

# HUMANE TRAPPING INSTRUCTIONS FOR FERAL CATS

## Cache Humane Society

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The following guidelines have been gathered from Alley Cat Allies (Allycat.org), No More Homeless Pets in Utah (UtahPets.org) and Community Animal Welfare Society (CAWS.org)

### What is Trap, Neuter , Return (TNR)?

TNR is a humane, non-lethal approach to feral cat population control. It is a comprehensive management plan where healthy feral (wild) cats are sterilized, vaccinated and returned to their habitat where they are provided long-term care.

It is perfectly normal to feel hesitant at first about trapping - but PLEASE don't put off our TNR efforts! It does get easier and easier, and when you see your happy, healthy, STERILE colony you'll know it was WELL WORTH THE EFFORT!

Each cat will have a tiny tip of its ear removed (while under anesthesia) to indicate it is an altered feral cat. This does not hurt the cat and is very important! The ear-tip proves to municipal shelters and/or property owners that the cats are indeed altered through TNR. Remember, a tipped ear may save a feral cat's life!

### 1. What to do before you trap

- a) Plan ahead! Establish a routine feeding schedule and acclimate your cats to the trap. Padlock the trap open so you are certain the trap will not accidentally trigger. Put generous amounts of treats in the trap at the same time of day you eventually intend to trap. The cats will get used to going in and out of the trap, which will make your trapping day much easier!
- b) NEVER leave a trap unattended unless it is locked to a secure object and locked open - not set for trapping. Use a padlock to lock the trap door open rather than wire or string. This will ensure that a cat or person cannot undo the tie and let the trap close. Even if you think the trap is in a "safe" location, it is important to secure it from theft. If someone steals a trap, they probably do not intend to use it for humane purposes and you will be financially responsible to replace the trap.
- c) Talk to neighbors and property owners. It is very important to talk to persons who might loose pet cats. You will most-likely find both supportive and non-supportive comments regarding your TNR efforts. Many times supporters will lend a hand and you will also have the opportunity to address the concerns of the others. It is imperative that you address their concerns to ensure your cats' future safety.
- d) Call the Cache Humane Society and set up an appointment for the cats you intend to trap. Once an appointment is made trap the cats no longer than 24 hours in advance. Make sure to contact the Humane Society and alert them if you are unsuccessful in trapping and are unable to keep your appointment. It is very important to minimize the possibility of cancelling an appointment. On the other hand, if you trap more cats than you have appointments for do not release the cat(s). We will do our best to accommodate additional cats. NOTE: It is very difficult to re-trap cats!

### 2. Time to Trap ... now what?

Just remember that when a trap goes off a cat will often panic a bit. As you approach the cat may struggle even more. Do not worry, this is normal! Quickly and quietly go to the trap and cover the entire trap so the cat cannot see. This will calm the cat considerably. Remove the trap from the area immediately. This step is very important not only to protect the cat but also to ensure other cats do not see the cat thrashing around and become frightened. Place the trap in a protected, preferably temperature-controlled environment.

NOTE: NEVER set an uncovered trap unless you are nearby so that you can immediately cover the entire trap when a cat has been trapped. You must be far enough away not to frighten the cats but close enough to monitor the situation.

DON'T FORGET: as soon as you see any new cats to Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) do so as soon as possible. Simply follow these instructions again so as to prevent and pregnancies or unwanted kittens. The more you do it, the easier it will become!

