



Kitten Season, it's Not So Cute and Cuddly

Everyone looks forward to spring time; flowers, sunshine, warmer weather. Well, almost everyone. Those of us involved in animal rescue know of another part of spring, the phenomenon known simply as “Kitten Season”.

What is “Kitten Season”? Starting in early spring, the longer days trigger the onset of estrus, or “heat”, in cats. Cats seasonally polyestrous, meaning that as the days get longer and warmer they will come into heat, multiple times until the weather cools back down. Therefore, kitten season begins early spring and usually lasts until late October.

How Does It Effect Shelters? With the hundreds (or thousands) of stray and unaltered cats in the area, this turns into a flood of kittens, arriving at nearly the same time during the year. This puts a tremendous strain on the already limited staff, resources and space a shelter has to work with. A sudden and drastic increase in the cat population also brings along risks of disease and illness spreading through the cat population.

But Kittens Get Adopted Quickly! Yes, kittens do get adopted quickly, but the number of kittens housed always outweighs the number of homes ready to take them in. Kittens are cute, cuddly and spunky! They draw people in. Unfortunately, that means our adult cats are often overlooked and spend even more time in the shelter. And those kittens that don't get adopted right away, often grow up within the shelter walls. We have kittens that came into us last summer that were overlooked for one reason or another that are now adult cats and chances are will be overlooked again this summer as kittens come through the doors again.

How Can You Help? SPAY AND NEUTER! It's almost that simple. Cats reach reproductive maturity between 4 and 6 months old. The average gestation is 64 days, therefore female cats can have easily 2 to 3 litters per year, with the average litter size being between 4 to 6 cats. Spaying and neutering is the only way to stop the cycle, whether they are owned pets or feral cats.

What Should You Do If You Find A Litter of Kittens? PLEASE, leave them where you found them and don't disturb the nest. Female cats will often hide their litters in safe places (under the bushes, under

the deck, in a garage) so that she can go off and hunt for food. The mother could be gone for a couple of hours. Chances are, if you don't see mom now, she will be back.

If you find only 1 or 2 kittens, chances are mom is in the process of moving the litter and hasn't moved those kittens yet. Only remove the kittens if you are 100% positive that mom has not been around for several hours.

What If Mom Doesn't Come Back? In the rare event that the mother cat doesn't return for her litter, there are two options. You can either take the kittens in and care for them yourself or bring them to the shelter. It's important to remember that the mortality rate for kittens under 4 weeks of age is extremely high, especially without mom. These kittens need to be bottle fed every 2 to 3 hours and that's just the start. It requires commitment for anyone looking to take on the task. Resources on raising kittens can be found at:

www.2ndchance.info/orphan **HYPERLINK "http://www.2ndchance.info/orphankitten.htm" kitten**
HYPERLINK "http://www.2ndchance.info/orphankitten.htm".htm

<http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/cat-care/newborn-kitten-care>

What We Need Here To Help Prepare: We always need donations here at the shelter, but kitten season brings in a demand for items we may not typically need during the winter months.

Specific Items Include:

Kitten Replacement Milk – Liquid or powder

Kitten Bottles & Nipples

Hot Water Bottles

Snugglesafe Heating Pads

Dawn Dish Soap

Blankets

Bleach

Shallow Dish Bowls

Canned Cat Food (Patte)

Most importantly we will need volunteers willing to foster and bottle feed kittens to help alleviate the burden of the staff.

We will be hosting a “Kitten Shower” May 4th 2014 at the Humane Society, during which we will do a bottle feeding “how to” class! It’s free to attend, all we ask is to bring a small donation to help with our kittens!