



Trapping Mom by Using Kittens as Bait

Information by Bernadette with *The Creative Cat* (www.thecreativecat.net/trapping-a-mother-cat-using-her-kittens)

Edited for brevity and relevance. Follow the link for the full article.

In the throes of kitten season, it seems like these adorable fluffs are popping up out of the ground like weeds in the garden. Of course you want to rescue them, but the first thing you need to do is ask yourself several questions about them and their mother. Does anyone nearby know anything about them? Is their mother with them, or in the vicinity? Is she feral or friendly? Are they in any danger? How old do they appear to be? Are their eyes open? Are they walking around? And more.

Once you've determined the needs of the kittens and mother, the most difficult part can be dealing with a mother cat's inherent caution. This wariness has left prolific matriarchs of many generations outside to continue breeding, and it is these cats that generally take the most time and care to capture. But, we have some tricks!

A mother cat's interest is protecting her kittens on top of her own survival; as many mother cats have done, she will literally walk through fire to collect to her kittens and get them safety. So if mom is trap-savvy or especially wary, you can use this particular mother cat behavior to your advantage and set a humane trap with the only thing that could possibly make her walk into it: her kittens. You don't actually put the kittens in the trap, but you set it up so it looks as if they are, and that the only way the mother can get to them is to walk right through the door.

Planning your Trapping

Mother cats are often reluctant to enter a trap despite food providing a hungry mom a big incentive. Even if she is a socialized, friendly cat, mother cats are often fiercely defensive and protective and won't respond to your overtures nor walk into a trap. Feral moms can seem to walk into a trap and eat and walk back out without tripping the trap. Other humans around may also be feeding, so mom will avoid the trap altogether and eat somewhere else.

Situations like these are when you would consider using her kittens as bait. Their mewing can inspire her to move mountains to get them to safety, including running into a trap when she feels it's the only way to reach them.

In an ideal world, the family is in a safe location with a steady caretaker and a set feeding schedule. Mom and kittens can stay together until the kittens are beginning to wean and they can be habituated over time to a standard box trap to increase the success rate of trapping. At this point, the kittens can safely be socialized in foster care while mom is TNR'd (or, when appropriate, given the opportunity to find an adoptive home according to regional laws, policies, and availability of resources). If necessary, they can also be removed from mom at 4 weeks. They will still need specialized care at this age, but they will have received some immune support from mom if it becomes necessary to separate them (e.g. mom is truly feral, and to place her in an indoor foster environment poses a danger to both her and the kittens).

When unfamiliar with mom's personality, it's best to presume she is feral or unfriendly and will not come near if she knows you are there. Even formerly socialized cats can be resistant to human contact when they've been forced to survive outdoors.

The Needs of Neonatal Kittens

Sometimes situations are more urgent. The area may be unsafe, and the cat may have no apparent caretaker. Maybe she hid them in a loading dock, or they are living in a condemned and soon-to-be-demolished house. If neonatal kittens are concerned, be sure you are skilled with their needs, and if not, find someone who is. This process is risky for the kittens, especially neonates who can't regulate their body temperature so need their mother to keep them warm and feed them frequently. Using kittens as bait pushes both kittens and mother to the edge of safety, and it's best to only do this after you have experience with neonatal and younger kittens so you understand their fragility and needs.

Trapping happens in the snow and in the heat of summer. You need to be very careful that neonatal kittens are warm and that they'll stay that way but not become overheated, and how to tell the difference. If they are still nursing and mom is taking her time coming around, you will also need to properly feed them milk replacement formula as recommended per their age, warmed, in a little bottle. This is difficult to do sitting outside watching traps, so you either need to be thoroughly prepared or have help who can leave to prepare formula.

Ironically, the kittens also need to be a little hungry so they will cry for her and she will respond. It's a difficult balance.

Setting Up the Trap and the Kittens



1. The kittens are safely tucked in a carrier which is prepared for kittens of their age in the weather conditions that exist. The front of the carrier is placed up against the back end of the trap so the kittens can be seen and clearly heard when mom investigates.
2. The entire length of trap AND carrier must be covered with a single cover so that when mom inspects the situation, she sees that the only way to get her kittens is to go into the trap and head for the back of it, making her step on the trip plate that closes the door.
3. The trap cover will need to be weighed down or tucked under with no loose ends that might move and frighten the mother.
1. She can smell her kittens from outside so she may look around, but it's not until they start to cry from hunger that most mothers will consider going into the trap.

Alternatives

Recordings of kittens crying will sometimes work better than using the mother's own kittens. You could record her kittens if they cry with their foster or find a video on YouTube or other service. A cell phone on top of the trap, in the back, above where the food would be. You can cover the trap tightly so she can't look inside, following the mewling.

It's Not Foolproof

No one needs unrealistic expectations when trapping (see: the adage of "herding cats"), and it may seem easier to jump straight to this method, but there is risk involved here for both the mother cat and her kittens. Weather and time limitations in particular pose a significant risk to the health and wellbeing of the kittens. Additionally, it's unwise to expect that it is ever easy to outsmart a mother, especially if she's been living successfully outside for a long time. There is a reason this problem has been going on for thousands of years. Cats are smarter than us in the ways that matter for them.

It's worth it to try your luck, but have patience, be realistic, and do your best. Not all methods work for all cats.

Looking into

Kittens!