- 1) This is a typical brown trap. Even if your trap is slightly different from this, the directions will still be the same. Make sure your trap is clean and hosed down to remove large debris. Then spray the entire trap with a dilute bleach solution (1:32) to kill any bacteria and viruses on the trap. Do this every time you store the trap and reuse it or if you're trapping in a different location.
- 2) Fold a stack of clean newspaper so it will lay flat inside the trap from front to back. Use several layers of paper to protect the cat's toes. (NOTE: If you catch a cat you've already trapped simply release him. But you must remove the torn paper and start over at this step, relining the trap properly and follow the rest of the instructions each time.)
- 3) This trap has an easy-open back door. Open this door and slide the paper in so that the flat, smooth side is facing up. This will hide the trap mechanism from the cat and protect its toes from the wire below.
- 4) Place a large spoonful of the bait at the very back, center of the trap. You'll also need to use a trail of 2-3 pea-sized drops of your bait at the front of the trap.
- 5) Now your trap is ready to be set! You have two basic options: to set the trap completely covered or, if your cats are fearful of a cover, you can set your trap completely open, uncovered. **\*\*IMPORTANT: NEVER set an uncovered trap unless you are nearby so that you can immediately cover the entire trap when the cat has been trapped.**
- 6) If you're covering the trap, simply set the front door open (see left picture). Now use a CLEAN, BLEACHED, SCENTLESS cover that covers both sides, front and back completely (see right pictures). The cat shouldn't be able to see outside once it's trapped. This will prevent many injuries to the cat's feet and face. **\*\*NOTE: If a cat is scared to go into your traps it may be from a weird smell - on the trap or cover. Consistent cleaning with unscented soaps and bleach is important! Also see: "Trapping Tips" below.**
- 7) Be sure to leave a little extra fabric over the door so that as soon as the trap is set off it will cover the door completely. Once you've caught a cat, don't forget to check for an ear-tip. Release any ear-tipped cats (unless your plan is to re-vaccinate your colony.) If the cat doesn't have an ear-tip, cover him up and place the covered trap in a secure (preferably temperature-controlled) environment until your appointment the next day. Make sure the cat is safe from overheating or freezing, predators, ants and people.

Repeat these steps until you've caught every last one! Leaving one unaltered male isn't advisable. All it takes is one unaltered female to show up and get pregnant! Then you'll be back to step 1 - except this time with even more cats and kittens! So don't stop until you've sterilized every single one.

### 3. Trapping Tips

Often what works for one cat won't work for others. A colony can require various methods to successfully trap every cat!

- Establish the feeding routine in a padlocked open trap as outlined in step 1. If you do not have a trap available use a garbage can tipped over on its side.
- Do not leave food out overnight. If you do, you may be feeding cats you don't know exist because they only appear in the middle of the night. **\*\*You will also attract other nocturnal wildlife! (This endangers your colony as well as the wildlife, drawing unwanted attention from neighbors, who may or may not be angry at the situation.)**
- Place bait in the front of a padlocked open trap. Then everyday move bait further back in trap.
- After bleaching traps, wash in Dr Bonner's lavender soap to get rid of the bleach smell.
- Roll bleached traps in catnip to get rid of bleach and human smells.
- Cover the treadle with a dishtowel to disguise it.
- Tightly cover back and sides of trap, tucking towel under trap so cat can't reach in and grab bait from outside the trap.
- Don't cover the trap at all! **\*\*Covering the trap is usually recommended but sometimes the reverse works. Always closely watch an uncovered trap! Cover immediately after cat has been trapped.**
- Use smelly bait like mackerel or warm chicken (no bones!)
- In winter months use hand-warmers under your bait dish. The heat keeps the bait warm and smelly.
- Hang bait from the top of the trap rather than putting in a dish on the bottom of the trap.
- Try catnip as bait.
- Place open can of cat food in a padlocked closed trap for one day, do not feed cats. Next day throw away the open, used can, this time setting trap with fresh bait.
- If smelly bait doesn't work, use regular dry cat food you typically feed the cats.
- Withhold food for 24-48 hours prior to trapping.

