



City of Culver City

## ANIMAL SERVICES

# FERAL CAT HUMANE TRAPPING



It is estimated that there are approximately 90 million pet cats in the United States and there may be up to 1 ½ times that number of un-owned cats, including both feral cats and strays. Feral cats are the offspring of lost or abandoned pet cats or other feral cats who are not fixed. They don't easily adapt, or may never adapt, to living as pets in close contact with people. Free-roaming cats can have an impact on wildlife, and it is important that this also be acknowledged as part of the dynamic of dealing with feral cats. It is a problem for people because feral cats can also carry diseases that are contagious to humans, including toxoplasmosis and rabies.

This isn't a new problem, or an issue unique to America. Many nations have been dealing with feral cats for centuries. Going back centuries, when feral cats became too much of a problem, they might have been poisoned, shot at, or animal control officials would be asked to catch and kill them.

If this approach worked, we wouldn't still have a problem today.

Relatively recently, the idea of managed care for feral cat colonies, called trap, neuter, return (TNR), was popularized as a solution. Feral cats are individually trapped and ear-notched to identify them as colony members. The cats are spayed or neutered, vaccinated for rabies (and in some instances microchipped for further identification), then re-released. Kittens are given to shelters to adopt out, and very sick cats are humanely euthanized. Volunteer caretakers watch over the colonies, processing any new arrivals and supplementing the colony's food. While cats will still instinctively kill some birds, with a full tummy they're not as driven. Unable to reproduce, colony members dwindle to zero. There's a growing need for community-wide Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programs, which help improve the health and quality of life for feral cats and prevent more from being born into this dangerous and difficult existence.

TNR can take time and requires dedicated volunteers, effort and resources. But with diligence and community support, TNR can work to eliminate feral cat colony numbers.



Culver City Animal Services, Culver City Police Department, 4040 Duquesne Avenue, Culver City, California 90232

Non-Emergency Line for Immediate Service: 310-837-1221

Main: 310-253-6143 Fax: 310-253-6217



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### **Preparation for Feral Cat trapping**

Get the feral cats used to being fed at the same place each day. Don't feed the feral cats the day or night before you are going to trap so the feral cats will be hungry. Cover the trap with a towel or blanket to keep the feral cat calmer and protect the feral cat from the elements. Feral cats can hurt themselves if the cat trap is not darkened with the feral cat inside. Please be advised that you could be subject to cruelty charges if you injure the cat, starve the cat or kill the cat so please be humane in your treatment of your trapped feral cat.

It's best to leave the feral cat in the cat trap in a garage or other sheltered, weather protected area. You can use pieces of wood to elevate the feral cat trap and then slide newspapers under the cat trap to catch the waste. This allows the waste to fall through the wire away from the feral cat.

If kittens are involved, remember that the kittens are weaned at 4-5 weeks of age. If you are trapping a lactating female, you may want to wait until you have located all the kittens and they are weaned and eating soft foods.

### **Setting the Feral Cat Traps**

Plan to set up the feral cat traps one (1) hour before the cat's normal feeding time. Or, dusk is usually the best time to set up cat traps.

Don't trap in the rain or the heat of day without adequate protection for the trapped feral cat. Cats are vulnerable in the traps and could suffer from heatstroke in the sun. Think about the safety of the feral cat first and for most.

Fold a piece of newspaper or use surrounding foliage and dirt to line the bottom of the cat trap just covering the trip plate. Feral cats don't like walking on the wire surface. Be sure that the paper does not extend beyond the cat trap trip plate. Too much newspaper or foliage material could interfere with the trap plate and prevent the door from closing fully and locking.

Place the feral cat traps on a level surface in the area where the cats usually feed or have been seen. Feral cats are less likely to enter the cat trap if it wobbles. If trapping in a public area, try to place the cat traps where they will not be noticed by passersby. Bushes are often places where feral cats hide and provide good camouflage for the trap.

Use very smelly food to bait the feral cat trap. Canned sardines and tuna in oil are very effective and you can use the juice in the can to make a trail leading to the trap. Feral cats will follow this trail to the entry of the cat trap. It is best not to put the can itself inside the cat trap to hold the bait since the feral cat can easily hurt itself on it in a panic. To prevent ants from swarming around the food, you can place a plate or saucer with water underneath the container or bowl with the bait. This will create a "moot" around the food so that the ants will not have access to the bait.



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After baiting the feral cat trap, open the trap door. There is a small hook attached to the right side of the top of the cat trap. The hook holds the door in an open position which also raises the trip plate. When the feral cat steps on the plate, it will cause the hook to release the door, closing the cat trap. After setting the feral cat trap, cover it with a large towel. Fold the towel 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 feral cat after it is caught.

