



## Trapping cats

### Companion, stray or feral – which did you catch?

If you accidentally catch a cat in a live-capture trap, or find one captured in a trap someone else has set, it's important to handle the situation calmly and responsibly, as the cat could be someone's companion cat or it might be a stray cat that someone cares for.

In built up areas, you won't catch truly feral cats because they live completely independently of humans – for this reason, in this section companion and stray cats are the focus.

Plenty of stray cats and some companion cats will do a good job of looking fairly cross and very wild – so take care, and make sure you identify from which cat category the trapped animal comes. Legally, this matters – you can't destroy someone else's property (which is how companion cats (and some stray cats) may be seen).

Do you know the difference between an anti-social stray cat, and a feral cat?

Curious? For loads more information, check out the NCMG website.<sup>3</sup>



#### Companion cats

These are cats that are considered to be owned by a person. They are usually very sociable, and directly dependent on people and live with them.



#### Stray cats

Stray cats can be social or not, and managed or not. They might be lost, abandoned, or stray-born companion cats with varying levels of dependence on people.



#### Feral cat

These cats are unowned and unsocialised. They often have no relationship with or dependence on people, and live in the wild.

The Ministry for Primary Industries has information on their website,<sup>1</sup> as does the National Cat Management Group in the section called 'Caring for Colony Cats.'<sup>2</sup>

### What to do

Here's a step-by-step guide on what to do:

#### *Stay calm and assess the situation*

**Ensure Your Safety.** If the cat appears frightened or aggressive, give it space. Even a domestic cat can be startled and may try to scratch or bite.

**Observe the cat's behaviour.** Domestic cats may appear more relaxed and approachable, while stray cats are likely to be more frightened, aggressive, or wary of humans. However, domestic cats can act extremely aggressively out of fear too, so behaviour in a cage alone is not a good indicator of whether the cat is stray or not.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-and-pest-management/traps-and-devices-used-to-manage-pests/#CatTrap>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nzncmg.com/cat-guardians>

**Identify the trap's owner (if not yours).** If the trap is not yours, is there any identification on the trap or nearby that could help you identify who has set it and how to contact them. If the cage has an antenna on it, it is likely a satellite activated trap which will notify the trapper that the cage has been triggered and they are likely on their way already.

If the cat has been killed by the trap, it is still important to check if it was potentially an owned cat by getting it scanned for a microchip. Contact your local animal rescue, veterinary clinic, or pest control group.

### *Check for identification*

**If the cat is wearing a collar,** it might have an identification tag with the owner's contact details. In this case, contact the owner directly to inform them that their cat has been trapped.

**If there's no collar,** and you can't find any contact details for who set the trap, you can contact your local cat rescue group or predator control group to see if they are able to come & scan the cat for a microchip.

If you are able to transport the cage with the cat in it, you could also take the cat to a local veterinarian, animal shelter, or contact your council animal control officer to have it scanned for a microchip.

This is a quick and non-invasive process that can help identify the cat's owner, if there is one.

### *Provide water and comfort*

If the cat is trapped in a humane trap, cover the trap with a towel or blanket to reduce stress and help the cat feel more secure until a plan can be made.

If the cat is not injured and seems calm enough, offer some water through the bars of the trap. Avoid giving food immediately, as it could lead to digestive issues if the cat is stressed or hasn't been eating regularly.

### *Do not attempt to handle the cat*

Unless you are experienced with handling frightened or aggressive animals, do not attempt to handle the cat directly, as it could scratch or bite. If the cat is stray with wild behaviour (anti-social) or extremely scared, it may also try to escape and could injure itself, you, or both, in the process.

### *Contact local animal services or a shelter*

**If the cat is unidentifiable (no collar, no microchip)** or you are unsure what to do next, contact your local animal rescue, animal control, veterinarian, or a community organisation that deals with animal welfare. They will have the expertise and resources to safely deal with the situation.

**If the cat is injured or sick and cannot be treated,** local shelters or veterinarians may provide humane euthanasia. They can help assess the cat's health and make the best decision.

### *Avoid further trapping of cats*

If you are using a live-capture trap for pest control (e.g., targeting stray cats), make sure to use it responsibly (see below). Ensure it is checked every day it is set to avoid accidental captures of non-target animals, such as domestic cats. Use lures that will attract the target pests ideally.

If cats are your target, then make sure you have informed any nearby households (up to a 3km radius) that the traps are being set & when so cat owners can take appropriate action (keep safe and happy at home; get microchipped) to avoid their cats being targeted.

