



Relocation Guide for Barn & Garden Cats

For any topic not covered below or questions, please contact our Barn/Garden Cat Relocation team at (707) 576-7999 x 206 or email wcbc@forgottenfelines.com.

Should I relocate a cat?

The first choice should always be to **leave wild cats where they are**. This is the territory they are most familiar with, and they already know all the good hunting and hiding places. They feel safe there. Relocation should only be considered if the cats are in life threatening danger. It is very traumatic for them to be extricated from their home, caged, and then adjust to a new situation, and is not always successful. It is inhumane and illegal to remove cats from a property and just release them elsewhere. Forgotten Felines provides these guidelines for people wishing to relocate their wild cats with the best possible outcome - the cats are safe, they will be well cared for, and they choose to stay at their new home for the rest of their lives.

If the cat(s) have become a nuisance on the property where they reside, it is preferable to solve the problems they are creating, rather than remove them. Ask us for information regarding deterrence of undesirable behavior. For example, if the complaints are regarding fighting, yowling, spraying, and/or litters of kittens, it must be understood that this behavior stems from unaltered cats mating. TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return) helps solve these issues. Altered cats are much more likely to peacefully coexist, and no more kittens means the colony is stable. Contact us for information on our low-cost spay/neuter clinics at (707) 576-7999.

If, for the safety of the cats, relocation is the only option, follow these guidelines for the best possible outcome. Without following these specific steps, cats may not stay where they are relocated AND their lives will be in danger. If an entire colony needs relocating, the best-case scenario is to find a place where they can all go together, and importantly, all cats should be altered before relocating. If this is not a possibility, then placing the cats in two's and three's is less traumatic and more successful than being placed alone.

NOTE: Relocation involves the cat or cats staying in an enclosure on the new property for three (3) weeks. They must have this time for transitioning to the new property. Cats cannot be simply released in their new location as they will be terrified, and most likely run away and be at great risk.

The Vacuum Effect

If you are considering relocating a cat, you have chosen to remove it from a specific location for a specific reason. Unless it is an empty field or thicket that is about to be bulldozed for condos, the original location may be subject to the *Vacuum Effect*. There was a good reason why those cats chose to congregate in that yard, field, parking lot, apartment complex, etc. They either had access to a good source of food, or a safe sanctuary to sleep in and have their kittens. Whether the food source was the back of a fish market, a dumpster behind a restaurant, a heavy rodent population, or a kind person putting out dishes of kibble, it drew cats like a magnet. When you remove a colony from a source of food, eventually a new group of cats will move into the vacated area, drawn to that source of food. The problem simply continues, with a new bunch of UNALTERED cats...and the cycle begins again. TNR must resume to prevent more kittens,



and you are back to where you started. That is why leaving a fixed colony in place, with all cats spayed and neutered, is preferable to relocation.

Kittens

When kittens under the age of 8 weeks are present, the ideal solution is to trap and socialize the kittens, then find homes for them. This lessens the number of cats in the colony, reduces the amount of food to be purchased, and reduces the impact of the colony on the neighborhood. The other advantage, of course, is these kittens get a better life. If you have weaned kittens 5-8 weeks of age in your colony, please contact our office to get them a spay/neuter appointment.

Keep in mind that past the age of 8 weeks, taming wild kittens can be a very difficult and long-term project. Getting kittens in your possession ASAP is the key. Be aware that kittens will not tame down sufficiently if left to run free outside. They may become friendly to you but will not be candidates for adoption.

