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**How to Tame Wild Kittens**

**By LeAnn R. Ralph**

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Over the past several years, the wild mother cat who has taken up residence in our barn in rural Wisconsin has given me many opportunities to figure out how to tame wild kittens. The mother cat always hides her kittens very well, and then, when they are big enough to leave the nest and are big enough to eat kitty food, she brings them out and expects me to feed them.

When the wild mother cat brings her kittens out of the nest, it is the first time in their lives they have seen a human being, and they tend to be hissing, spitting bits of fluff that really look as though they mean business. And since they already have teeth and claws, I would rather not push the issue. I also would rather not let them remain wild, living in my barn, having kittens of their own. Six kittens, within a year or two, could turn into 56.

As of early 2005, the wild mother cat has had more than 20 kittens in our barn, and I have managed to tame them and to find homes for most of them (unfortunately, several were lost when the wild momma kitty took them out to teach them how to hunt).

Here are some tips for taming wild kittens:

1. Buy some canned kitty food -- In my experience, kittens are always hungry and are always interested in canned kitty food. I have noticed it doesn't matter what brand, just so long as it has fish in it. The smell of fish seems irresistible to kittens.
2. Let the kittens smell the canned kitty food -- Open the can and then try to get as close to them as possible so they can smell the food. Once they get a whiff of it, and this is especially true of younger kittens that are anywhere from four weeks old to a few months old, they will be so interested in the canned kitty food they will forget (somewhat) that you are right next to them.
3. Use a fork (or spoon) to scoop out some of the food and let the kittens eat off the end of the fork (spoon) -- This is an important step. Do NOT put a forkful of food down and then back off. From the very first, hold the fork toward the kitten and let the kitten eat off the end of the fork. Stick to your guns

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and do not give up. If the kitten wants canned kitty food, the kitten **MUST** eat it off the end of the fork or the spoon. This is the first step in getting the kitten used to being close to you and in growing accustomed to your hand coming closer. This will be useful later on when you are trying to pet the kittens. After the kitten has eaten food off the end of the fork/spoon, **THEN** you can put a little food down for the kitten to eat on its own.

4. Repeat step 3 every time you offer the kittens some canned food -- At first, the kittens are going to be cautious about your hand coming toward them. The fork with the food will help to overcome that resistance. After you have done this a couple of times, the kittens will look forward to eating off the fork and will start to lose their fear of you and your hand.

5. Stay right there while the kittens are eating -- After you have put out some canned food for the

kittens, stay there and don't move off. Let them eat with you next to them. This will help teach them to associate human beings with "good things."

6. Carefully start to pet the kittens -- After feeding them a couple of times without trying to pet them, which will begin to teach them that they can trust you, put food out and let the kittens start to eat. Then slowly reach down and pet them a little bit. Continue to sit there while they finish eating.

7. Carefully start to pick up the kittens -- After you can successfully put out food and remain there while the kittens eat and can pet them a little bit, try picking up a kitten. If you can, grasp the kitten by the scruff of the neck. This is how mother cats carry their kittens, and when you do this, the kitten will go limp. Hold the kitten against your shoulder and talk softly to it, but don't say "Hi kitten" or anything starting with an "h" sound. To a kitten, this sounds like a cat hissing, and the kitten will become frightened. Hold the kitten for a minute or so and then, grasping it by the scruff of the neck, set it down. After you have done this several times, the kitten will realize that no harms come to it from being picked up and handled.

Depending upon the age of the kittens and basic personality traits, the whole process, from starting with canned kitty food on the fork to being able to pet them and pick them up, could be accomplished in a few days or it might take a few weeks. Eventually, the kittens will know that people mean good things, and when they see you coming, they will come running to meet you. It has been my experience that cats quickly recognize when a situation is to their advantage, and once the kittens know you are a source of good things to eat and that you mean them no harm, they will want to be friends.

If you have any questions, you are welcome to send me an e-mail at -- [bigpines\(at\)ruralroute2.com](mailto:bigpines(at)ruralroute2.com)  
(replace (at) with @)

If you would like to read an article about feeding and caring for orphaned kittens, go to the "articles" section of my website at <http://ruralroute2.com> -- or if you would like to read more stories about cats and kittens from my book, "Give Me a Home Where the Dairy Cows Roam" (free shipping (!) on copies ordered from the author) -- visit <http://ruralroute2.com> and click on sample chapters.

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LeAnn R. Ralph is the author of the books "Christmas in Dairyland (True Stories from a Wisconsin Farm)" and "Give Me a Home Where the Dairy Cows Roam." You are invited to read sample chapters and to sign up for Rural Route 2 News, the FREE monthly newsletter from Rural Route 2. Visit --- <http://ruralroute2.com>

## **Kittens and Hiccups**

**By LeAnn R. Ralph**

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Can kittens (and cats) get hiccups?

The answer to that question is --- yes.

After I rescued four two-week-old kittens who were orphaned when their mother was killed, I became the "momma cat" and started feeding them kitten formula with a syringe.

When I took the kittens to the vet clinic for a checkup, the vet asked me if they had gotten hiccups yet.

At that point, they had never shown any signs of it.

"No, they haven't had hiccups," I said.

"They will," the vet said with a smile. "It happens sometimes when they eat too fast."

"Should I do anything to help them if they get the hiccups?" I asked, wondering what in the world I could do for kitten hiccups. Tell the kittens to hold their breath? That's what works for me.

"You don't have to do anything," the vet said. "They'll go away on their own."

Not long after that --- sure enough, the kittens got hiccups. And sure enough, after a while, the hiccups went away.

That was more than 13 years ago. I still have the "kittens" (three of them, anyway; one died in October 2004 from chronic renal failure). And even today, as adult cats, they will occasionally get the hiccups. The hiccups last for a half a minute or a minute and then that's the end of it.

So --- if your kitten (or cat) develops hiccups, don't worry about it. The hiccups will go away sooner or later.

LeAnn R. Ralph is the author of the books "Give Me a Home Where the Dairy Cows Roam" (September 2004) and "Christmas in Dairyland (True Stories from a Wisconsin Farm) (July 2003) and "Preserve Your Family History (A Step-by-Step Guide for Interviewing Family Members and Writing Oral Histories)" (e-book; April 2004). For information about the books, visit <http://ruralroute2.com>



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