

# HUMANE TRAPPING INSTRUCTIONS



While humane, being trapped and undergoing surgery can be very stressful for feral cats. Following these instructions is the best way to provide the least traumatic experience for the cats in your care.

These instructions assume that trappers are using traps from the [Tomahawk Live Trap Company](#). Specifics regarding the traps may be slightly different if you are using another type of trap. NOTE: The Feral Cat Coalition **DOES NOT accept Harbor Freight Traps!** They often collapse with cats inside and provide them with an easy escape. These traps may also have sharp metal edges, which can severely cut cats' feet.

**You must ALWAYS make spay/neuter reservations BEFORE trapping.** NEVER trap a cat BEFORE securing a spay/neuter appointment. If you will be taking a cat to a private veterinarian, make sure he or she is experienced with feral cats. He/she should anesthetize the cat through the trap and use stitches that will not need removal.

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## 1. PREPARATION FOR TRAPPING

If possible, get the cats used to being fed at the same place and time of day; it is this area where you will be trapping. You may try “**trap training**,” by leaving the trap **unset** (use twist ties or zip ties to hold trap door open) and covered with a large towel, and begin feeding cats **inside** the trap. Feed only inside the trap. Cats will not have any incentive to enter the trap if there is food available outside it. Start by putting the food in front of the trap and working your way back each day during routine feeding so that the animal will get used to seeing and smelling the trap in the area. Remember to remove ties on the night of trapping. **Don't feed the cats the day/night before you are going to trap** so the cats will be very hungry, thereby increasing the chances of them finding your bait irresistible and walking into the traps! Be sure to notify others who may feed the cats to withhold food before the trapping.

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 older than 4 months of age should not eat for 12 hours prior to surgery. Kittens under 4 months of age should be fed one teaspoon of wet food at 6:00 a.m. on the morning of surgery.**

Prepare the area where you will be holding the cats before and after surgery. A garage or other sheltered, protected area is best. Lay newspapers on top of plastic, a tarp, or an old shower curtain, to catch any waste that may fall from the traps. Use wood blocks to elevate the traps. This allows waste to fall through the wire away from the cats.

Prepare the vehicle you will use to transport the cats. Use plastic to protect your vehicle, as well as newspaper or some other absorbent material. Cats should **NEVER** be transported in the open bed of a truck or in a closed, unventilated car trunk.

Plan the 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; cats learn very quickly.

If young kittens are involved, remember that they should not be weaned from their mother before 4 weeks of age. If you plan to trap a lactating female, you may want to wait until you have located the kittens, and have determined that they are old enough to wean. If you wish to tame and foster the kittens for adoption, they should be taken from the mother at 4-6 weeks of age. Waiting longer than six weeks makes taming more difficult.

## **2. SETTING THE TRAPS**

Plan to **set traps just before or at the cats' normal feeding time**. Dusk is usually the best time to set traps, as this is the time of day when cats become active.

**Don't trap in the rain or the heat of day without adequate protection** for the traps. Trapped cats are vulnerable, and can drown during storms or suffer from heatstroke in the sun. Use common sense.

**Fold a piece of newspaper lengthwise to line the bottom of the trap, and cover the trip plate**. Cats don't like walking on the wire surface, and the paper helps keep their feet from going through the wire. 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. Many people find it is helpful to **ONLY** cover the trip plate.

**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 a trap if it wobbles. If trapping in a public area, try to place traps where they will not be noticed by passersby (who may not understand that you are not trying to harm the cat). If necessary, leave a note on each trap explaining the purpose of trapping, and provide a phone number where you can be reached during trapping. Bushes are often good places to trap, as foliage provides camouflage for both traps and cats.

**Use smelly food to bait the trap**. We find that **canned mackerel** (available in the canned fish section of grocery stores, not in the pet food section) is very effective and relatively inexpensive. It is best not to put any bowls inside the trap to hold food.

**Soak a small scrap of newspaper** (2-3 inches by 3-4 inches) **in the mackerel 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 being inaccessible 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 hard to get, so that the cat has to go as far as possible into the trap, and has to work at getting it long enough to trip the trap. Some cats are good at getting in and out of traps without getting caught. Don't make getting the food too easy for them.

**After baiting the trap, open the trap door** by pushing the top of the door in and pulling the bottom of the door upward. There is a **small hook attached to the right side of the trap top which hooks onto a tiny metal cylinder on the right side of the door**. **The hook holds the door in an open position and raises the trip plate**. When the cat steps on the plate, the hook will release the door and close the trap.

**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, keeping the top, sides and back of the trap covered**. The towel will help camouflage the trap, as well as calm the cat after it is caught.

## **3. WAITING FOR SUCCESS**

**Never leave traps unattended in an unprotected area**, but don't hang around within sight of cats or you will scare them away. A trapped animal is vulnerable; passersby may release the cat or steal the trap. **Wait quietly in an area where you can see the traps without disturbing the cats**. Check traps every 15 minutes or so. From a distance, you can often hear

the traps trip and see the cloth covers droop slightly over the openings. 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. Be sure to dispose of any food left on the ground when you pick up the trap. You don't want to litter and/or spoil any appetites.