If socializing is not an option, and kittens will continue to live in the colony, please do not TNR until kittens are about 2 months old but before they can reproduce. This will enable the veterinarian to administer a rabies vaccine at time of surgery. If kittens are to be relocated, it is imperative that they go in pairs, with sibling(s) or mom. *NOTE: required weight for spaying a female cat is 2.5 pounds and 2.0 pounds for neutering a male cat.*

Preparing for relocation

Getting Ready - what you will need:

> A large cage or enclosure of some sort with room for the cat to move around plus room for a litterbox, bedding, and dishes. Rabbit cages work especially well. Aviaries, chicken coops, or a completely enclosed dog run (including a roof) can be used. Be aware that dog crates have a distinct disadvantage: the large door. There is more of an opportunity for cats to rush past the caretaker while the door is open because the opening is so large. A cage where the door is to one side of the cage is better, so the cat has a place to move away, off to one side, from the caretaker when they reach in to clean the litterbox and bring fresh food and water. *Custom cat enclosures are available online: catfencein.com, wcdpets.com, purrfectfence.com are just a few.*

>A large sheet, blanket, or tarp to cover cage. If using a tarp, secure it well as it makes a very scary noise to cats when windy. Cover the cage with the sheet at least on two sides so it feels like a cave and so the cat feels safer.

> Towels placed on the bottom of any wire cages to protect the cat's paws.

>They need some sort of cubbyhole (box, carrier with door removed) for cat(s) to hide inside the cage.

>Two sturdy, hard-to-tip dishes (straight-sided heavy ceramic work well).

>Litter box and litter.

>Dry cat food.

>Toys, catnip, cat treats, canned cat food.



The Cage

The cage/enclosure needs to be sheltered from the weather. A large enclosure should have a roof or other secure covering. A smaller cage should be positioned inside a structure, such as a barn, garage, shed, etc. The cat(s) need to see the outside area where it will eventually live. This will facilitate acclimation to the new home. Cats will naturally be extremely fearful when they first arrive. As noted above, they will need a transition period to adjust, as well as to become accustomed to their new caretaker who will feed them every day. The choice of location for the transition cage is important. The cats need to be near the hub of activity, if this is where rodent control is needed, but at enough of a distance so they can observe everything without feeling threatened. Do not place the cage directly on a cement floor. Cages should be off the ground 1-2' on a table or cement blocks.

When deciding on appropriate coverings and bedding for the cage, consider the time of year, and be prepared for the extremes of temperature and weather. A tarp might keep off a light rain, but if it is accompanied by gale force winds, the tarp may be inadequate. If the weather is very cold, make sure the maximum amount of warm bedding is available, and that the covering will provide some insulation. In extreme hot weather make sure the cage is completely shaded, yet make sure there is maximum airflow. Certain fabrics work better than others. Cotton, if it gets wet, tends to stay wet and eventually will mildew. Synthetic fabrics can often be the better choice in damp weather, while cotton can be better when it is hot. Make sure everything is set up and ready at the new location prior to the cats arriving.

Screening

You will need to screen potential "adopters" to make sure they understand the nature of wild cats and confirm that they are willing to care for these animals for the rest of their lives. Make sure they do not have any false expectations of friendship with the cats (unless the cats are indeed tame), and that a consistent caregiver will agree to feed them every day. Relocating a wild cat to someone's weekend home is not a solution and will not work unless there is a property caretaker who lives on the property and will care for the cats daily. Feeders on a timer do not work, most likely will just be plundered by raccoons and other wildlife, and the cat will go hungry. Some people believe that withholding food makes a cat more inclined to hunt due to hunger, but it is much more likely that the cat will vacate the premises with nothing to anchor it there. Explain to the property owner that a healthy, well-fed cat WANTS to hunt - it is their instinct. Understand: there is never a guarantee that a cat will indeed be a successful and prolific hunter.

Predators

Another concern you should have when choosing a rural home for cats is the prevalence of predators in the area. Kittens can fall prey to many predators, including foxes, hawks, owls, and coyotes. Adult cats usually coexist well with most animals of their own size, but in Northern California they can fall prey to coyotes and bobcats, as well as the occasional mountain lion.

It is unlikely that all risk of predators can be eliminated, and the risks/benefits must be weighed. Consider safeguards on the property to help deter wildlife such as cat-friendly dogs, fences, and places cats can safely get away from other animals. Human presence will also discourage these animals to some degree. Make modifications to structures as able to improve cat safety.



