

Relocation of cats (a last resort!)

Relocation is a last resort and should be done only if the cats are in danger from people, vehicles or starvation. Even with the agreement of a new caretaker at a farm or ranch, relocation is not an easy task as you cannot just take cats somewhere else without implementing the correct protocols to ensure their safety. Even with the best of intentions, releasing cats in unfamiliar territory is "dumping" and disastrous for the cats (not to mention illegal).



Without proper relocation procedures:

- 1) the cats do not know they are supposed to stay at the new location and take off running, looking for their own "home" back where you got them. Often the cats will die in the attempt.
- 2) resident cats at the new location will view the newcomers as intruders, fight them and run them off.

To make sure the cats understand they are to stay at the new location and to trick the resident cats into thinking they have always been part of the group, you must confine the new cats for a minimum of 2 weeks (usually no longer than 4 weeks). During this time, they acclimate to their new surroundings, get used to the new caretaker and the new feeding routine, and put their scent in the environment. If the new cats are in crates, the resident cats cannot run the newcomers off and their natural curiosity will mean they take a look at them in their crates, thus sharing THEIR scent with each other. Of course, the crates must be away from direct sun and protected from the weather.

After the minimum of 2 weeks, if you are confident that the cats in the crates have settled down and are eating, drinking, pooping and peeing normally, they can be released. Leave the crates in place for another week or so with the dirty litter boxes as a point of reference for them with their own strong scent. Sometimes the cats will jump back in to sleep if they view this as their secure place. Gradually, they start exploring and feeding at the feeding station outside of the crates and the crates can then be removed.

A typical size crate for one cat is no smaller than 30 inches X 36 inches (usually one cat per crate). A bonded pair or two small cats sometimes can be put in together if the crate is big enough. It's always easier and safer to care for the cats in crates if they are set up on sturdy tables so you are dealing with them at waist-height.

The crate should contain a shelter for the cat to sleep in (turned sideways so the cat thinks you can't see him), a litter box and food and water bowls. Cover the whole crate with a large sheet or blanket to give the cat some sense of security. The sheet/blanket can be rolled back gradually as the cat becomes accustomed to its surroundings. Keep the litter box, food/water bowls up front so you don't have to reach past a skittish or feral cat. Usually timid cats will creep into their shelter box away from you when you approach the crate. This is good as they stay calmer, thinking you cannot see them, while you replenish the food, etc.

Always keep one hand on the door while you have it open and NEVER turn away to do something without securing the door first. An early escape or unintentional release will probably mean the loss of the cat.

You may want to use pine pellet litter as it is cleaner and easier to use. You can purchase horse/equine bedding (pine pellets) at feed stores. It is cheaper and does the same job. Also, the urine-soaked pellets turn to biodegradable sawdust, which can be scattered around the property as additional rodent deterrent.

