

For Immediate Release:

MARCH 25, 2009

Contact:**ELIZABETH PAROWSKI**, eparowski@alleycat.org or (240) 482-1984**FRANCIE ISRAELI**, fisraeli@johnadams.com or (202) 737-8400**ALLEY CAT ALLIES OFFERS TIPS FOR “KITTEN SEASON”****Springtime is prime breeding season for stray and feral cats**

BETHESDA – Springtime is prime “kitten season”—the time when most kittens are born to intact stray and feral cats—and it is fast approaching, noted Alley Cat Allies, the national advocate for stray and feral cats.

“Should you come across kittens outdoors, you may be tempted to pick them up and bring them home with you, but that might not be in the best interest of the kittens,” said Becky Robinson, president of Alley Cat Allies. “Deciding what to do when you find kittens—whether to take them home or leave them outside—depends on a number of variables.”

Feral cats are members of the domestic cat species, but unlike stray cats, they are not socialized to people. Feral cats live in family groups called colonies, and unless they are spayed or neutered through a Trap-Neuter-Return program, these colonies continue to reproduce. As the weather warms, tomcats prowl for mates, females become pregnant, and the cycle of reproduction continues.

What to Do When You Find Kittens

Robinson noted that Alley Cat Allies has helped thousands of Americans who care for stray and feral cats with the following advice for people who find litters of kittens in their community:

Determine the age of the kittens.

“If kittens are not handled in the first weeks of their lives, they are not socialized to humans, and are thus ‘feral,’” said Robinson. Older kittens are probably better off left in their outdoor home.”

The following guidelines are useful for estimating the age of the kittens:

- *Under one week:* Kittens’ eyes are shut, ears are folded down, and they are not walking. They are purring and making tiny noises.
- *One-two weeks:* Kittens’ eyes start to open—they are blue—and focus and ears begin to open. They are crawling, snuggling, and kneading.
- *Three weeks:* Kittens’ eyes fully open and ears are open and standing up. They are responding to noises and movement and taking their first steps.
- *Four-six weeks:* Kittens are probably running, playing, digging, and pouncing. They are starting to wean, and eyes have fully changed from blue to their adult color.
- *Eight weeks:* Kittens look like little versions of full grown cats. This is the best age at which to begin the socialization process.

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Determine whether a mother cat is caring for the kittens.

“If the kittens are alone when you find them, they could be abandoned, or the mother could simply be looking for food,” Robinson noted. “Wait and observe from a distance for an hour or two. Ultimately, you have to use your own judgment, depending on the kitten’s needs and your time and resources.”

If the mother cat does not return, determine if the kittens are young enough to be socialized and fostered or adopted, or if they are old enough to be trapped, neutered, and returned using the age guideline above, Robinson said. If they are not weaned, they require bottle-feeding and round-the-clock care.

If the mother does come back, keep in mind that her care is best for the kittens, and they should remain with her until they are eight-weeks-old. If she is friendly, trap her, pick up the kittens, and bring the whole family indoors to a confined area until the kittens are old enough to be adopted.

If the mother is feral, leave the family outside and provide shelter, food, and water. Once the kittens are weaned, place them in foster care for adoption.

In all cases, be sure to spay the mother cat—so there are not future litters of kittens—and spay or neuter the kittens themselves.

Practice Trap-Neuter-Return to Ensure No More Kittens

“The best way to help stray and feral cats is Trap-Neuter-Return,” said Robinson. “The cats are humanely trapped and taken to a veterinary hospital or spay/neuter clinic to be vaccinated and neutered. Cats who are friendly toward humans and young kittens are put up for adoption through a foster program. Feral cats are ‘eartipped’—a portion of the left ear is clipped while they are under anesthesia—and then released to their original colony site.”

Visitors to www.alleycat.org can find more information about caring for and socializing kittens, as well as tips on starting a Trap-Neuter-Return program and connecting with Feral Friends—local individuals, groups, and veterinarians who will be able to help.

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About Alley Cat Allies

Alley Cat Allies is dedicated to ending the killing of cats and leading the movement for their humane care. Their web site is www.alleycat.org

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