



WORKING WITH SHY CATS



What is a shy or feral cat?

Cats that are extremely shy with people may have to overcome a past with:

- very little human contact,
- bad treatment by people on the streets or in a previous home, and
- Bad experiences with other animals while trying to survive alone.

Sometimes shy cats are called a *feral cat*, which just means they are undomesticated and not used to living with people. Feral does not mean that these cats are wild or aggressive. On the contrary, feral cats are timid and shy with people because they are afraid of humans. However, they are generally comfortable living with other cats and make great cat companions.

Feral cats are the result of irresponsible pet ownership. They are pets who strayed, or were abandoned, and bred. These cats and their kittens have a life of hardship and deprivation.

Is a shy cat right for you?

- Can you and your children accept a cat on its own terms? Can you put the needs of a cat above your own needs?
- Can you accept a cat that may not behave like other pet cats you've known?

- Will you be happy with a cat that may not snuggle with you? Maybe you already have a cuddly cat that satisfies your need for an affectionate cat.
- Are you persistent and patient? Will you work with a shy cat for months waiting to see a change in their behavior?
- Is someone home a good part of the day or evening and willing to spend time with this type of cat?
- Is your home relatively calm and quiet?
- Will you and your family remember to keep the doors and windows closed to ensure your shy cat won't stray?
- Would your current cat like a cat companion who will not be dominant or assertive?

What to expect from a shy cat

If you adopt a shy cat, your expectations must be realistic. Here's what you can expect from shy or feral cats:

- Shy cats will likely stay shy and will take months to learn to live with humans and feel comfortable in your home.
- They will initially regress and become even shyer, when they are moved from the shelter to your home.
- They will prefer small areas and hidey holes.
- They won't like company, fast movements, loud noises, door bells and the like.
- They will take months to a year to be comfortable with people in your household.
- They may never be comfortable with visitors to your home, and hide when company comes.
- They might bond with only one or two people in the household, not everyone.
- They are quiet observers who love a predictable routine and calm environment. But they also have a boundless curiosity and are often extremely playful.
- These cats usually like living with other cats. Does your current cat need a quiet companion? If you are looking for a companion for your cat (not necessarily for you), please consider a shy or feral cat. They can form strong bonds with new cat playmates.

It may take a very long time, but if you are patient and kind, shy cats can turn into great pets. They may blossom in your home over time, but such a change would probably be slow as cats don't change

quickly. If you are patient, loving and respectful of these cats' needs, you may be rewarded with a more confident cat that may eventually ask for more of your attention. Even if they stay aloof, you will know that you are providing a safe, healthy and loving home to a beautiful creature who deserves a good life.

Imagine yourself in the same circumstances - how long would it take you to learn how to live with Klingons? And would you feel more comfortable if there was another of your species with you?

Tips to help a shy cat make the transition into your home

- Ask RBARI staff with experience in the socialization process for advice, guidance and even encouragement when you need it.
- These cats need to stay in a small room for quite some time. While this may sound cruel, it isn't. Shy or feral cats feel safe in small spaces. They need to be introduced to larger spaces very gradually.
- Shy cats need hidey holes and covered baskets to sleep in and to watch the goings on from.
- Quality time with people is very important. Start out with:
 - slow movements,
 - a quiet voice,
 - eye contact but blinking your eyes, don't stare,
 - yawning and looking away to show you are no threat,
 - be predictable and establish a routine.
- To help the cat get used to the activities in your home:
 - read a book out loud so the cat gets used to your voice,
 - play a radio quietly so the cat gets used to background noise,
 - lay on the floor and talk to them so the cat gets used to your company being no threat,
 - show the cat any new thing that you bring into the room as they are curious.
- To make life pleasurable for the cat, offer delicious treats with a long handled spoon - little bits of tuna or other irresistible smelly foods.
- Start to touch:
 - Use a wand toy or a stick with fleece at the end.
 - Let the cat see the pet wand.
 - Start to touch the cat gently and slowly around the cheeks.
 - Perhaps that is enough for the first few days or even longer.

- As the cat gets used to the cheek touching, continue rubbing with the pet wand and start to move over more of the body slowly.
- Go slow and build on each day's success gradually. This routine will be slow going but it can't be rushed.