

## **Tips for Trapping and Safe-Handling of Hard-To-Trap Cats**

### **Time to trap**

- Trap when cats normally expect food and are hungry.
- Early evening, before it is too dark, or just after dark is often a good time.
- Trap when few people are around (not feasible if area has lots of night activity).

### **Places to trap**

- Where they usually find eat.
- Nearby places where they rest.
- Some may roam 1/10 to 2/10s of a mile (not a scientific measurement) but try to stay within ten to twenty feet of their usual place to eat.
- Set traps beyond that to trap roaming cats from nearby colonies.
- Ask yourself: if I were a small, shy, secretive animal, where would I hide? Then try those areas as well.

### **Size of traps and trigger mechanism**

- A standard size Have-a-Heart trap works well (humane, will not harm cats, and easily transported).
- If cat will only enter front part of trap, try larger trap. (These reduce number of cats you can transport, but worth trying.)
- If cat will enter trap but not step on trigger plate, rig trap to close manually. Run twine through bottom or end of trap, tying this to some part of “trigger” that causes trap door to slam shut. Standard Have-a-Heart traps have long rod at top of

trap, running from front of trap to near back. At back, a link chain descends from long rod and is connected to trigger mechanism. Tie twine to link chain. Then unwind enough twine to conceal yourself several feet away. When cat enters -- after its hindquarters are in the trap -- pull twine, causing door to slam shut. Be patient. Don't pull too soon. If cat realizes trap is dangerous, it may not enter another time. Cats can react within a fraction of a second and are incredibly fast and powerful.

- Use rectangular pet carrier or cardboard box as feeding station. When they are used to eating inside, place trap inside or set it beside the station and cover the new “station” with a towel. This may take a few weeks, perhaps more. Be patient. You can close the door on them if they trot right in as you are standing there. Otherwise, you'll have to rig some way to securely and quickly close door on them.

### **Appearance of traps and stability**

- If cat won't enter trap, try varying trap's appearance. Drape a towel over it. They then see small dark tunnel instead of wire grids. Try different colors, light and dark.
- Conceal trap in leaves of shrubs or camouflage in other ways
- Make sure trap is stable, won't tilt.

### **Foods**

- Many are trapped using smelly food: Friskies, sardines, tuna fish, Jack Mackerel, fried chicken, or aromatic food from nearby fast food place. Use fresh food, not spoiled.
- Try their customary food, even if it's dry kibble.

### **Other things you can change**

- Cats can recognize you, your voice, your smell, your walk, a particular item you carry (sack that contains food), and your car. If you have repeatedly tried to trap a cat, stop trapping for awhile.
- Have a friend drop you off so your car is not seen or heard.
- If a mother cat is trap-wary, do not place trap within her view. You can set trap away from her, perhaps trap kittens, while mother waits at usual place.

### **How long to halt food**

- Withhold food at least 24 hours before trapping to interest cats in trap food. Some people withhold food 48 hours for a hard-to-trap cat. (Use sense when trying to trap kittens.)
- When captured and in cage, take their needs into consideration. Young kittens need food every few hours. They can have food up to four hours before surgery. For adult cats, halt food at 10 p.m. or midnight of the night before they are spayed/neutered. Same with water.

### **Time and patience required**

- Be realistic. Just as human beings differ from one another, cats differ in intelligence, experience and wariness. No two are alike. Trapping can stretch from a night or two, a few weeks, a few months, to a few years for a truly hard-to-trap cat. Your needs and schedule may vary, as may the environment and weather and the cat's abilities and needs. Think of this as putting together an intricate jigsaw puzzle or as creating a ballet or symphony. No one expects you to do this overnight or in a week

or a month. Be patient. Be adaptable, as the cats are adaptable. Observe and learn from what you see and from what you hear from other volunteers. You will gain experience and develop your own cherished principles for successful trapping.

### **Think ahead: Other things to do and Safety Considerations**

- Never take your attention off the trap and the cat, even if you want to converse with someone. The door easily flips open if the trap turns over, allowing the cat to escape. This is terrible. It risks the cat's life when away from its home territory and unaware of food, water or area predators or dangers. It can also be dangerous to you if that occurs in a vehicle. Trapping is only the first step; you must maintain cat safely in trap.

- Binoculars help you see at distance.  
- Flashlights let you to examine trapped cats to see whether an ear has been tipped or notched. Release cats whose ears have already been tipped. (Vets are supposed to take the top 3/8s of an inch off the top of one ear, although this can be very hard to see. If unsure whether an ear was altered by vet or by cat fight, take the cat to the clinic and let vet make that call.)

- Take paper and pen; make a map of where you trapped each animal so you can return each to place where trapped.

- Place your name, phone number and address on trap. Jot reminder to yourself on label about location where trapped.

- Drape a towel or other covering (newspaper with a slit for the handle) over live trap. This allows cat to feel hidden and

safe, making it less likely to injure itself trying to escape. (Towels are best protection in cold weather or wind.)

- Avoid all conduct and noise that threatens or intimidates the cat.

- Do not stare into a cat's eyes; a direct stare is a look of aggression in the animal kingdom. What you think is comforting may terrify the cat.

- If cat is not used to your voice, be quiet. Your voice may frighten cat.

- Do not play radio loudly, or much at all, while driving cat.

- Do not put newspaper or "flooring" in trap bottom. Some clinics place traps on blocks, lifting them off floor so feces and urine fall through trap wires.

- Do not open trap or try to stroke feral cat or transfer it to another carrier.

- Do not poke fingers into trap. If bitten or scratched, you may have to have a rabies shot or go to a doctor or medical center for treatment for a painful bite and infection of the wound. Consult a physician about all injuries, no matter how slight you may think they are.

- If you are injured, hospitals and doctors are required by law to notify Animal Control. Officers will often demand custody of the animal. They will usually quarantine it for at least ten days. This creates an additional source of terror for the caged feral cat that is now confined in a strange place, with strange noises and has lost its accustomed freedom of movement. All of this can be avoided if you treat the cat with respect.

- Do not risk your safety or the cat's safety by trying to treat it as you think a tame cat should be treated. A feral cat is not socialized to human presence. It should be treated with thoughtful respect and not be approached in a manner that is intrusive, no matter how loving or kind you may feel. Being respectful of the cat's space and privacy is the kindest thing you can do to show you care. All physical handling and up-close-work should be done by trained professionals, veterinarians and vet techs.

- When housing a cat overnight, be especially mindful of its safety and welfare. Do not leave trap unprotected or outdoors where cat is exposed to rain, wind, predators that may terrify it, or humans who may release or steal it. There are people, hopefully few in number, who will harm vulnerable animals so always protect the cat. Keep the cat in a safe, enclosed area, preferably locked.

- Do not leave cat in cold or freezing room, for example, on cold cement in freezing weather with just a towel over it. The cold will travel up into the wire cage. Insulate the floor. You can put a plastic garbage sack on the floor, and newspaper on top of that. Then set the trap on top of that covering. This will both create some insulation and keep the cement or floor clean. If you can do more by putting down towels or other materials to protect the cat from losing its body heat, that is even better.