### *Notify neighbours or the local community*

If the cat appears to be a lost companion cat and you cannot find the owner immediately, inform your neighbours, local rescue organisations and veterinary clinics. You could also post on community social media pages to increase the chances of reuniting the cat with its owner.

There are various online resources and websites where you can post information about the lost cat, including a photo and location, to help find the owner.

### *Prevent future accidental trapping*

If you are using traps to catch stray (or proper ferals) cats, avoid setting them in areas where domestic cats are known to roam, such as neighbourhoods or around homes. Consider placing traps in more remote or controlled environments to minimize the chance of trapping pets.

MPI and the Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) are jointly responsible for enforcing the Animal Welfare Act 1999. If you have any particular concerns about the trapping of cats in your neighbourhood, contact your local SPCA or MPI.

## *Setting up traps to avoid accidental cat entrapment*

There are a number of different types of traps, including live-capture and kill traps. Live capture traps would typically be used when targeting cats as they are wily adversaries. However, there are some kill-traps approved for use in catching cats, and it is possible to accidentally trap and possibly not kill a cat in traps that are not licensed for use against them.

Until AI traps are readily available and can identify which animals should enter the trap, it's up to the cat (and other predators) as whether they or not they do.

There are some things you can do to help prevent accidental entrapment of cats:

### *Communicate with neighbours or your community*

- Inform your neighbours about your trapping activities and encourage them to keep their cats contained if possible (there's plenty of resources here to share!)
- Explain the types of traps you will be setting and the steps you will take to prevent cats being accidental caught where possible. This cooperation can help prevent domestic cats from being unintentionally caught and potential backlash from the community

### *Avoid setting traps where owned cats may roam*

- If you are using traps to catch feral or stray animals, avoid setting them in areas where domestic cats are known to roam, such as neighbourhoods or around homes.

- Consider placing traps in more remote or controlled environments to minimize the chance of trapping pets.
- Let neighbours know if you're trapping so they can keep their pets indoors overnight or contained (see catio & fencing options)
- Trap during times when cats are less active (e.g., midday), though this depends on your target species.
- If you do want or need to trap in urban areas or areas where owned cats are likely to be present, you have a responsibility to contact the owner of that cat and return it (alive!) to them

### *Use trail cameras first*

- If you're unsure what animals are around, a cheap trail camera can help you ID visitors before you trap. This helps avoid surprises and lets you adjust the trap setup accordingly.

### *Use species-specific trap boxes*

- Enclosed trap boxes with restricted entry holes (e.g., 60 mm diameter or smaller) can exclude most adult cats while still catching target species like rats or mustelids. Owned kittens would not reasonably be expected to be free-roaming when they are still small enough to fit through these entranceways.
- Designs like the DOC 150, 200 or 250, and rat traps in wooden boxes are often used because you can customize the entrance size to suit the target species.
- Avoid open, uncovered traps which can accidentally harm non-target animals and small children!
- If there is a high chance of capturing owned cats, then opt for live capture traps, which are designed to safely contain animals without harm. These traps are particularly suitable for residential areas, as they allow for the identification and safe release of non-target animals, such as domestic cats. The disadvantage is that target species caught will then need to be humanely killed after capture. Best practice guidance for live capture traps can be found on<sup>3</sup> MPI's website.
- Some cats like to explore traps or are attracted to the lures used. Even if they can't fit inside the trap itself, they may try to hook the lure out with a paw. Extending the length of the trap in the entrance area, or placing a low barrier just inside the entranceway to prevent a cats paw being able to reach the trap mechanism at full stretch is critical if there are cats around to prevent injury.

### *Fence off traps*

- Installing barriers like cat-proof fencing or cat rollers can effectively prevent cats from accessing areas where traps are set. These measures are humane and can be particularly effective in urban settings, however are not often practical

### *Careful trap placement*

- Avoid placing traps near:
  - Urban areas or known owned cat territories.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/27894-Remote-monitoring-of-live-capture-traps-for-vertebrates>

- Warm sleeping spots or food sources that might attract curious cats.
- Bush lines or along fences away from homes are better for predator control and less tempting for pet cats.
- While you can set live-capture traps on your property, there is no law against cats 'trespassing' on your property. If you live in an urban area, or there is a possibility owned cats could be wandering on your property, your starting point if you capture a cat should be to assume it is owned, find out who the owner is and contact them directly.

