



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Six principles for handling free-roaming animals

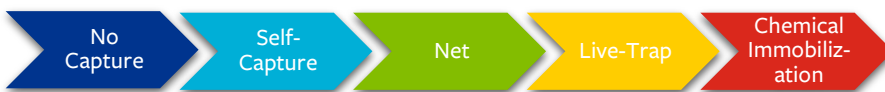
Responding to free-roaming (wild and feral) animals is not always about capture and handling. Minimizing stress is good for all, and sometimes the best option is not to capture.



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Use the least amount of restraint

Assess the amount of restraint necessary when considering personal, public and animal safety. Start with the goal of not capturing, then allow the animal to “self”-capture in a trap or drive pen. Proceed through the process below as necessary while recognizing that chemical immobilization is a last resort.



When physically restraining an animal, apply the least amount of pressure and contact as possible. Be aware of both physical restraint (nets, blankets) and psychological restraint (Y-pole, darkness).

Allow the animals a choice

Give the animal a choice to go in the direction you want, and reward a good decision. You gain more by reducing pressure on an animal who made the right decision than by stepping toward an animal who made the wrong decision. *Human actions and behavior should be low, slow, quiet and soft.* Fight-or-flight reactions can be triggered by the messages you are sending to the animal. Making yourself smaller (by kneeling or turning sideways), backing away and lowering your volume can reduce the potential for an animal to have a fight-or-flight response.

Keeping animals safe and secure during transport

Handling and transporting free-roaming animals will be stressful for them.

Reduce stress by doing the following:

- **Conduct vehicle and equipment inspections.** Ensure your vehicles and trailers are up to date on inspections for ventilation systems, engine, tires (tire kit and spare) and temperature controls.
- **Use direct travel routes.** An efficient route helps minimize animal stress by cutting down travel time and avoiding heavy-traffic zones.
- **Ensure redundant crate security.** Securing animals for holding and transport requires multiple checks to prevent tipping over and falling, as well as to ensure doors are secure. Zip ties are a great way to make sure doors are secure for travel.
- **Handle with care.** Move low, slow and soft to minimize any physical trauma and distress to the animals. Support the animal’s weight properly, and avoid unnecessary force and excessive pressure.
- **Prepare properly for overnight holding.** Avoid holding animals in a capture device or trap. Using polyethylene feral cat boxes and other nonmetal cages and containers can be more comfortable for animals, as well as warmer and dryer than traps.
- **Be aware of weather conditions** Consider where traps will be stored during holding and transport to keep animals comfortable. For example: Factor in wind chill with wind-protected areas for holding and transport cages.
- **Minimize captivity stress.** Reduce odor, noise, temperature and visual stressors. Every holding cage should have several towels, blankets and sheets to use as head covers and cage covers. Consider team awareness of the benefits of soft voices, dimmed lighting, no perfumes and as few humans present as possible.

Be creative

Think creatively about what can provide the same result as a cage, trap or capture device. It does not necessarily need to be a purpose-built device. It may be easier to:

- Catch feral chickens by supplying them with a nest box with fresh hay.
- Lure a loose dog into an empty swimming pool during a disaster zone scenario.
- Use a fenced tennis court as a way to contain the animal in a smaller space and allow for the use of additional techniques if capture is necessary.

Plan to develop long-term solutions

This is at the core of coexisting with wildlife. How can we change human AND animal behavior to reduce conflicts? Just removing the animal will not solve the problem. There need to be long-term solutions and public education to prevent future incidents.

Action item: How can we implement communitywide acceptance of approaches that include habitat manipulation, exclusion of wildlife from buildings and wildlife feeding bans?

Plan for the worst-case scenario

Make sure your team is prepared for things to go wrong and that the field vehicle and equipment are prepped and packed with that in mind.

- Does this animal present a potential danger to the public?
- Does a perimeter have to be established by law enforcement?
- Is the team knowledgeable and equipped to handle emergency animal and human care incident protocols?



Scott Dalton/AP Images for the HSUS



Carlos Delgado/AP Images for the HSUS

While the goal is to minimize and mitigate stress wild animals may experience during handling, working with wildlife comes with the risk of capture myopathy, death and injury. When planning, always identify emergency veterinarians, shelters, law enforcement and wildlife rehab centers for support.

Field euthanasia policy must be expressly clear about all procedures required, including documentation to be provided, approvals that must be obtained, witness statements that must be taken, etc., to avoid potential liability.

Human safety protocols must also be well developed. There must be a plan that all team members are aware of for access to care and first aid in the event of an accident or injury.

Visit humanepro.org/wildlife for more information.



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