Take the trapped cat to a quiet area, away from the other traps. Carefully lift the cover and check for signs that you have the correct animal and not a pet or previously-altered feral. FCC "tips" the right ear of every animal it sterilizes to distinguish it from those that are unaltered. If you realize you have captured a lactating female, check the area for kittens. Newly-born kittens may not survive without their mothers. If you are unable to locate her kittens, remember that a lactating mother must be released 10-12 hours after surgery in order to care for and nurse her kittens. **Cover the cat back up as soon as possible. If left uncovered, the animal may panic and hurt itself thrashing around inside the trap. Be quiet and gentle when moving traps; the wild animal inside will be very frightened.**

There is always a chance that you will catch another species of wild animal or an unintended cat. If the unintended cat is an intact feral, **DO NOT RELEASE IT**. Call your FCC contact to arrange spay/neuter for it. If the cat is already fixed or you have caught another species, simply release the animal quietly in the manner outlined in the releasing procedures.

#### **4. HOLDING PROCEDURES**

After you have finished trapping, you will need to house the cats overnight. Because cats must fast for 12 hours prior to surgery, trapping should never be done on the morning of the spay/neuter appointment unless you have made special arrangements with a particular vet to perform surgery late in the day.

Place cats in the prepared, protected area. Do not feed. Place a small bowl of water in the trap by opening the trap door a few inches, sliding the bowl inside, and slowly letting the trap's door push it the rest of the way in. Use a bowl that can't be tipped easily. An empty canned cat food or tuna can works well. Don't open the door too widely or the cat may escape. If it can be done safely, remove the bowl before transporting the cat to its spay/neuter appointment.

**Keep cats covered and check them periodically.** They will probably be very quiet as long as they are covered. Meowing may indicate that a cat is tame. Keep this in mind if a cat's appointment is with one of FCC's weekly vets; some vets will charge full price for surgery if he or she believes a cat is tame. Do not stick fingers in the trap or allow children or pets near the traps. Feral cats are wild animals that will scratch and bite when scared. **ALL ANIMAL BITES ARE SERIOUS! IF YOU ARE BITTEN, SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION AND DO NOT RELEASE THE CAT; IT MUST BE QUARANTINED. CALL YOUR FCC POINT OF CONTACT FOR QUARANTINE INSTRUCTIONS.**

**Wash and change clothes after handling feral cats as a precaution against spreading any contagious diseases they may carry.**

Always have feral kittens examined by a vet, and isolate them from your pets. Some deadly diseases can incubate without symptoms. Check with your veterinarian, and use caution.

#### **5. RELEASING THE CATS**

If a cat does not seem to be recovering well from surgery, consider having it examined by a vet before release. Call your FCC contact to make an appointment to be seen by a vet. When cats are ready for release, return to the area in which they were captured and release them there. **DO NOT relocate cats!** Unless cats are in serious danger of being harmed, relocation is **NEVER** recommended. In unfamiliar locations, relocated cats have **EXTREMELY** low rates of survival. They may be chased away from possible sources of food by other cats in the area, or be killed by predators or vehicles. If you feel that relocation is the only option for cats you have trapped, call your FCC contact for advice about proper relocation protocol, such as rules that relocated cats must stay indoors for at least six weeks after relocation, and that they must be slowly introduced to the new location and feeding station. If cats are being harmed or are in danger of being harmed, you should notify your local Animal Control agency **Release cats the day after surgery** after offering a small amount of food. If a female **cat has been nursing kittens younger than 2 weeks old, release her 10 hours after surgery** so that she may continue nursing as soon as possible.

If the attending veterinarian has indicated that the cat has a serious, untreatable medical condition that would make it inhumane to release it back to its colony, he or she may opt to euthanize. Untreated illness can often result in suffering, and slow, painful death.

**Make sure the place you choose for release is safe for the cat** and does not encourage the cat to run into danger (like a busy street) to get away. Keep the trap covered until you are ready to release. When ready, **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 the cat is confused, tilt the trap so the back is slightly raised and tap on the back of the trap to encourage it to leave. **Never put your hand in the trap!** If the animal refuses to vacate the trap, prop the door open with a stick and leave it open until the cat leaves.

After releasing the cats, clean traps and disinfect them with bleach. **Never store traps in the "set" position (door open); animals may wander into un-baited traps, become trapped, and starve to death.**

## 6. HELPFUL HINTS

**Bring a flashlight with you if trapping at night.** It will come in handy for checking traps from a distance and may help avoid a twisted ankle.

**Bring a cap for the top of the can of mackerel.** Mackerel is oily and smelly; you may want to wear latex gloves and bring a re-sealable plastic bag for storage. Don't forget a fork or spoon, as well as a can opener, if needed.

**When attempting to capture female cats caring for litters of kittens, you may trap the kittens first and place them in a covered trap carrier behind the trap intended for the mother cat; she will be attracted to the trap by the sound of her kittens.** Similarly, kittens will be easier to trap if the previously captured mother is in a trap. **Never place the "bait" animal inside the trap or anywhere where it could be harmed by the trapped animal.** Even mother cats can inadvertently hurt their kittens when frightened. Be careful not to let the "bait" animal escape.

If you **need to trap a specific cat**, one that is pregnant, ill or injured, you may borrow a drop trap or drop-door trap. Consult your FCC contact for further details.

Some kittens can be caught without a trap but are still too wild to be handled safely. Use a thick towel and/or work gloves to protect you from bites and scratches. For advice regarding the taming and/or fostering of feral or orphaned kittens, consult your veterinarian. You may also obtain information on these subjects from the Feral Cat Coalition's website at [www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com).

## TRAP MECHANICS

**Trap door:** the front of the trap where the cat will enter

**Sliding door:** the back door you will use to release the cat on the day after surgery. You will also use the back door to slide in cans of food and/or water. Some traps do not have a sliding door.

**Trip plate:** located  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way to the back of the trap, this is what cats must step on in order to trigger the trap to close.

**Center handle:** handle located on the top of the trap. Always lift trap by handle to avoid being bitten or scratched.

