

A GUIDE TO

# Feral cat control

## Clever, curious and hard to catch

This guide focuses on feral cat control and assumes you're familiar with general predator control practices. For general predator control advice, visit [predatorfreenz.org](http://predatorfreenz.org).



## Understanding feral cats

Feral cats are apex predators with devastating impacts on our native wildlife.

They're smart and suspicious, which makes them one of the hardest predators to control. At the same time, companion cats are important pets and their safety is crucial to maintaining community expectations and social license.

### Key considerations

#### Trapping near people and pets?

Loop in local communities. Talk goals, set expectations, and pet safety. You could ask people to keep their pet cats indoors at night so that control can be done. Scan for microchips and always check for a collar before assuming a cat is feral. Mistakes erode trust.

**In public or recreational areas?** Keep traps discreet and off tracks. Trapped animals, especially cats, can be distressing to see or hear.

**Feral cats are very difficult to control.** Figure out how low cat numbers must be in your area to have the desired impact on native wildlife numbers.

Consider getting additional advice from your local council or DOC.



### Behaviour insights

- **Prolific, wide-ranging hunters:** Cats adapt successfully to a range of habitats from urban to alpine environments, so be prepared to plan varied control networks.
- **Cause local extinctions:** Cats hunt everything in an area and then move on. Break their cycle of behaviour with smart, adaptive predator control.
- **Highly individual and easily bored:** Some cats may be put off by the touch of cold metal, while others may be highly inquisitive, drawn to new smells, tracks or a well-placed lure. It pays to mix things up; cycle through different trap types, placements, lures and extra incentives to keep cats curious.
- **Solo or in colonies:** It depends on density and habitat. Kittens learn from their mothers, so it's important to avoid bad trapping, which teaches the next generation on avoiding traps.

## Lures: Meat, meat and more meat

Feral cats are opportunistic: they feed on rabbits, birds and bird eggs, rats, hares, bats, lizards, mice, wētā and other insects.

For your lures, think meat: generous in size, raw, smelly, fresh and keep it diverse. Be cautious that meat lures may attract non-target species such as kāhu (harrier), kārearea (falcon) or pets (especially when using kill traps).

### Top lures

- Fresh or hunted meat, e.g. possum, rabbit (blood, fur and guts welcomed)
- Commercial cat food
- Fish lures in winter when other food sources are low (cats need the protein)
- Freshly trapped rats or mice

**A note on toxins for feral cats:** Most cereal-based toxins rely on feral cats eating poisoned rodents (known as 'secondary poisoning'). To target feral cats directly, acute toxins delivered in meat lures are required (e.g. PAPP or 1080 in meatballs or sausage baits).

These are under development. Acute toxins require a CSL and are not covered by this guide. We recommend that groups contact a professional contractor for assistance with targeting mustelids using toxins. Contact your regional council, local DOC office or PFNZ for a list of contractors.

For further information, visit the [Predator Free NZ website](#) for a summary of toxins.

**Tip:** Mimic local food sources where possible (e.g. possum road-kill, venison in popular deer hunting areas, duck in shooting season).

- Pre-feeding can be helpful to create novelty and build trust, but don't overdo it or cats will become bored.
- Dragging part of a fresh rabbit or possum around the trap site leaves attractive blood scent trails.
- Anchored lures are useful for creating interest at a trap or camera site. You could try a folded wire mesh bag/cage containing fur and meat pegged to the ground in front of the camera.
- In areas where kāhu or kārearea may be present, try covering the top of live capture cages to reduce raptor interest.



STEVE ALLAN TRAP (SA2)

## Traps: Types, placement and timing

Because feral cats are so wary and difficult to control, using a variety of traps is often the most effective strategy.

This guide includes kill traps and live capture traps. Live capture traps are most effective for feral cats, but are not appropriate for many groups due to the additional requirements. Kill traps are not appropriate in areas where there are owned cats. The traps you choose will depend on your location, available time and capacity to deal with a live capture.

### Kill traps

Kill traps are instant and effective for multi-species (most also catch possums), but cats may be reluctant put their head in them. Use them in areas away from residential zones where pet cats are common. Avoid using them in areas with kea, kiwi, weka, or other ground-dwelling birds.

#### Recommended kill traps

- **Steve Allan 2 (SA2):** An effective and durable trap, but heavy and can be harder to source. Use in a chimney box or with a ramp.
- **Timms:** Cheaper and lighter than the SA2, but may not last as long.

### Top tips

When using a ramp, a 45–55 degree angle works best.

When using an SA2 or Timms kill trap, placing it next to an AT220 can be helpful, as feral cats may come to scavenge the dead possums below the automatic trap.

