



## What is a Barn Cat?

A barn cat, or "feral" cat, is unsocialized to humans, meaning that they tend to be fearful of people and keep their distance. Ferals are most often found living outdoors in tight-knit groups called *colonies*, sharing a common food source and territory. For this reason, we suggest adopting barn cats in at least pairs so that they can live communally as they naturally tend to. Barn cats are **not** suited to live indoors as pets, and attempting to force them to do so can be extremely harmful to you, the cat, and your home.

"Feral" describes behavior, not a biological trait. The same cat can be feral and not feral at different points in her life. An outdoor kitten may be born feral, then be taken indoors, socialized and adopted out as a friendly pet. Or an adult cat may be a gregarious pet for years then become lost and, after a few months of living on his own, start to act unsocialized. "Feral" is not a black or white quality, but different cats will be feral to different degrees. There is a chance that any barn cat adopted from the shelter may become more accepting of people as they begin to feel comfortable in their new home and learn to trust their new caretaker, but there is no guarantee.

If a cat is truly feral, the most compassionate choice is generally to let them live outdoors. Luckily, instead of immediately euthanizing "feral" cats on intake like many shelters still do, Nevada Humane Society is able to offer Barn Cat Adoptions for feral cats with no other options, respecting a feral cat's inner needs without ending their lives.

By neutering and vaccinating the cats, providing for their basic needs (food, water, shelter), and following these acclimation guidelines given to you at the time of adoption, a caretaker (you!) plays a role most supportive of ferals by giving them the opportunity to live among their own, be free, and answer to their own unique natures.

For the meager cost of daily cat food, fresh water, and available shelter, feral cats will help keep your building rodent-free. While these cats have no interest in curling up in laps and being pet, they are diligent workers intent on earning their keep with plenty of time to spare for rolling in the dirt, sun bathing, and peeking around the corner in anticipation of their dinner. For many people, this provides all the benefits of having a charming nearby cat without the obligations and maintenance of a domestic pet.

Be prepared for a brief period of adjustment for your barn cats. Moving to a new home is stressful for anyone, cats included. After a short stay in secure confinement, the cats will accept their new home and be doing their rodent patrols with enthusiasm.

Remember:

- These cats are not suitable as indoor pets. They are happy to live out their lives in large gardens, stables, barns, or small outbuildings.
- Outdoor cats are homed with the understanding that you will provide ongoing food and shelter and will make every effort to acquire medical care if the cats become visibly ill or injured. Note that our clinic will see any feral cat for free on our normal Trap, Neuter, Return clinic days, and traps may be rented out for this purpose.
- Providing food for cats to assure they are well-fed has proven to make them more efficient hunters. A hungry cat only catches enough prey to feed itself, whereas a well-fed cat will also hunt for sport.
- By providing both food and shelter for an outdoor cat, you will help build a bond between you (as the food provider), the cat, and their new home (a safe shelter).

- All of our outdoor cats have been spayed/neutered, vaccinated, and ear tipped (which identifies them as being altered).

## Settling In After Adoption

When first bringing the cat home, set up the carrier with the door propped open, and then leave. The cat will come out and explore when they feel ready, and generally only once you are gone.

Cats need time to adjust and acclimate to new surroundings, sounds, and smells. It takes between 3 to 4 weeks for a cat to associate a new place as their own new territory.

During this adjustment period, the cat must be confined to one building or room without access to the outdoors. This will give them the necessary time to adjust and eliminates the opportunity to run away or become lost. It is important to make sure that their new location is safe, sheltered, and dry, with easy access to their food, water, and litter.

You will need to insure that there are no gaps in the walls or broken windows through which the cat could escape. Please put mesh or curtain/net over the windows. If the cat panics, it may not recognize the glass as a barrier and could injure itself in an attempt to escape.

Be careful that it does not escape when going to feed it or change the litter. In general the cat will want to hide when you enter the space, but be mindful of keeping the door open for any period of time.

Spend time with the cat while it is confined! Talk to it, read the newspaper out loud, etc. This way the cat will get used to the sound of your voice. Although the cat may hide at first, it will be watching, listening, and getting familiar with their new caretaker.

During the adjustment time the cat needs easy access food, water, bedding, and a litter tray.

## Letting the Cat Out

- After 3-4 weeks, the cat can be given permanent access outside. Continue to feed it in the same place so that it knows where to find food. The cat must be able to come and go without needing to be let in or out by a person.
- The feeding site can be moved in a few more weeks, once the cat knows its way around its new territory.
- Sprinkling used litter (after removing the feces) on the ground will help the cat to recognize its territory and will let it know which areas to use as its toilet. This mimics its natural marking behavior.
- Although a semi-feral cat cannot be stroked or petted, it will come to recognize the adopter as a food provider. It may greet them or follow them (at a distance) when they put food down. This is a great compliment and demonstrates familiarity and a level of trust.
- If treated kindly, nervous and semi-feral cats may turn into friendly, even affectionate cats. This may take years, if ever. It is important to not force attention onto an unwilling/nervous cat as it may damage any trust already built.
- Most barn cats settle into their new territory well. They may disappear for a day or two on exploration trips, but will return for food. Continue to put food out as normal.
- If the cat does go missing, let us know as it may turn up as a stray elsewhere.