### **Waiting for Trapping Success**

Never leave the feral cat traps unattended in an unprotected area, but don't hang around within sight of the feral cat (or you will scare it off). Passerby may release the feral cat or steal the cat trap! Wait quietly in an area where you can still see the cat traps without disturbing the cats. Check the cat traps frequently throughout the day. You can often hear the cat traps trip. As soon as the feral cat is trapped completely cover the trap and remove the cat trap from the area if other cats are not in sight.

When you get the captured feral cat to a quiet area away from the other cat traps, lift the cover to check that the trapped cat is not someone's pet. (The FCC marks the right ear of every animal they alter so we can avoid taking an altered feral cat to the vet's office). If you have trapped a lactating female, check the area for kittens.

### **Feral Cat Holding Procedures**

After you have finished trapping, you will probably have to hold the feral cats overnight. Place feral cats in a weather protected area. DO NOT feed them. You can place a small bowl of water in the cat trap by opening the cat trap rear sliding door just a couple of inches. Don't open the door too wide or the cat may escape. Keep feral cats covered and check periodically. They will be very quiet as long as they are covered. You must remember that these are wild animals which scratch and bite.

### **Releasing the Feral Cat (For Trap/Neuter/Release)**

If a feral cat does not seem to be recovering well from the surgery, have it re-checked by a vet before releasing. When feral 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 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 could mean suffering and a slow death.

After releasing the cat, hose off the cat trap and disinfect them with bleach. Never store traps in the "set" position (door open); animals may wander into unbaited traps and starve to death.

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### Traps and Humane Animal Equipment

A basic box trap is a painless and humane method of safely capturing cats. Regardless of the level of socialization, do not attempt to pick up a cat to put her in a carrier. Use a humane box trap or drop trap to ensure the safety of the cats and you. (Never use darts or tranquilizers to attempt to catch a cat. These methods are dangerous and stressful to the cats.)



- **Back Door** - One of the most important features in a trap is a back door that shuts like a guillotine. This is essential when handling a cat you cannot touch.



- **Transfer Cage** - Once you have caught a cat in a trap, leave her there. But if you must put her in a different cage, such as a holding cage, use a transfer cage with a matching guillotine door and conduct the transfer in a closed room.



- **Isolator (aka catacomb or trap divider)** – This looks like a large pick (or comb). The isolator is inserted into the top of a trap or cage to force the cat into a small portion of the cage for anesthesia. (This device can be used in place of a squeeze cage by your veterinarian.)



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- **Feral Cat Den (aka Feral Cat Handler)** - When you must hold a cat for several days for recovery from an injury or extensive surgery, the den provides a quiet hiding place. The den can be placed in a larger holding pen or large cage where the cat is being held, along with a litter box, food, and water. The cat enters the den by a porthole on the side that you easily slide shut once the cat is inside. You can then take the cat for cleaning, treatment, or transportation. A vertical sliding door makes it easy to transfer the cat to another cage or return the cat to the den for recovery after surgery.



- **Drop Traps** - If you are dealing with a particularly hard-to-trap cat, you may want to consider building a drop trap. Drop traps allow you to catch a cat without having to force it into a confined space. These traps are generally large, mesh covered squares that, when triggered by you with a rope, fall down over the cat. All drop traps allow you to easily transfer the cat from the drop trap to a regular humane trap. Using a drop trap is often a last resort, because it either requires you to build your own or find one to use. Most drop traps are cumbersome enough to require the help of another trapper.

In addition to traps, you will need a few essentials:

- Bait for traps: Several large pop-top cans of tuna, mackerel, sardines or other smelly bait, preferably oil packed (if you don't bring pop-top cans, be sure to bring a can opener)
- Plastic forks or spoons (to scoop out the bait)
- Newspapers, which will be used to line the bottom of the traps
- Tape to hold newspaper to trap floor, if necessary (especially for windy days), and the labels to traps
- Trap covers: Enough big beach size towels, blankets, or sheets to fully cover the trap after cats are caught
- Small food storage container (big enough to hold open cans of tuna still in use, to prevent spillage)
- Dry and canned cat food and water (to leave after trapping for cats not trapped)
- Box of baggies (for tuna lids, used plastic silverware, etc.)
- A roll of paper towels
- One pair of thick gloves per trapper (wear these for your safety while carrying cats in traps)
- Antibacterial hand wipes, baby wipes, or antibacterial gel (for cleaning yourself, the traps, and any messes)
- Tools such as pliers and some WD-40 for traps that might not work properly
- First-Aid kit
- Cardboard, large plastic trash bags, or towels to line the inside of your vehicle. Puppy pads also work well, should there be accidents.
- Binoculars and camera
- Flashlight
- Drinking water and snacks (for you)
- Appropriate weather-related clothing and practical shoes