

Pets, Pets, Pets The Beacon October 5, 2006

...by Joanne Anderson



Penelope

The law of supply and demand hurts cats. Kittens are adorable creatures, but far too many are born outdoors with no prenatal care. Mother Nature has stacked the odds against them too. Millions are unwanted. Ailments and mishaps are the byproducts of fending for themselves. Cat competition for homes is so fierce. Unlike dogs, cat births are seasonal- from late March to early December, with the real glut arriving at the end of summer.

Kittens are that tiny desirable size for only a few weeks. This "cute cat" window of opportunity is actually a fleeting feline peephole. Even if a kitten is fortunate enough to be rescued and/or rehabilitated by an individual or group, that peephole often closes up before the kitten is healthy and tamed enough for permanent placement. When finally ready, the kitten is no longer a teeny fluff ball. Prospective owners prefer tiny kitties, not gangly teen cats.

There's also a Cat Catch 22 dealing with the babies of ferals about *when* to take them from Mama. Our early intervention socializes kittens but bottle feeding can't pass along maternal immunities. Littermates (and Ma) teach the babies manners. They learn that biting is not acceptable behavior. Kittens are better off remaining with their mothers for 8 to 10 weeks, but if the caretaker leaves them outdoors that long, they'll be hard to catch. Even if you trap them, they may stay too wild. The earlier you handle a kitten, the easier it is to tame. Month old feral kittens stop spitting at you in a day or so; after about 8 weeks old, they're hard to socialize. Another natural window of opportunity has slammed shut. Timing is crucial. You want a mother's care but you don't want the kittens to be so independent that they won't accept people. Grabbing them around a month old works, since the kittens are still malleable and starting to eat on their own. Sometimes you only get one chance, because if Mom distrusts you, she'll move the whole family. You also must keep an eye on her too so you can trap her next to spay her when her milk dries up. Orphans are a different story. Rescuers take them as soon as possible.

There are so many germs, bacteria, and fungi outdoors just waiting to complicate matters. Some diseases are fatal to debilitated kittens, while others are merely problematic delays to adoptability. Intestinal parasites are a given. Shelters routinely worm kittens upon arrival. Bacterial bouts like coccidia and giardia take longer to beat. You can't adopt out a kitten until the baby's bowels are under control. While you are medicating, the biological baby clock keeps ticking.

Feline upper respiratory and eye infections are rampant. They can take weeks to clear up, despite antibiotics. Sometimes cats are left with a lifelong chronic condition. Some may

have a drippy nose or eyes when stressed. These runny remnants are cosmetic issues and no longer contagious. Drips are not selling points.

Ringworm is a major nuisance- the dreaded scourge of feline rescue. It's the most common skin infection in cats, and more apt to attack those in large groups as in shelters or catteries. Spores can lurk in furniture and bedding for a year. Misnamed, because there are no worms, ringworm is just scaly fungal hair loss. Although not life threatening in itself, the suspicion of ringworm "condemns" many otherwise healthy cats.

Most ringworm cases in healthy cats will resolve themselves in 2 to 3 months, but treatment is usually recommended because the patches are so contagious (to us too). Diagnosis is iffy. A Wood's light only makes some fungal strains phosphoresce. A skin culture takes up to 3 weeks to confirm. Rescuers can't waste time waiting. Treatment- pills, dips, topicals- takes time (up to 6 weeks or more). Meanwhile the kitten is doubling in size while you are waiting for the hair to grow back

So after describing these health hazards, I pray I haven't frightened everyone from ever adopting a cat. The crowd of cuddly cats awaiting homes is so huge, their obstacles vast. I've decided to do PR for a few feline friends to give them a competitive edge. Here goes:

□ Last Hope's Stellar Trio: Comet, Star, Midnight, now about 5 months old and very *purrsonable*. These black and tuxedo babes are in foster care after recovering from a common eye infection- herpes viral conjunctivitis. They are not contagious to cats or people but do have a lingering drippy eye at times, so they will not show well at one of the Last Hope adoption centers. They are responding nicely to supplements of the amino acid, lysine. They're vaccinated, altered and FeLV/FIV neg. To meet one of the stars, call 516-996-3227.

□ At Babylon Town Shelter (643-9270) - "Tinker Bella" (#18449) - a 1 year spayed gray longhair beauty was turned in by owners who are having a baby. They did pay ALL her fees so she is free to go to a loving home.... "Denzel" (#18447) a debonair 3-4 month old smoozer that was abandoned in a box on someone's stoop. A Good Samaritan is having him neutered..... "Stubby Kay" (#18440 in maternity) an adorable 6 week old calico who participated in my N. Babylon Library program. She's missing part of her tail. I will arrange for her spay; just bring this column in when adopting her.

Babylon Shelter on Lamar St. W. Babylon also has an assortment of deserving dogs. "Penelope" in Cage 49 is a Schipperke mix about 30 lbs, a baby herself, yet she came into the shelter with her 3 puppies, now placed. Adult males available include 3 purebreds- a Boxer in Cage 5; "Cappuccino"- the Akita in Cage 43; "Tyler"- the yellow Lab in Cage 47- plus "Cubby Bear"- the huggable neut. Collie mix in Cage 1.

□ Job Opportunity: Babylon Shelter is hiring a full time kennel attendant, Mon. to Fri, 7:30 to 4:00 pm, \$7.50 an hour. This is an excellent way for a young person interested in a veterinary career to get hands on experience. Ask to speak to Ed Buturla.

Reminder: There is still time to enter the *Beacon's* "How Cute is Your Pet?" Photo Contest.