm the cat after it is caught.

Waiting for success

- Never leave traps unattended in an unprotected area, but don't hang around within sight of the cat (or you will scare it off). The trapped animal is vulnerable. Passersby may release the cat or steal the trap! Wait quietly in an area where you can still see the traps without disturbing the cats. Check traps every 15 minutes or so. You can often hear the traps trip and see the cloth cover droop down slightly over the opening from a distance. As soon as the intended cat is trapped, completely cover the trap and remove the trap from the area if other cats are not in sight. You may consider putting another trap in the same spot if it seems to be a "hot" one. Be sure to dispose of the food left on the ground when you pick up the trap. (You don't want to litter or give out any freebies and spoil any appetites!)
- When you get the captured cat to a quiet area away from the other traps lift the cover and check for signs that you have the correct animal and not a pet or previously neutered feral. If you note that you have captured a lactating female check the area for kittens and remember that this female must be released 10-12 hours after surgery so she can care for and nurse her kittens. Cover the cat back up as soon as possible. Uncovered, the animal may panic and hurt itself thrashing around in the trap.
- Of course, there is always the chance that you will catch some other wild animal attracted to the food or an unintended cat. Simply release the animal quietly as stated in the releasing procedures here.

Holding procedures

- After you have finished trapping, you will probably have to hold the cats overnight until you can take them to the vet. (Unless you have made previous arrangements with a vet)
- Place cats in the prepared protected area. You can feed them up until about 6-8 hours before surgery (3-4 hours for kittens). **DO NOT OPEN THE TRAP.** Just drop food through the wire of the trap for them to eat. If you have used a small paper or plastic plate, you can attempt giving the cat a small amount of water by using a watering can pouring a very small amount on the plate through the wire

of the trap. If this does not work, don't worry about the water for now, as long as it is not an extended amount of time that the cat will stay in the trap (or an overly hot or sun-exposed area) where the cat will be housed in the trap until re-release.

- 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.
- Once you have trapped as many cats as you can, transport the cats in the traps to the veterinary clinic. 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.
- Keep cats covered and check periodically. They will probably be very quiet as long as they are covered. Don't stick fingers in the trap or allow children or pets near the traps. These are wild animals which scratch and bite. **ALL ANIMAL BITES ARE SERIOUS! IF YOU ARE BITTEN SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION AND DO NOT RELEASE THE CAT. IT MUST BE QUARANTINED. CONTACT YOUR VET FOR QUARANTINE INSTRUCTIONS.**
- Wash and change clothes before having contact with your own pets as a precaution against spreading any contagious diseases the cats might carry.
- Always get feral kittens checked out by a vet and isolate them from your pets. Some deadly diseases can incubate without symptoms. Check with your veterinarian and use caution.

Releasing the cats

- 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. Pull up rings so you can open the front door of the trap and pull back the cover. You can prop open the door with a stick or slowly roll the trap so that the top is on the bottom. Do this gently and the door will automatically open when it is upside down. If it hesitates, push the rings down with a stick so that the door opens. 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.
- If a cat does not seem to be recovering well from the surgery, consider having it checked out by a vet before releasing. When cats are ready for release, return to the area in which they were captured and release them there. Do not relocate the animal! It will be disoriented and most likely die. In all likelihood, area cats will drive it away.
- If the veterinarian has indicated a serious medical problem with the cat which you will not be able to treat, you, with the advice of the vet, must make the decision on whether it is safe to release the animal or kinder to euthanize it. Untreated abscesses and respiratory infections, and a number of other conditions, can mean suffering and a slow, painful death.
- Make sure the spot you pick for release does not encourage the cat to run into danger (like a busy street) to get away from you. Keep the trap covered until you are ready to release. When ready, simply hold the trap with the door facing **away** from you and open the door. The cat will probably bolt immediately out of the trap. If it is confused, just tilt the trap so the back is slightly up and tap on the back of the trap to encourage it to leave. Never put your hand in the trap! If the animal still will not leave, prop the door open with a stick and leave it for a while. A trapped skunk or possum, which is nocturnal, may decide to sleep in the trap all day and not leave the trap until dark.
- After releasing the cats hose off traps and disinfect them with bleach. Never store traps in the "set" position (door open); animals may wander into even unbaited traps and starve to death.