Dogs

We generally only relocate cats into a place where there is a fence or other separation between dogs and cats. Dogs on the property can be an issue when relocating cats. Here are some questions to ask if you have dogs and wish to have barn/garden cats also.

>will the dog(s) have immediate access to the area where the cats will be caged during the 3-week acclimation period?

>where will the dogs live after the cats are released to the property>

> have dogs lived with cats before?

>What breed are the dogs? Almost any dog will chase a running cat out of instinct, but not all will do it with the intent to harm if they are breed that is trained to be a guardian or herding dog.

>have they shown any prey drive in the past? Do they chase cats?

>what prior cat experience do they have? If there have been barn cats on the property in the past, what was the relationship between the dogs and the cats? Even if the dog is no more than a playful puppy, you don't want the cats to be chased away. Just as in the case of predators, the cats need to have a safe sanctuary to get away from over-friendly canines, such as a loft in a barn or a garden shed.

Shelter

As part of your screening process, you will want to find out about the cat shelter. An ideal property will provide shelter a safe distance from dangerous streets. The shelter should be at least 3' x 4' with two doors. The cats still need some sort of protected corner or area in barn or garden to feel safe. It's great when there is a lot of stuff in the barn or yard for the cats to hide. Check for and remove toxic material and other dangerous materials such as traps. The important factors are 1) a shelter that protects them from the elements and other animals, and 2) the shelter is in a place that the cat will be likely to want to use. If a small moveable-type shelter is to be used, placement should be considered carefully. Out of the way of most human traffic, but in a place protected from the weather as much as possible is ideal. Cats generally like to be up high so securely on a shelf or table or up on legs works well.

Transition Period

The property owner will need to agree to keep the cat in some form of containment for approximately three (3) weeks. This is the "transition period." The cat will need to live in some form of enclosure for three weeks before being released. This involves cleaning a litterbox every day, as well as providing food and fresh water daily. The reason for this forced confinement is to allow the cat to become adjusted to all the new sights, sounds, and smells of their new environment. Whether there are horses, or barking dogs, or machinery, or farm workers, the cat needs to be desensitized to all the busyness so that they will be inclined to stick around after their release. The cat also does better when they bond with a consistent caregiver even if they don't seem to "like" people. At the end of the three weeks and on a quiet day, tie open the doors of the cat's transition cage, walk away, and let them jump out when they are ready. No need to force them. They will jump out when they are ready. If the property owner is willing to manage the extra efforts involved in the transition period, you're ready to start the process.



Finding the Right Relocation Spot

Rural locations and urban gardens are generally best because there is often a need for such properties as "mousers." Property owners with livestock have grain and hay often have rodent problems. Also, agricultural concerns, such as organic farms and vineyards, are often seeking a poison-free alternative for the control of mice, rats, moles, voles, gophers, etc. Cats can be the answer! Network with friends, relatives, co-workers, and neighbors to see if you can find someone in need of a good hunter or three. You never know, a co-worker's neighbor might have an uncle with a ranch that would welcome barn cats. If you cannot find a barn home through networking, try putting up fliers at feed stores, agricultural supply stores, or farm animal veterinary offices.

Follow Up

If you will not be the continuing caretaker for these cats you will want to follow up with the property owner to check on the progress of the relocation, both before and after the release. Encourage the new caretaker to interact verbally with the cats and tell them that providing wet cat food as a treat (to be associated with their daily visits to the cage) will help the cat "bond." This wild cat may or may not ever be touchable, but it can understand kindness, and will gain a certain degree of trust for its caretaker. Cats that form this "bond" will be much more likely to remain on the premises post-release.

Make yourself available to the new caretaker for any questions or issues that come up with the cat. They may not be truly cat-savvy and will rely on your guidance and advice to make the relocation process successful.

Remember not to make any guarantees regarding either the cat's choice to remain on the property, nor regarding their hunting abilities. Your efforts can increase the likelihood of the cat choosing to stay forever, but the cat will ultimately decide for itself what it wants to do.