



Feline Cat Colony & Rescue Program

As do other large parks such as Disneyworld, Bush Gardens, Hershey Park and Longwood Gardens the PA Renaissance Faire allows a colony of semi-feral cats to live on grounds serving as a pest control system, to reduce the amount of poisons and pesticides require to keep the park safe for patrons.

The cats are provided safe warm places to sleep, given food and water and monitored for medical needs, but are not pets, and the vast majority of them remain hidden when patrons are on grounds, so it is a rare sight to see one; they come out after the faire day and "clean up." This is what is meant by "semi-feral."

As part of this program, the cats are caught, spayed/neutered, checked for diseases, given vaccinations... but it is impossible to catch every single one and this means we end up with newborn kittens here despite efforts to prevent that. If everything goes perfectly, the kittens are raised by their mothers, and grow up to become a part of the colony, replacing natural losses.

But if something goes wrong, as sometimes happens, any surviving kittens found are caught and brought to my wife and I, who serve as the kitten rescue portion of the operation.

Once we take the kittens in, they cannot be returned to the wild, as they miss crucial weeks of learning how to operate as a feral cat, and their mothers will not accept them back.

We keep the kittens until they are at least 8 weeks old, and have had their first vet visit, been checked for ailments such as FIV and Feline Leukemia, and get their first rabies and distemper etc. vaccinations, at which point they become available for adoption. We normally have a list of people wishing to adopt them which has at times been as much as a hundred people long, so we can be very selective about who gets to take them. We require that they continue the course of vaccinations, and that they get the kitten neutered when they become old enough, and we also make it clear that if the adoption does not work out for any reason that they are to return the kittens to us, not release them into the wild or take them to a shelter. We also insist that these are to be indoor cats, never going out of the home unless on a leash, they don't have the skills, and it is bad for them and for the local songbird population. Again, because our "want to adopt" list is long, we do not have to compromise on those requirements.

We understand that optimally they would be on mother's milk until naturally weaned at about four weeks of age, and left with the mother until adopted at about 8 weeks... but that's not the circumstance we find ourselves in, these are kittens who would, for one reason or another, be unable to survive in the wild. As such, although they are young, sometimes very young, all we can do is do our best to make up for the lack, providing kitten replacement formula until weaned and kitten food after that, keeping a warming pad available for them at all times, and doing everything we can to return them to health, and keep them healthy.

We bring them to Faire and have them in front of people for several reasons. First, at their age, we have to feed them frequently, sometimes as often as every two hours, it would be impossible to leave them at home. Second, since they cannot ever be released into the wild, we want them to be socialized so they enjoy humans and make good pets and companions. Third, people very much enjoy getting to meet and perhaps pet these very young kittens, something you would never normally be able to do as they are too young to be separated from their mothers if that can be avoided, and too young to adopt. And forth, being exposed to large numbers of people means they get dozens of people who really want to adopt them. They are kept in harnesses, and have "bungee" leashes attached, so they do not injure themselves if they fall or are dropped, and don't get lost, the ones who are too tiny for a harness are not allowed to run free and are rarely handled by patrons.

I would also like to add that we get quizzed almost daily by people who, in the guise of asking innocent questions, are actually concerned about what we are doing and want to know specific details... after getting their answers, they reveal that they are vet techs, or work for official rescues, or are with the SPCA, etc. Without fail, they have all thanked us for what we are doing and expressed relief that we are doing things right, and for the right reasons, often offering advice or assistance based on their own knowledge of similar practices.

We are not paid by the faire to do this, we do not sell the kittens, there is no direct financial incentive for us to do this, we do it because we love doing it, as hard as it sometimes is, because it is the best we can do for these little creatures, because it brings joy into the hearts of thousands who see them, some of whom say it is their favorite part of the Faire, and because we understand this is a duty, as part of the overall effort in using the feral cat colony for the benefit of the Faire and thus the community of vendors who lease space here, and we can do our part, just as do the people who care for the adults, who put out the food, who take them into their homes if they get ill or injured. Please know we do all we can to take care of and home these sweet kitties.

Joan & Lance Berg