

FERAL CAT ARTICLE

About Ferals

“Feral” cats were born on the streets and have not been socialized to people. Most have never had any human contact but some were once semi-tame cats that now have to fend for themselves. These



cats do the best they can to survive, facing many hardships but many manage to lead a good existence, especially here in California with our temperate climate. They live in neighborhoods, shopping centers, creeks, commercial properties and near dumpsters—anywhere they can find shelter. Many compassionate people provide daily food and water for these street cats. However, the greatest threat to feral cats is overpopulation. Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) has proven to be the most humane and effective method of managing feral cat populations. With TNR, a feral cat is humanely trapped, spayed or neutered, then returned to the location where they were trapped. It breaks the breeding cycle while allowing the cat to live out its natural life in its original territory.

Removing feral cats from a location is very ineffective as it only opens a territorial void and then more unaltered cats move in, starting the breeding cycle all over again!

*Ferals that have been spayed or neutered usually have one ear “tipped” or “notched” for easy identification.

Orphan Kittens

3,507 cats and kittens entered Butte County shelters in 2014. Only 726 of them were placed in loving homes. You can make a difference in their lives by doing a few simple things:

First, make sure your own cats are spayed or neutered so that they do not add to the overpopulation of kittens. Too many kittens must lose their lives at the shelter because there are not enough homes.

Second, TNR (trap, neuter, return) roaming cats in your neighborhood. This will help reduce cat populations in your area and is the only effective and humane way of doing so.

Third, care for kittens, including taking them to a veterinarian if they are sick, until they are at least 8 weeks of age. Please only bring kittens to the shelter if you know for

certain their mother is not caring for them, you cannot care for them, and you are certain they are without care. Kittens that are at least 1.5 pounds and extremely healthy and friendly will be considered for adoption.

March to November is kitten season, the time of the year when most kittens are born and shelters are busiest with incoming cats and kittens. Reports of people finding orphaned kittens increase during this time. If you've found an orphan kitten, preserving its health is a difficult job requiring prompt action. However, right up front, take a moment to decide if the kitten or litter you've located has truly been orphaned. Sometimes well-meaning people unknowingly separate kittens from their mother, making things worse instead of better. This article will help you determine if you're dealing with an orphan situation.

Where's Mom?

The mother cat, also called the *queen*, usually remains continuously with newborn kittens for one or two days after giving birth. She may then leave the 'nest' for short periods. Even well cared-for domestic mother cats with litters indoors may leave the nest for several hours at a time about two weeks after giving birth. Feral mothers, needing to hunt for food, will leave the nest for intervals at a much earlier stage.

Also, a mother cat will often pick up and move her litter to a new location, especially during the first few weeks after birth. Establishing a new nest is part of the cat's instinctual behavior to safeguard her young by not remaining in one place too long.



What to do?

When you find small kittens without a mother cat present, the mother may simply be away hunting for food or may be moving the kittens, one by one, to or from the place you found them. In other words, don't immediately assume the kittens are orphans. If the kittens are safe for the time being, you should observe the nest to see that the mother returns soon; observe quietly from a safe distance if dealing with a shy or feral mother.

The goal here is to do what is best for the mother and her litter -- and it is best to keep a mother together with her kittens if possible, not for emotional reasons but for the best chance of survival. Not only is hand-raising a young, "prewean" kitten an intensive round-the-clock job, but also the mortality rate for these young kittens separated from their mothers is much higher than if they had been kept together.

Remember that if you encounter a lone kitten, mom may be moving the kittens, and the lone kitten could be either the first to be moved to the new location, or the last to be moved from the old.

The same considerations apply to a lone mother cat. For instance, when trapping feral cats, if you trap a nursing mother you must try to find her kittens. In fact if you are trying to trap a feral litter and their mother, you can rely on the mother returning to the nest in order to trap her with her kittens, allowing you to keep the mother and kittens safely together.

When observing kittens you've found, there is no set length of time that you should wait to watch for a returning mother cat, but think in terms of only a few hours. It's a tough call, especially if you don't know how long the kittens have been alone when you discover them. If you wait too long, the kittens can weaken beyond recovery (chilling and dehydration are major concerns).

By all means, if you've found an orphaned litter we want you to be able to help these kittens reach a happy, healthy adulthood. But before acting, consider the information above and take a moment to ask yourself "Are these kittens orphans?" Go to "[How to Care for an Orphan Kitten](#)."

For more information about feral cats and humane trapping, visit www.alleycat.org and www.sfspca.org.