## *Remove attractants and use species-specific lures*

- If you are trapping on your own property and don't want to accidentally trap a cat, ensure that food sources, such as pet food or bird seed, are not left outside, as these can attract cats. Additionally, secure rubbish bins and remove any other potential food sources to discourage cats from entering your property.
- Use lures known to be effective for your specific target species eg cinnamon, apple, vanilla, onion etc for possums; peanut butter, chocolate, cinnamon etc for rats; hens eggs & mayonnaise for stoats.
- Where you need to use lures for species that are carnivores like cats (eg mustelids) consider using specific scent lures instead or you may need to take other the precautions listed here instead

## *Abide by the law*

### *Animal Welfare Act 1999*

- You are legally responsible for checking live-capture traps within 12 hours of sunrise, and for humane dispatch of pest species (section 36 Obligations relating to traps<sup>4</sup>)
- For kill traps, only use MPI-approved or NAWAC-tested traps to ensure they're effective and humane; using these traps will also ensure you compliant with respect to which traps are legal to use (section 34 Restrictions on use of traps and devices to kill, manage, entrap, capture, entangle, restrain, or immobilise animals<sup>5</sup>)
- For a summary of the requirements relating to stray cats<sup>6</sup> and cat colonies, and a list of recommendations for people who manage feral or anti-social stray cats in colonies, you can read part 12 of the Animal Welfare (Companion Cats) Code of Welfare: Companion Cats. [Code of Welfare: Companion Cats](#)



### *Other legislation*

- There may be by-laws in place in your area that restrict the use of traps. Your local council can provide you with information about these by-laws.

<sup>4</sup> <https://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1999/0142/latest/DLM50444.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1999/0142/latest/DLM50442.html>

<sup>6</sup> Photo by [Melody Lin](#) on [Unsplash](#)

- Killing an animal (humanely) is not illegal under animal welfare legislation, but destroying someone's property is (Crimes Act 1961) and companion cats are technically considered property. The deliberate act of killing someone's pet cat should be reported to police, but the humane killing of feral cats is not an offence. [Crimes Act 1961 – NZ Legislation](#)

#### Other Advice

- The **National Cat Management Group's Report**<sup>7</sup> contains recommendations for managing stray cats. It aims to help people humanely manage cats in a way that protects their welfare and our unique environment and biodiversity. It encourages live trapping (not using leg-hold traps), checking for microchips and desexing/rehoming wherever possible.
- Talk to your local trapping group(s) coordinator; get in contact with DOC; Predator Free NZ or other trapping organisations to discuss what is best for your location.
- Make sure you engage your local community, cat rescue groups, or anyone who is likely to be affected by your trapping efforts, so they understand what you are aiming to achieve and how, as well as how they can minimise the impact on them and any owned cats that may be present.

## What traps look like

At these links, you can see what various trap look like and read about how to use them.

1. **Predator Free NZ:** <https://predatorfreenz.org/toolkits/trapping-baiting-toolkit/where-to-buy-traps-and-equipment/>
2. **Steve Allan:** <https://steveallantraps.co.nz/sa2-feral-cat-trap/>
3. **Traps.co.nz** <https://traps.co.nz/products/cage-trap-large-ptr1009>
4. **Maintrac Group:** <https://www.maintracgroup.com/collections/cat-traps>
5. **Connovation:** <https://www.connovation.co.nz/products/trap-tunnel>

## Useful links

1. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-and-pest-management/traps-and-devices-used-to-manage-pests/#:~:text=Live%20capture%20traps,Live%20capture%20traps&text=The%20Act%20requires%20that%20any,an%20animal%20in%20the%20trap.>
2. <https://www.bionet.nz/assets/Trap-summary-table-DOC-3174743-21-Nov-2023-update.pdf>
3. <https://www.nawac.org.nz/assets/NAWAC-documents/guidelines/NAWAC-Guideline-on-humaneness-testing-of-traps-FINAL.pdf>
4. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/27894-Remote-monitoring-of-live-capture-traps-for-vertebrates>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nzncmg.com/research> - at this link is the Executive Summary and the Full Report

5. <https://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1999/0142/latest/DLM50444.html>
6. <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/predator-free-2050/community-trapping/trapping-and-toxins/animal-welfare-and-trapping/>
7. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-and-pest-management/traps-and-devices-used-to-manage-pests/restricted-traps-and-devices/>