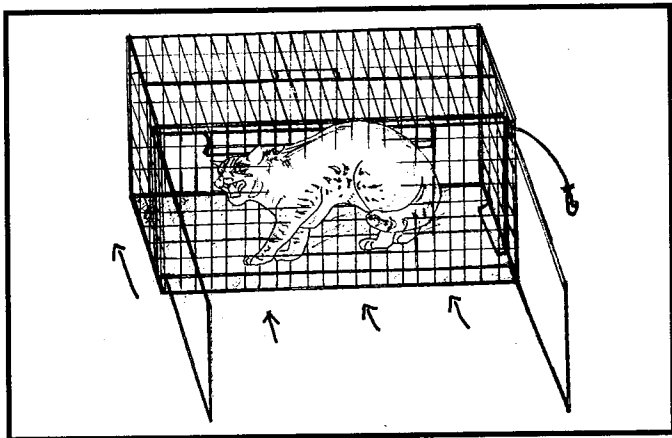


When trapping large colonies, do check with your veterinary surgeon first, as to how many cats can be dealt with in one operating session. Remember that if you trap a cat and release it for some reason, it is unlikely that you will be able to catch it again - cats become trap-shy very quickly, especially females!

There are three types of trap. An automatic, a manual and a multi-cat trap, which is usually operated manually. An automatic trap is relatively simple to operate. It has an end door that closes automatically when the cat steps on a trip plate. The disadvantages of an automatic trap are that it is impossible to be selective about which cat to catch and the 'clang' of the door banging shut can frighten off the more timid cats in the colony. However, a strip of padded adhesive around the sides of the door will deaden the 'clang'. The advantage is that any number of traps can be placed on site, allowing several cats to be caught in a relatively short time. The spring mechanism should always be tested before use and needs to be kept well oiled - there is nothing more infuriating than watching a cat enter a trap, eat the food, then back out nonchalantly without setting off the trip plate!

Sometimes it can be advantageous to use a manual trap. These are available commercially or can be constructed in wood by someone with basic joinery skills. Automatic traps can also be converted to use as a manual by drilling a small hole at the centre point in the bottom of the door and threading string - the door can then be held open and closed manually once a cat is inside the trap. Some cats seem to be less concerned about entering a wooden manual trap and some trappers feel their use is less traumatic for the cats, but it is very much a matter of personal choice. It is more time-consuming to use a manual trap but you can be selective about which cat to trap and that is helpful if you particularly want to catch a pregnant female as opposed to a young male that may be first to enter the trap. Never try to close the door until the cat is right inside, then close it with a swift, sure action - a cat will immediately sense any indecision or mistake and will bolt and be very wary of being caught a second time!



Multi-cat traps allow several cats to be caught at once. The disadvantages are that some cats may panic and begin to fight; they are also impossible to lift or move when several cats are inside; they are very useful for catching a mother cat with her kittens or a small group of cats that are feeding close together.

The first few cats in a colony are always the easiest to catch since you have the advantage of the element of surprise, so it is advisable to 'blitz' the colony and catch as many as you can first time round before the cats become trap-shy. Some male cats will enter a trap several times and appear to be quite dozy in this respect, enjoying the free meal. Females are not so dim!

Try to catch the pregnant females first - you can always round up the males at a later stage and the priority is to prevent any heavily pregnant females from giving birth. Some vets will terminate a pregnancy at a very late stage but the female may need a day or two to convalesce. A hospitalisation cage with an end door that aligns with the trap or crush cage will be invaluable as it will obviate any need to handle the cat during this time.

If you realise that you have trapped a lactating female, check the area for tiny kittens. If you decide to go ahead with spaying, this female must be released within hours so she can return to nurse her kittens, otherwise they will die. Nursing mothers will be attracted by the sound of their kittens if these are placed in a covered carrier just behind the trap. Similarly, kittens will be easier to trap if their mother is placed in

the carrier. Females in oestrus can be placed in a carrier to attract male cats that have been eluding the traps.

If you decide to foster the kittens so that they can be tamed and homed, the best results can be achieved by removing them from their mother when they are about five to six weeks of age. Taming kittens becomes progressively harder with age and almost impossible after eight weeks old - then it may be better if older kittens are neutered and returned to site.

Use strong smelling food such as pilchards, sardines or smoked mackerel to bait the trap. Do not put dishes of food in the trap as this will upset the balance of the trip plate. Place a trail of food leading into the trap to attract the cat. Only a very small amount of food is required which should be placed behind the trip plate then pressed down firmly on the floor as some cats become quite devious about hooking out food without actually stepping on the trip plate which operates the door. In very hot weather, it may be preferable to use dried cat biscuits, as flies can be a great nuisance.

Cats will not enter a trap if it wobbles so make sure traps are placed on firm flat ground. It may be necessary to disguise a trap by covering it with cardboard, newspaper, an old blanket or even to place it inside a bin liner. Never trap in rain or in hot weather without adequate protection for the trap. Cats are vulnerable in the traps and could drown during storms or suffer from heat-stroke in the sun. Cover traps with plastic sheeting if it is likely to rain but do not use thin sheets that will flap in the wind and frighten the cats off. A towel, blanket or cardboard will provide some protection from the sun.

If trapping in a public place, try to place traps where they will not attract too much attention by passers-by who may not understand that you are not trying to harm the cats. Never leave traps unattended but don't hang around too close to the traps either or you will frighten the cats off. Wait quietly in a car or nearby area where you can still see the traps without disturbing the cats. Remember, a trapped cat is vulnerable. Passers-by may be tempted to release or harm the cat or steal the trap so stay close at hand and check the traps every 15 minutes or so. You can often hear the traps 'trip' from a distance. As soon as a cat is trapped, cover the trap with a blanket and remove it from the area so the other cats are not 'spooked'. Left uncovered, the cat will panic and may become injured as it thrashes about in the trap. Cats will be frightened so try to minimise their stress. If you speak quietly to the cat, your tone of voice will help to reassure it. Transfer the cat to a crush cage, cover it with a blanket and arrange for neutering as soon as possible. When carrying a cat in a crush cage, remember to secure the end door to avoid the risk of the cage opening accidentally, allowing the cat to escape. Another trap can be set in the same spot. Be sure to dispose of any food left on the ground when you pick up the trap.

If the cat is to be kept overnight, line the bottom of the trap or crush cage with newspaper to soak up urine and provide a little comfort for the cat. Stressed cats may also vomit. Clean out traps after use as cats are fastidious and will not enter a heavily soiled trap.

Carry a torch for night work. It is useful to have a torch attached to a strap round your neck so that hands can be left free. Do not forget a tin opener and spoon or fork.

Always carry proof of your identity in case you are challenged for acting suspiciously! For personal safety, trapping is best undertaken in pairs. Always make sure that someone knows where you are. Do not take any avoidable risks and carry a fully-charged mobile phone so that you can summon help quickly should an emergency arise.