A SA2 can also be positioned on top of a wooden trap box (e.g. DOC 200) to attract a feral cat, but this requires particular care around non-target species. Do not use this approach in kea or weka habitat.

Hang bait in a wire mesh bag inside the chimney box so it attracts feral cats and distracts them from the trap.



TIMMS

## Live capture traps

These traps are very effective and less intimidating to feral cats, however, it's a legal requirement to check live capture traps daily (within 12 hours of sunrise).

They also allow identification of pets (check for collars, name tags, microchips). Feral cats must be euthanised humanely by a licensed shooter. Live capture traps should not be used in areas with kea, kiwi, weka, or other ground-dwelling birds.

### There are two main types of live capture traps

- **Cage traps:** Cats are more easily enticed inside cages than kill traps (though still require luring). Once the treadle is triggered, the doors come down.
- **Leg-hold traps:** These can be very effective, especially when several are used together. There is less for cats to be wary of, as they do not have to enter anything. However, setting and careful placement of traps requires skill and experience (e.g. camouflage: covering with leaves/partially burying).

## Recommended cage traps

- **Pestguard Tunnel trap MK2:** Tall doors allow cats to enter without ducking.
- **Tāwhiti Cage:** A double entrance cage trap with an optional sensor to detect when the trap has triggered and sends out a message.



### Top tips

- Ensure trap entrances are big enough so cats don't need to duck to enter, as this will deter them. Cages with an entrance at each end are ideal, too, as the see-through tunnel builds confidence in entering the trap.
- Hang bait from the top of the trap to distract the cat from the treadle plate. Use a bait wire with a loop that allows the bait to move slightly and catch the cat's attention. If kāhu are present, hide the bait from aerial view.
- Camouflaging and covering the base in dirt helps reduce wariness.
- Cats use their footpads to detect changes in the ground. When setting traps, dig up the ground all around the trap site so the ground feels the same on and around the trap.
- Remote monitoring technology reduces the need to check all traps manually.

## Recommended leg-hold trap

**Victor #1.5 Soft Catch:** A well-made and effective leg-hold trap but can be slippery to set in wet conditions.



### Top tips

- Cover the centre plate (pan) with a thin layer of sand, soil or leaves (no stones). You can also add a layer of toilet paper to hold the sand/soil in place - make sure the trap jaws are not covered. Dig out a larger area around the trap/s (2m<sup>2</sup>) so cats get used to walking on the sand/soil.
- Place bait 0.5m high on a nearby tree or post. It needs to be easy to reach for cats while also moving around in the wind to catch attention. You can also place something interesting up high (e.g. a fabric scrap scented with kitty litter or blood) to distract the cat from looking at its feet and noticing the trap/s.
- Multiple leg-hold traps in an area will also maximise the chances of a cat triggering one, as it approaches from different directions.

## Other methods

- If you have access to a **skilled shooter** with a thermal scope and your project site allows, shooting can be an effective way of controlling cats.
- Permits are also required on Public Conservation Land. Check firearm license requirements.
- Using **skilled dogs** to flush feral cats up trees can also be effective. Landowner permission is essential on private land.

## Trap location and placement

Trap placement near landscape features is key for feral cats: grids are far less useful.

Position traps along natural or human-made lines that guide movement. Ideally, look for den sites and high movement areas. Aim for:

- Water and forest edges
- Roads, tracks, fencelines
- Stream crossings (logs, bridges)
- Tree rows or shelter belts (but away from the public eye)
- Runs and trails regularly used by cats and other animals
- High points in the landscape, as cats like to look down on their prey
- Food rich areas like hay barns, grain silos, chicken sheds, offal pits and other farm areas

**Use cameras to observe individual cat behaviours and interests, and place traps accordingly.**

**Tip:** When on public land, be aware of safety and traps being in public view. More open traps, such as the SA2 or live-capture traps, should be at least 50 metres from huts and tracks. Seeing feral cats in traps is particularly confronting, and care should be taken to keep them away from the public eye.



## Trap checking frequency

Feral cat trapping is time-intensive, and running traps year-round is often high maintenance. A smart approach is to run focused trapping bursts during peak times of cat activity or vulnerability.

### Best times to trap

- **April:** Food is scarce, and cats are more likely to take the bait. Set traps for ten days.
- **July:** Another low food period; a good second trapping window.
- **February–March:** Ideal time to catch breeding females before kittens arrive.
- **December–January:** A quick summer burst can target naive juveniles, which are more easily caught.

Live capture and leg-hold traps require daily checking, and you'll need someone experienced with a firearms license to kill any cats caught. Check kill traps weekly when you have high cat activity.