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Cat trap fever

By: D.E. Kern, The News Messenger

In less than five minutes, you can find a person capable of regaling you with a story about how cramped quarters - perhaps a studio apartment or a one-bedroom place - preceded their arrival in more comfortable confines.

But change the protagonist to a cat and you really have a story worth telling.

With its trap, neuter and release program, FieldHaven Feline Rescue is on the cutting edge when it comes to controlling the region's population of unwanted cats.

It involves attracting at-risk cats into baited cages that close when they step on a switch attached to a spring-loaded gate.

Once captured, the cats receive needed medical attention, are fixed and returned to the population.

"It doesn't hurt them at all," said FieldHaven trailer manager Jen Paul, the facility's in-house expert on trapping. "They're just not always real happy about being in there."

But she quickly adds that temporary trauma is nothing compared to the problems feral, abandoned and unfixed cats face when left to their own devices.

Statistics show a female cat can get pregnant at 6 months of age and have two to three litters of kittens a year. With that kind of exponential reproduction, families can morph into colonies within months.

During a visit and demonstration at the rescue's Ironwood Lane facility, Paul - who currently has three trappers in the fold - said she's in desperate need of more volunteers.

"We get several calls a month and I often have to turn people down," she said. "It's especially tough when people are calling and asking me to trap their cats in Sacramento."

These days, Paul counts on Curtis Covington for some of her tougher assignments. The retired elections official, who became involved with FieldHaven through the influence of his wife, recounted a trapping tale set on a hay ranch on the outskirts of Lincoln.

"This family did the right thing," he said. "They had two semi-wild cats that they wanted to be fixed, but they also wanted them back. So I set the trap in the barn and caught one. Then, because the cats were gentle enough for him to do this, the owner took it out and put it in a crate while he reset the trap to catch the other cat.

"I normally set the trap in the evening and come back in the morning," he added. "And, nine times out of 10, they go for it."

Lorraine Davis, who's successfully trapped cats near where she works in Roseville, described a slightly more



karina williams/the news messenger
Volunteer Lorraine Davis sets a trap for a stray cat in Roseville. FieldHaven Feline Rescue depends on volunteers like Davis to provide care to feral cats.

elaborate process.

"Once you know that a cat is in a certain area, you leave food out for several days up to a week before trapping," she added. "Then, I usually diminish the amount of food and not leave food for a day. After that, I return with a nice juicy can of tuna."

Using that method, Davis reported being able to trap nine cats near the Starbucks in the Safeway shopping center parking lot.

While techniques vary, the basics of trapping remain the same, and Paul - who's willing to teach anyone willing to learn - encourages people living near problem cats to borrow FieldHaven's cages. A \$75 deposit is required and the rescue will also lend those transferring cats to the Animal Spay and Neuter Clinic recovery cages to be used after the surgery.

"It's not really dangerous," she added "It's best to trap in the early morning or evening when the cat's used to being fed."

Cats are habitual feeders and generally do a good job of locating food sources. However, as volunteer trapper Jen Rosenbrook points out, the mere fact that an animal is eating doesn't mean that it's healthy.

"It's not just the fixing that's necessary," she said. "These cats often need some medical attention. People who dump cats seem to think that maybe they can make it on their own, but they can't make it very well and they can't make it very long."

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