

ACCLIMATING YOUR WORKING CAT

Working/barn cats can be an important asset to your shop or property; they can help control the rodent population while also keeping unaltered cats from colonizing on your property. Introducing your working cat to his new environment can be challenging if they are not allowed the proper acclimation time. Proper introduction provides a safe environment for your cat to explore his new environment, reducing the chance of becoming lost in an unfamiliar area.

Establishing a Safe Space

To support your cat's transition and help him slowly develop a sense of security in his new space, it's important to have an enclosure prepared when he arrives. We recommend a XL dog crate or other secure enclosure. The enclosure should be set up in your shop, barn, outbuilding or whatever space he will be calling "home." Using an enclosure will allow him time to acclimate to the sights, sounds and smells of his new environment. The enclosure should be protected from very hot or cold conditions and allow enough room to house the following items:

- Food and water bowls
- Litter pan
- Cardboard box to use as a hiding space (den)
- Blankets/sheets to cover the outside of the crate

When transferring the cat into his enclosure, it's important to take appropriate measures to reduce the chance your cat will escape. Remember, he will likely be stressed and anxious. To safely transfer, place the door of the carrier immediately next to, or inside of, the opening of the enclosure. Open the door and wait for him to leave the crate. Once he does, close the door to the enclosure quickly.

An acclimation period of 2-3 weeks in the enclosure is recommended. Longer confinement periods are unnecessary and may even jeopardize your acclimation efforts. If confined for too long, the cat may run away upon release, from fear of being confined again. During this time, offer him wet food twice daily in addition to his water and dry food. This will help build trust between you and the cat. When offering wet food, use a voice signal like "here kitty" or another call you will use consistently in the future when offering wet food. This will set the groundwork for the cat to come around at feeding time once he's been released from the enclosure. During this time, feel free to spend time quietly talking to the cat. Don't try to pet or pick up the cat as this may increase his anxiety and cause him to scratch or bite. If your cat does escape from his enclosure before the acclimation period is over, set food and water out around the barn/shop. Cats often hide for a period of time but

usually stay on the premises. Leave plenty of food and water out to encourage the escapee to stay close.

Transitioning Out of the Enclosure

After the confinement period, open the enclosure door and allow the cat to come out on his own. This may take time. He has likely become comfortable in the enclosure and may not want to leave while you are present. Once the cat is out of the enclosure, leave it set up with the door open in the same spot for approximately a week. This will allow him to explore on his own while still preserving a safe and familiar space. Continue filling the food and water bowls while offering wet food (with your voice signal) once a day in the crate. Once you notice that the cat is finding new spots to hide, or appears to be acclimated to his new space, feel free to slowly move the food and water bowls outside of the enclosure to a more convenient location. After two more weeks, the cat should be comfortable in their new home and the cage and supplies can be taken away. Some working cat caregivers keep litter pans inside their barns, but often are rarely used.

Caring for your working cat is as easy as providing fresh food and water daily. Remember that, while they may be quite self-sufficient, working cats still need a nutrient rich diet to sustain a healthy life. Fresh, healthy food, clean water, and shelter from the elements should always be available to your cat.