



## Interesting Case from our web site [www.fairfield-vets.co.uk](http://www.fairfield-vets.co.uk)



### Hand Reared Kittens



Back in May 2008, eight weeks ago, a lady walked into our surgery carrying a bundle of three tiny kittens. She had found them, abandoned on waste ground, whilst walking her dog. They appeared to be around 1 week old, with eyes not yet opened and umbilical cords still attached. There had been no sign of a mother, and - by the fact they they were found wrapped in some old clothing- we had to assume that some one had deliberately left them to die. A volunteer was needed to hand rear them!

I recently came back to work after maternity leave. My little boy is not a good sleeper, and was still - at that time - waking 2 or 3 times in the night to be fed. I knew that hand rearing a litter of kittens was demanding, and I knew I already had enough on my plate, but I couldn't resist them. So I went home with kittens in one hand (all 3 could sit in one hand at that time!) and a tub of kitten replacement milk in the other. My elder son, Jamie (aged 8) was over the moon.

My first port of call was to look on the Feline Advisory Bureau website ([www.fabcats.org](http://www.fabcats.org)) for information on hand rearing. Despite my 13 years in practice, it was something I had never done. The website (an excellent resource for cat owners, breeders and vets alike) said that hand rearing was extremely demanding and time consuming, but ultimately rewarding. How true that has turned out to be!

Initially, the kittens needed bottle feeding every 2-3 hours. They also need assistance going to the toilet, as usually, their mother's grooming stimulates this. Hand reared kittens have to be wiped with wet wipes/damp cotton wool to stimulate toileting. This is done after each feed.

For the first 2 weeks, my routine completely revolved around the kittens. In the day, I had to bring them to work so they could be fed, or - on my non-working days - co-ordinate where I went and when around

their feed times. By the time I had sterilised bottles, made up milk, fed and toileted 3 kittens, 45 minutes would have gone by. I just about had time to care for my baby and other family before the next feed was due. In the night, I would get up to feed the baby, then stumble sleepily downstairs to do the kittens. On some nights, I had barely got back into bed before the baby woke again for his next feed.

I have never been so exhausted in my life! The hardest time was the first morning feed - with an 8 month baby yelling for his milk and breakfast, an eight year old to get ready for school, and 3 kittens to deal with, it was all I could do to stay sane! My elder son Jamie was a huge help though - either occupying the baby or doing the bottle feeding for me. My husband was also fantastic, helping with feeds whenever he could and doing a whole weekend with baby and kittens when I had to work away. It was a mammoth family effort!

However, as the kittens grew, things got easier. The frequency of feeding reduced, and by 6 weeks they were taking some solid food too. Despite warning from the FAB website that many hand reared kittens don't survive, and despite bouts of both constipation and diarrhoea for all 3, they are now the picture of health. They have increased from 80 to 800grams, and are now at the wonderful stage of playful, kitten-like behaviour. The three of them are like a whirlwind around the house!

Having had such close interaction with people, they are all extremely confident and sociable. We are truly reaping the rewards for all our hard work. Who needs a TV, with kittens to entertain you?! Whoever abandoned them so selfishly has missed out on 3 beautiful little creatures!

The one thing that the FAB website failed to warn me was how hard it would be to let them go to new homes - all the family are very attached to them, and we would keep all 3 were it not for the fact that we have other cats. So we now have the difficult dilemma of deciding on one to keep. At least I am safe in the knowledge that I have found an excellent home for the other 2, and I will get to see them at the vet's on a regular basis.

However hard I imagined hand rearing would be, it was more time consuming than I could ever have realised. Would I do it again? Definitely.....but not with an eight month old baby in tow!!!

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This article is available on the Fairfield Veterinary Centre web site at [www.fairfield-vets.co.uk](http://www.fairfield-vets.co.uk)

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