

How to Trap Animals for Rescue or TNR

By Sherry Woodard

There are two reasons why you might want to learn how to humanely trap animals:

To rescue animals in danger. If you are rescuing animals in danger, you should be aware that they will require at least basic medical care and may need more extensive treatment. They may have diseases, injuries or major behavior challenges.

For trap/neuter/return (TNR). If you get involved in a TNR program for feral cats, you'll need to know how to successfully trap the cats to transport them to a veterinarian for spay/neuter surgery.



Before becoming involved in trapping animals, consider what you'll be getting into: You will be the guardian (either temporarily or permanently) of an animal who may not have the social skills for living in our human world. Once trapped, an unsocialized animal will most likely be terrified and might thrash about in the trap, trying to escape. If your plan is to have the animal live with people as a pet, you should know that some animals need a great deal of time and attention before adoption can take place. Of course, many strays can eventually become wonderful family pets – which is possibly what they once were. However, keep in mind that animals that have never been socialized to humans may remain feral and might never become adoptable.

Safety First

“Safety first” should be your mantra! Bites and scratches can lead to infection, so be careful and be prepared. While they may look harmless, very young animals can inflict serious bites. Learn first aid for yourself and others, including emergency aid for packaging injured animals for transport to a veterinarian. Information about first aid and emergency care of animals can be found on the American Red Cross website at www.prepare.org/animal/petaid.htm.

Read up on zoonoses (diseases that can be passed from animals to people) and seek medical attention if you become ill. Zoonoses include internal parasites like roundworms and hookworms, and external parasites like fleas and ticks (which can carry Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever). Other diseases transmissible to humans include ringworm, a fungal disease, and rabies and encephalitis, which are viral diseases. The fact sheet “Zoonotic Diseases in Cats and Dogs” is an excellent place to start learning about these diseases. More information about zoonotic diseases can be found on the website of the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/nasd (search for “zoonoses”).

You should also learn about diseases and conditions that are transmissible to other animals, rather than to people, such as parvovirus, canine distemper, feline distemper,

feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), feline leukemia, rabies, hantavirus, canine transmissible venereal tumors (CTVT), heartworm, mange, and worms and more worms (pin, tape, round, hook, whip). The American Veterinary Medical Association has excellent information about several of these conditions on their website, at this link: www.avma.org/communications/brochures/allbrochures.asp.

Work with Others

Don't try to do it all yourself – get other people involved. For one thing, traps are heavy once an animal is inside, so you'll need help carrying the traps. To socialize animals who are lacking social skills, you'll want to have people and other animals around to model healthy behavior. Placing animals that have medical or behavior challenges, training your foster parents and adopters, helping the rescued animals long-term – all these tasks are a lot more manageable if you have a team of people working together toward a common goal.

You might want to contact local wildlife management and animal control personnel, since they may be helpful if you have any questions or concerns. They may also be working on the same goal or know of other people involved.

Getting Started

Here's a list of items you'll need for trapping:

- Humane traps sized for the animals you are going to trap
- Towels, to line the inside of the trap and to cover the trap if you'll be trapping cats
- Blankets, for covering dog-sized traps
- Work gloves, for protection
- Exam gloves, to wear anytime surfaces might be contaminated
- First-aid kit
- Antibacterial hand sanitizer
- Disinfectant, bactericide and virucide cleaner to use on all surfaces and as a foot bath (read the labels carefully to find out how to use them)
- Washable liner (tarp) to put in your vehicle, under the trap

If you need to buy a trap, you can purchase one online. Tomahawk Live Trap at www.tomahawklivetrap.com is a good source. Other tools that can be helpful include throw nets, animal control catchpoles, and fence panels and gates to create a small, free-standing pen. Gates can also be used as squeeze boxes and shields if necessary. For the safety of yourself and the animals, learn how to use all tools properly.

Setting the Trap

Before setting the trap out in the wild, make sure it works. Here are the steps for testing the trap:

1. Set the trap up on a level surface.
2. Place a towel inside the trap for comfortable footing once the animal is inside.

3. Hold the door open.
4. Set your bait (wet food) behind the trip plate. Put the food on a flat plastic cutting board instead of in a can or on a plate. (The reason for this is that some animals will walk in, pick up the can or plate, and walk out without springing the trap.)
5. While holding the door open, set the door with the trip-pin/rod.
6. Apply pressure to the trip plate to spring the door.
7. You can adjust the pressure needed by changing your pin/rod setting on the door.

Before going out to set a trap, go through your checklist of necessary items and make sure you have everything. It's a good idea to carry a cell phone, along with a list of phone numbers you might need.

If you are unsuccessful at trapping an animal within 48 hours, try putting a trail of cat or dog kibble outside the trap, leading to the open door. Don't put out too much food, though. If too much food or high-value food is given outside the trap, trapping will be a challenge. Leaving water outside the trap might help lure the animal in.

Once you have the animal in the trap, keep in mind that the experience is probably very frightening for the animal. Wear your protective gloves in case the animal tries to bite through the trap. Covering the trap before lifting it may help prevent the animal from thrashing about in a panic, trying to escape.

Do not open the door, unless you are releasing an unwanted animal. Carry the trap to a secure place (ideally, to your veterinarian's office) before opening the trap. All animals who are trapped should receive medical evaluation and attention from veterinary professionals.

For More on Trap/Neuter/Return

If you're trapping feral cats for the purpose of neutering and returning them, and then maintaining the colony, you'll need a lot more information. Alley Cat Allies' website (www.alleycat.org) contains a wealth of resources. Just click on Caregiver/Advocate Information on the home page.

Sherry Woodard is the dog training and care consultant at Best Friends. She develops resources and provides consulting services nationally to help achieve Best Friends' No More Homeless Pets mission.

See also: Zoonotic Diseases in Cats and Dogs
 Feral Dogs
 After the Rescue: What's Next?