

Feral Cat Relocation

Relocating feral cats should be undertaken as a last resort after all other alternatives are exhausted. Because feral cats bond strongly to both territory and their caregiver, it is best to leave the cats where they live. Most often, there is no reason to remove them from their habitats. Ferals become well-adapted to their territory and can live safely and contentedly in alleyways, parking lots, vacant lots, backyards, and a host of other locations—urban, suburban, and rural. While there may be a few barns or sanctuaries that accept feral cats, in all cases the demand for space is much higher than what is available. Finally, relocating all or most of the cats in a colony can open up a void that allows unneutered cats to move into the area, starting the cycle all over again.

ALTERNATIVES TO RELOCATION

"I found a group of feral cats. Where can I take them?"

If you have found a colony of feral cats, it is best to have the cats altered, return them to where you found them, and provide them with food and water each day. Even if you choose not to provide ongoing care, you should still have them spayed and neutered and return them to their habitat.

"My neighbor is complaining and threatening to trap the ferals I care for."

First, be sure all the cats you care for are neutered—this prevents the causes of many neighbor complaints. Next, explain that Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR) is the most effective and humane way to reduce the population of feral cats. Explain that if they are trapped and taken to the animal control agency the cats will be killed and more cats—probably unneutered—will move back into the area starting the cycle all over again.

Talk with your neighbor and find out what her concerns are, then be creative and see if you can reach a compromise. If the cats are using your neighbor's yard as a litter box, set up sand-filled, covered litter boxes in your yard, or offer to periodically clean up her yard. Give your neighbor The SF/SPCA flyer "Keeping Cats Out of Your Yard." Consider installing a cat fence on either of your yards. For more information on advocating for feral cats, contact The SF/SPCA at (415) 554-3071.

"My colony is in a dangerous location/a location where construction will soon start."

Start immediately, and gradually move the cats to a safer area. Every few days, move the feeding location a little further away from the danger, and a little closer to where you want the new feeding site to be. The cats will follow. The longer you are able to extend the transition, the easier it will be for the cats. Keep feeding stations to a minimum and place them in secluded areas.

"Can I relocate a feral cat to my friend's colony in the park?"

No. You cannot relocate to an open, unmonitored space such as a park, parking lot, pier, etc. For relocation to be successful, the cat needs to be confined for an extended period and you cannot do that in an open space.

"I'm moving! What should I do with my feral cats?"

The answer depends on where you are moving and how many feral cats you have. In some cases, the best thing to do is find someone who will take over the care of your colony. It's good to plan ahead and start sharing duties with someone (or several people) even if you think you'll never move. Finding a new, responsible caregiver allows the cats to remain in their home territory even though they'll be losing their caregiver.

If you will have a backyard in your new home, another good option is to take the cats with you. With a little planning, safe transportation, and an appropriate destination, you can successfully relocate the cats with you.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL RELOCATION

If other alternatives fail and relocation becomes necessary, consider the following important tips.

Before you start

- Make sure all cats are spayed or neutered prior to relocation.
- Have a plan and a place to take the cats before you start trapping.

Items to have ready

- Humane trap(s)
- Cat carrier(s)
- A place to comfortably and safely confine the cats temporarily in their new location. A large cage, a cat condo, or a dog kennel can work well. Some people use a garden shed or a small room in their house. Just be sure the cat cannot escape.

Catching the cats

See The SF/SPCA "Humane Trapping" fact sheet.

Transportation

The cats can be transported in humane traps or in standard carriers. If you are driving, make sure the temperature is maintained at a comfortably cool level. Secure carriers in the vehicle by using seatbelts if possible. You may want to lightly cover the traps or carriers, but do not block air circulation. Do not leave food and water in the carriers, but do stop to offer water every few hours.

If you are flying, take the cat in the cabin with you rather than placing her in cargo. See The SF/SPCA article "Safe Airline Travel" for more information.

General relocation recommendations

- Relocate more than one cat from a colony, if possible.
- Feed on a regular schedule—preferably twice a day. Meals should include both wet and dry food. Rattle the food in a box or bowl each time you feed so the cat associates the sound with food. Give the cat treats occasionally as well.
- Cat(s) will need to be confined for approximately three weeks. Some people keep relocated cats confined for longer, but it is important to pay attention to the individual cat's comfort level. If you confine her for too long, she may run off once released.
- Cat(s) should be confined where they can see and smell their new surroundings (especially other cats, the caretaker, and the feeding location).
- Set the confinement cage/room up so that it is as clean and comfortable as possible. Be sure there is adequate air and light available.
- Talk to the cat and let him see and smell you several times a day—especially when you bring food.
- When you release the cat into her new yard, continue feeding on the same schedule as before.

- Once released, maintain access to the room or cage where the cat(s) were confined. Leave out bedding and litterbox for smell. Some people sprinkle the used litter around the yard.
- Consider erecting a cat fence, enclosure, or other barrier to prevent the cat(s) from leaving your yard.
- If the cat disappears, walk around the neighborhood and rattle dry food, calling to the cat. Continue leaving out food and canvassing the area. Don't give up.

SF/SPCA Resources

- Fact sheets including "The Care and Feeding of Feral Cats," "Humane Trapping," "Safe Airline Travel," "Post-Surgery Recovery Care," and more.
- Cat Fence-In System™ brochure.
- Feral Cat Video Series, including *Relocation*.
- Lifeline for Feral Cats (415) 554-3071. We can provide advice specific to your situation.
- The SF/SPCA Feral Fix Program provides free spay/neuter for San Francisco feral cats, no appointment necessary.