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HUMANE OHIO

Humane Ohio operates a high quality, low-cost spay/neuter clinic. Our vision is a community without homeless pets where every resident has access to affordable spay/neuter.

SAFE RELOCATION OF FERAL CATS

The safest place for your companion cat is indoors, but the only environment suitable for feral/wild cats is usually outside. Feral cats that have gone through the Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) process and live in managed colonies with a volunteer caretaker – who provides food, water and shelter – can live healthy, content and long lives. Finding homes for feral cats is not a realistic option. Animal shelters rarely accept them because they cannot be touched by people and are thus “unadoptable.” If they do accept them, they are usually euthanized without a holding period.

Relocation of the cats should only be done as a last resort after you have exhausted all possibilities. 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. (Our fact sheet titled “helping neighbors and outdoor community cats co-exist” may be useful to you. It can be found at www.humaneohio.org – click on “Other Resources” and then “Fact/Help Sheets” – or ask our staff to provide a copy.)

Alley Cat Allies and Humane Ohio do NOT recommend relocation; it should only be done under extreme circumstances when the cats’ lives are in danger. Moving a colony of feral cats – and convincing them to stay – is a complex process involving specific procedures that start with finding a suitable new habitat or location, and must be followed without shortcuts if you want the cats to be safe and remain at the relocation site.

1. **Assess the colony.** Feral cats develop strong bonds with one another and 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 spayed/neutered and relocated with the rest of the colony depending on your available resources.

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, warehouses, greenhouses 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 supply stores, coffee shops, hardware stores, feed mills and farm supply depots. Place ads online for your area at www.craigslist.org and on social media. You may find it useful to use Alley Cat Allies’ barn cat flyer, which can be found at <https://www.alleycat.org/resources/barn-cat-flyer/>.

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.

SAFE RELOCATION OF FERAL CATS continued

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.

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. 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 or hit by cars.

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 2 – 3 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 outdoor community 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 2 – 4 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 (2 – 6 weeks) and then dry food.
- The new caregiver made frequent (minimum twice daily) verbal attempts to bond with the cats.

Thanks to Alley Cat Allies for providing all of the above information. Please visit www.alleycat.org or www.feralcat.com for even more information on feral cats and Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programs. Humane Ohio's staff can walk you through the TNR process and the process of becoming an outdoor community cat caretaker. Please contact us at 419-266-5607.