- Trying to trap a newcomer but other already-fixed cats keep entering the trap? Place plates of bait out for the "regulars" and watch closely. If the cat you want to trap comes close use a squirt bottle to scare him off. After the regulars are very full, then set your trap - or try the manual trigger method.
- For small or young cats that you see step on the treadle but don't set it off, weigh-down treadle using a washer, flat smooth rocks or a can of unopened cat food to add weight to the treadle. Also, check to make sure you have "hair-triggered" the trap when setting, placing the bar as close to the trigger position as possible. Spray olive oil on trap mechanisms, to make them extra slippery.
- Manual trigger method: Manually set trap by tying a string to a pvc pipe or piece of wood the same height as the height of the door opening. Prop open the door with pipe or wood, hold string taught a few yards away, wait for cat(s) to enter and pull the string HARD. Try this method up to forty yards away. Be sure to test before attempting! This is a great way to catch 3 or 4 kittens all at once. Try using lots of bait at once and wait for multiple kittens to go in at once before pulling string. **\*\*Don't trap multiple adult cats** this way as adults can injure one another if trapped together.
- You can often use previously trapped kittens to lure the mother cat into a trap and vice-versa. Place the trapped animal, still in its trap against the back door of another set trap. Use a sheet to cover both traps, luring the un-trapped family member into the set trap.

#### 4. Important Safety Information

- a. Do not try to open the trap or transfer the cat into a carrier. It is important to maintain a "hands off" policy when dealing with feral cats. They are often frightened of humans and might claw or bite out of fear. Transferring also increases the risk of the cat escaping - cats can be extremely difficult to trap a second time! Check out [www.animal-traps.com](http://www.animal-traps.com) for more information on transfer cages and other feral cat equipment.
- b. A cat should NEVER spend more than 24-hours in a trap before surgery. Take the cat (in the covered trap) to a quiet, safe and warm indoor location until your appointment at the Cache Humane Society. The safest thing to do is bring the trapped cat indoors. To protect your floors try using a large piece of plastic along with a few layers of newspaper. Do not let other animals have access to the cat. You can slide open the back door to put a shallow dish of water for the cat. A jar lid works nicely! Do not open the door more than an inch. Some ferals, trying to escape, will charge the door so be sure not to open the door too wide or you or the cat could become injured or the cat may escape. Make sure you latch the back door. Nervous cats may not drink the water you provide; however, it is very important that they don't become dehydrated.
- c. Following surgery keep the cat in a safe and warm indoor location. Be sure to keep the cat in the trap! You should also bring a clean towel for the clinic staff to place in the trap following surgery. While the cat is recovering you can also provide fresh food and water (in shallow dishes). If the cat charges or you're nervous to open the trap door, simply spoon some soft food in through the metal grating, this provides enough moisture for an overnight stay.
- d. Ensure the cat is bright-eyed before releasing. If you find the cat is still groggy the next morning or you notice bleeding contact the Cache Humane Society immediately, before you release him/her. These complications are rare; however, if the cat is a pregnant female, the weather is below freezing or the cat needs additional care you may need to hold the cat for a longer period of time. The best information on fostering a feral cat can be found on the Neighborhood Cats website: <http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/info/fostering.htm>. You can foster a feral cat - totally hands-off! Fostering ferals does take a proper set-up so do not attempt to transfer a feral cat before reading this important information.
- e. Release the cat back to the same area where it was living before - do not release the cat at another location. When releasing the cat, face the door of the trap in the direction you want the cat to run. Uncover the rear area of the trap and pull open the rear door. Be careful not to release the cat close to a busy road or too close to a fence or structure it might be inclined to climb. Give it a clear and safe path for its "escape". You should wear gloves and protective clothing (but the cat will most-likely run forward and not back!)
- f. If you are concerned that a cat cannot return to its home territory following TNR you must research relocation tactics before trying to relocate the cat. If you simply release a cat into an area it is not familiar with it will most-likely become a victim of traffic, inclement weather, inhumane humans or slowly starve.

#### 5. A Note about Pregnant and Lactating Cats

Many cats, even if they are noticeably pregnant, can still be safely spayed. Yes, this does require aborting the unborn kittens. This is certainly not something anyone wants to do; however, recognizing the risks to feral kittens living outdoors and knowing how many cute, cuddly, tame kittens are being euthanized every year in local shelters, we believe spaying is the best course of action in dealing with pregnant cats. You must also realize that every time you release a trapped cat, you lessen your chances of re-trapping that cat. If you decide to contain a pregnant feral cat in a

cage until she has given birth and weaned the kittens and then adopt-out. This takes considerable set-up and maintenance work.