- If you do trap a skunk, possum or other animal and they won't leave the trap or they attempt to attack you when opening the trap door, you can simply and slowly put the trap on its side, then roll again until it is upside down. Doing this slowly helps the animal upright itself as you are turning it over (wait for them to upright themselves with each turn of the trap). Once the trap is upside down, the door will open automatically.
- **A word of caution:** Many areas are known for epidemics of rabies. Please consult with your city or county about this. Skunks and a few other animals are known carriers and the city may require notification if you have trapped one. Also, many animals are protected by city, state, county or federal law. Please verify if this is in effect in your area, and the requirements if you have trapped one of these possibly endangered species.

Helpful hints

- Bring a flashlight with you if trapping at night. It will come in handy for checking traps from a distance and might help you avoid a twisted ankle in the dark.
- Bring a cap for the top of the Tuna can. Nothing smells worse than fish juice spilled in the car. Don't forget a spoon!
- Females with kittens will be attracted by the sound of their kittens if the previously captured kittens are placed in a covered carrier just behind the trap. Similarly, kittens will be easier to trap if the previously captured mom is in the carrier. Females in heat can be placed in a carrier to attract male cats who have been eluding the traps. Never place the "bait" animal in the trap or anywhere where it may be harmed by the trapped animal. Even moms can hurt their babies if frightened enough. Be careful not to let the "bait" animal escape.
- Some kittens can be caught without a trap but are still too wild to be handled easily. Use a thick towel to pick up the kitten to help protect you from scratching and biting. This also helps prevent the kitten from squirming away from you.

TRAPPING GUIDELINES - Dos and Donts

DO:

- Bring a trapping kit.
- Trap with a buddy (especially at night or in dangerous areas).
- Practice working your traps ahead of time.
- Cover the trap with a dark towel or blanket.
- Talk to neighbors about your plans to trap.
- Post flyers in your neighborhood asking for volunteers to help with TNR.
- Be creative – use every trick you can think of!
- Organize a feeding schedule ahead of time.
- Always provide fresh water daily (even when you're withholding food).
- Put out enough traps at a time. If your goal is to trap a colony of 20 cats, then set 25 traps on your first attempt.
- Wear thick gloves while carrying cats in traps.
- Prepare traps at a distance away from the actual trapping site. Loud noises and quick motions at the trapping site will scare cats away.
- Bring several large pop-top cans of tuna, mackerel, sardines or other smelly bait, preferably oil packed.
- Plan your trapping session so that the cats are transported to the vet as soon as possible. Avoid an overnight stay in the trap prior to your trip to the vet, if possible.
- TNR the cats at your apartment complex now – even if they must be relocated eventually. The more births you prevent, the easier it will be to find relocation sites.

DON'T:

- Get emotional.
- Argue with people who don't support your efforts.
- Trap on a hillside.
- Withhold food for more than three days. Cats can actually forget to eat if they don't eat for a few days; this can be life threatening.
- Trap in extremely hot or cold weather.
- Trap a nursing female for kittens under 5-6 weeks old. Her kittens can die from exposure and/or starvation in her absence.
- Release an unsterilized cat that you trapped involuntarily. You may never catch that cat again!
- Ever leave traps unattended.
- Put too much bait at the front of the trap, or the cat will get filled up before tripping the trap.
- Use dirty traps. Even traps that appear clean will carry the scent of the cat previously trapped, which can deter other cats from entering.
- Attempt to touch a conscious feral cat.
- Let a feral cat run loose in your car or home. Use a transfer cage to move a feral cat from the trap to a holding cage for recovery.
- Trap cats before making a plan. Which vet will you use? How will you pay for the sterilization, vaccinations, and ear-tipping? Where will the cats recover?
- Forget to cover each trap with a dark towel or blanket after a cat has been trapped. This will help to calm the cat.

RESOURCES

Humane box traps are available from the following companies:

Tomahawk Live Trap Co.
PO Box 323, Tomahawk, Wisconsin 54487
Phone: 800.272.8727
www.livetraps.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
Phone: 800.381.7206
www.drsofostersmith.com

R.C. Steele
Phone: 800.872.3773