

NOTES ON FERAL CAT CONTROL

Feral cat control

Populations of feral cats usually develop from unwanted or ill-treated domestic cats. Sexually intact individuals leave home and start up colonies in areas where food and shelter are available. These individuals shun human contact, although they may feed off food left behind by cat-lovers. Feral cats can cause serious problems in urban areas but control is complicated by the emotions it stirs in the cat-loving population.

Feral cat control programmes should be based on capture, using cage traps, followed by humane culling by a veterinary surgeon. Programmes are best undertaken with the co-operation of animal charities such as the Cat Protection League or the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (R.S.P.C.A.). Although, in practice, few animals make it, the control programme should be presented as a rehabilitation programme for the healthy individuals in the population. Those that stand a chance of recovery and domestication after neutering will usually be cared for or re-housed by these charities.

The traps used must not damage the cat and must be of sufficient size to allow free and easy movement. Typically, 750 mm x 250 mm x 225 mm or larger. The traps are usually of 14 gauge galvanised steel with a foot-operated treadle at one end. As the cat enters, it activates the treadle and a spring-loaded trap door shuts. Traps should be placed in an area frequented by cats, but out of sight of passers-by. Some camouflaging may be required. Set the trap door and bait the cage with cat food, fish heads, crab sticks or similar. Like all live traps, it must be visited at least once during a 24 hour period but with such sensitive animals it is good idea to increase this to three or four times a day.

Before the control program starts, it is essential to ensure that the general public are aware of its objectives and that those individuals that feed the feral animals refrain from so doing.

Once trapped, the cat should be examined by a veterinary surgeon. Great care is needed in the handling of these animals and protective clothing, including the use of thick gloves or welding gauntlets is advised. Maimed or diseased animals should be humanely destroyed and arrangements made to house and rehabilitate healthy animals.

The drowning or poisoning of cats is illegal.

Once a feral cat population has been removed it may be necessary to consider exclusion techniques, using chicken wire fences to stop re-colonisation of sensitive areas.