

A caregiver's guide:

Looking after an inbetweener that needs to live outdoors

Inbetweeners are a special kind of cat that have lived in proximity to humans, but didn't receive the correct socialisation in the 'socialisation window' when they were a kitten. This results in a cat that is anxious around people, and this is a permanent temperament trait that is very unlikely to change. Inbetweeners need a special kind of person who accepts that each cat is an individual and will care for him/her as an inbetweener with particular requirements. These cats require understanding and empathy and, on a practical level, the right kind of environment and care to meet his/her needs. They often thrive in a 'working cat' home. Below you will find some guidance on how you can prepare for the cat's arrival and care for him/her in the longer-term. Your contact for any queries is adoptions@thesheffieldcatsshelter.org.uk.

Environment

Some inbetweeners can live successfully in outdoor environments, providing someone is relatively close by to watch from a distance to monitor health and general condition. These environments include, for example, a large garden in a domestic home, a smallholding or farm, a stable yard, grounds to a hotel, etc. Your inbetweener will require a shelter to escape from extremes of weather. This shelter can take the form of an adapted building already present, such as a garden shed or outbuilding or can be purpose built. Placing a small shelter inside the outbuilding where the cat can sleep may provide additional warmth in colder conditions.

The cat must always have access to their shelter going forwards, and the shelter must be an area that is undisturbed by people so the cat feels safe to continue using it as a shelter.

Settling in period

Working cats need to be confined temporarily during his/her settling in period so that he/she gets used to the new territory (usually between 1 and 3 weeks depending on the circumstances). During this time, it is important to provide litter facilities (litter tray) and food and water, as far apart as possible, within a secure structure, eg, a shed, together with somewhere to sleep and several options of hiding places. Ideally, all these resources should be spaced apart, but near the door so that food, water and litter trays can be easily accessed without invading the cat's space. To prevent the cat escaping before the end of their settling in period, care must be taken when entering the cat's shelter.

General care

Once the inbetweeners are let out the cat will, like any other cat, require food and water and somewhere to toilet. This can be inside the designated shelter or close by. Once the cat is able to be let out to roam freely, suitable areas of soil can be prepared as a toilet and a litter tray may no longer be required. Feeding dry food daily may be preferable to wet food, to prevent spoiling and attracting flies. Fresh water should be provided daily. If possible, these resources should be located in an area where other animals are unlikely to access them. Inbetweeners may be less visible than a typical pet cat, and there may be days when he/she is not seen at all. Keeping a diary of sightings and observations about food eaten or disturbed bedding can be helpful in case there are any future concerns about the cat's whereabouts.

Interaction

Inbetweeners do not require attention, such as eye contact, approaching, touching/stroking, from caregivers, as many inbetweeners find this threatening. However, if the cat feels comfortable, he/she may approach you and appear friendly. Any response from you should be minimal, always giving the cat the choice to continue to interact or to walk away. It is common for inbetweeners to live perfectly content lives without direct interaction with people.

Health care

Any concerns about his/her health, eg, sickness or injury, should be reported to The Sheffield Cats Shelter for advice on further action. Any medication can be provided in food, but it is best to mix with a treat food to administer to avoid the cat becoming averse to his/her normal food if something is added to it. Ongoing health care of the inbetweeners that cannot be handled is always a challenge. The Sheffield Cats Shelter will support you to appreciate that there are limitations regarding what can be done should the cat become ill or suffer an injury or trauma. Some free-roaming inbetweeners may be trapped successfully (in the same kind of food-baited traps used for TNR programmes) but treatment can only realistically take place if the condition or injury can be treated under one general anaesthetic with no further requirement for ongoing treatment or medication that requires handling. Minor conditions may be treated by putting medication in food but if the inbetweeners requires confinement and prolonged treatment, and will be severely distressed under those circumstances, then euthanasia must be considered to prevent or alleviate suffering.