## 6. Keeping Cats Warm in the Winter

Follow these directions for easy to make cat shelters!

- ◆ Large Styrofoam coolers make great feral cat shelters! Many people ask their veterinarian to save the large coolers their vaccines are shipped in because they are extra thick and are perfect outdoor cat houses. Hospitals, fish markets and even grocery stores may donate large coolers to you. Some farm stores sell extra large coolers manufactured for deer meat storage. If the coolers are less than 1 1/2 inches thick, be sure to cover the box with several layers of bubble wrap and/or insulation. When using insulation be certain that it is the kind that has paper on both sides and make sure NO fibers are exposed when your shelter is completed.
- ◆ To begin, turn cooler upside down and cut an entrance hole (sometimes two) on one side of the shelter (or sides). Place entrance hole 1-2 inches above the line where the lid meets the cooler body and place it at one end of the longer side of the cooler. Now glue the cooler lid shut. Glue Styrofoam together using sturdy "Liquid Nails" or foam insulation product "Great Stuff." Reinforce seam with duct tape. Two entrance holes are recommended only if the shelter is in an area where predators may pose a threat to the cats.
- ◆ Next, wrap the shelter with the thickest black plastic sheeting you can find. You can purchase this at any home improvement or garden store. Tape all seams with duct tape or similar that withstands cold temps and water. Be generous with your duct tape and "T" the corners because duct tape does lose some of its adhesive quality in the wet and cold Utah winter. After wrapping, locate your door hole and cut the plastic using a box cutter and duct tape around the door.
- ◆ Make the Most of your Winter Shelter: Duct-tape a curtain of bubble wrap over the door hole(s). Use two layers. Cut the bubble wrap to make fringes (leave the top few inches solid and cut fringe vertically.) Now attach your curtain over the door(s)!
- ◆ If your winter shelter is exposed to the elements it is best to put a piece of plywood over the top of the shelter as well as another piece of wood (or similar material) at a slat over the doorway. You may also need to place the shelter on a pallet, lifting it above the ground. Another option is to make an igloo-type tunnel over the doorway using a smaller cooler or other material. **\*\*It is important to do what you can to keep moisture OUT!**
- ◆ If the shelter is to be placed outside, hardwood chips (not cedar) or dry, easily available straw make great stuffing inside the shelter. They absorb moisture and keep the cats very warm. NOTE: Cloth can get wet and freeze, making the shelter cold and useless. If the shelter is in a garage or other dry area, towels or kitty beds can also work very well. You can buy fleece or fake sheepskin at fabric stores and cut to the shape of the cooler/house. Check your shelter frequently to ensure it is staying dry!
- ◆ When you first use the shelter, try adding some catnip to the straw to get your cats interested. Also, if you have bubble wrap fringe you may want to tack it up (for a little while) so the cat can easily see the entrance. Placing the shelter on a pallet keeps it off the cold ground but is not necessary. In exposed areas it is very helpful to weigh-down the shelter with bricks or similar.
- ◆ If the shelter is in a shared area it's important to make a laminated sign that says something like: "This shelter is part of a humane Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) program for feral and stray cats, please do not remove. If you have questions, please ca . . ." Always get permission from property owners before placing a shelter on property other than your own!

## 7. Miscellaneous

Need financial assistance? If you need financial assistance for spay or neuter call 435-792-3920 or visit [www.cachehumane.org](http://www.cachehumane.org). The Cache Humane Society in conjunction with No More Homeless Pets in Utah's Feral Fix program. This program offers feral cat surgeries at considerably reduced rates for caregivers who otherwise could not afford the surgery for their feral cat colony. Some restrictions do apply so please call for more information.