



Safe Relocation of Feral Cats

Relocating a feral cat or colony of feral cats should be avoided at all costs, and only viewed as a last resort. Unless the cats' lives are threatened, the optimal place for them is where they currently live.

Cats are territorial animals and form strong bonds with the location they inhabit. A food source exists in the area and the cats are acclimated to local conditions. Relocating feral cats is a difficult, time-consuming, and challenging undertaking.

A far better course of action is to resolve, if possible, the problems that are forcing the cats out of their established home. Many solutions exist for common complaints stemming from cat behavior. Read about how to help the cats be good neighbors on our website at <http://www.alleycat.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=298>.

Only after you have exhausted all possibilities should you consider relocation. Moving a colony of feral cats—and convincing them to stay—is a complex process involving specific procedures, starting with finding a suitable new habitat or location, that must be followed without shortcuts if you want the cats to remain at the relocation site.

1. **Assess the colony.** Feral cats develop strong bonds with one another as well as with their established homes. When looking for a new location, try to find one that can take all of the cats. If this is not possible, cats with strong bonds to each other should be moved together. Cats will adjust to their new homes better and the move will be less traumatic if they have the security of one or more trusted companions.

Kittens and cats that are friendly to humans can be adopted into good homes, or sterilized and relocated with the rest of the colony depending on your available resources. Read our Socialized Cat Guide, including adoption techniques on our website at <http://www.alleycat.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=286>.

2. **Find a new home for the cats.** The colony's new home should be in a climate that they can adjust to easily. Do not move southern cats up north where they won't be used to the cold winters. The new home should be away from heavily trafficked areas, include shelter from inclement weather, and come with a new caregiver who understands the responsibilities of feeding, sheltering, and caring for the cats.

Barns, horse stables, and country homes with lots of land often make excellent homes for feral cats.



Other options include a backyard or alley. Ask everyone you know for leads on locations, and place notices or flyers in local newspapers and veterinarian offices, pet stores, coffee shops, hardware stores, feed mills, and farm supply depots. Place ads online for your area at www.craigslist.org or www.groups.yahoo.com. You may find it useful to use our sample Barn Cat Flyer on our website at <http://www.alleycat.org/NetCommunity/admin/Document.Doc?id=99>.

When you find a promising location, inspect the area carefully and talk to the prospective caregiver at length. Ensure that the new caregiver will provide daily food, water, and monitoring. Consider developing an adoption contract in which the new caregiver will commit to providing basic needs, including veterinary care, and to having any new cats who appear in the colony spayed or neutered and vaccinated.

Some things to consider:

- Avoid locating near busy roads.
- Ensure that the cats are properly introduced to the property's other animals. Dogs must be introduced slowly so the cats will not become frightened or be chased away. Cats and horses frequently get along well, once the cats adjust to a horse's size.
- Take into account wildlife in the area. Raccoons, foxes, and opossums typically get along with adult cats in their own fashion. Kittens, however, are at risk because they can be prey. Coyotes will prey on both cats and kittens. In areas with coyotes, the cats stand a better chance if they have access to a shed or similar structure with several small openings that they can run in for safety. You may also consider building a fenced area for the cats - find directions on our website at <http://www.alleycat.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=100>.

3. **Relocate the Cats.**

a) Trap the cats and safely transport them immediately, in covered traps, to their new home.

b) Upon arrival at the new location, the cats must be confined in pre-installed large cages for two to three weeks (an example of confinement cages at http://www.cdpets.com/enclosure_kits.php). Confinement allows the cats to adjust to the environment in safety and to accept it as their new home. If set free upon arrival, all cats will attempt to return to their former home and will likely become lost.

c) Alert the new caregiver that during the first day or two, the cats may try to find a way out. Most cats settle down in the cage when they realize that no harm will befall them.

d) While the cats are confined, they must have clean water, fresh food, and clean (or scooped) litter at least once, preferably twice, each day. Feeding cats canned food during confinement appears to help them accept their new home. The cats can then be fed dry food upon release; it is up to the new caregiver.

Details to keep in mind:

- Be skeptical if you are told the new location is escape-proof. Always install cages for the confinement period to ensure that the cats remain in their new home.
- Do not confine for longer than two to three weeks, or the cats may be traumatized and the relocation project will be jeopardized.
- If a cat escapes from the enclosure, the caregiver should set food and water out. This will encourage

the escapee to stay close. The new caregiver should sprinkle that particular cat's used litter (specifically feces) around the location. Since cats have a keen sense of smell, this will help lure the cat back to its territory. Cats often hide for a period of time, but usually stay on or near the premises.

4. **Follow up.** Plan to call or visit the new caregiver regularly to ensure that the cats are well cared for. You may be able to provide valuable support or advice. They may also serve as a contact for future relocations.

If you have relocated an entire colony, try to completely remove the food sources in the old location to discourage a new colony of feral cats from forming. But remember, because the original colony has been removed, new unsterilized cats are likely to move in.

An Alley Cat Allies survey of caregivers revealed that relocations were most likely to succeed when four main steps were followed:

- Several cats from the same colony were relocated together.
- Cats were confined in adequate climate for two to four weeks (Alley Cat Allies recommends no more than three weeks) in large cages inside sheds, barns, basements, or escape-proof shelters.
- Cats were fed canned food every day for a short period (two to six weeks) and then dry food.
- The new caregiver made frequent (minimum twice daily) verbal attempts to bond with the cats.

© 2010 Alley Cat Allies