



## **In From the Wild – from Feral to Pet**

The man said, “Don’t you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can’t possibly make a difference! After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, “I made a difference for that one.”

“We make a Difference... if We Choose!”

Ferals are the product of human irresponsibility. Unneutered domestic cats are allowed to roam freely or are disposable commodities dumped when they become inconvenient. These unneutered domestics produce offspring who have little or no direct contact with humans- these are ferals.

Feral cats deserve our compassion and protection. Most importantly, feral cats have the right to be free from cruelty and abuse.

Most adult feral cats are not able to be socialized to the point where they can be adopted as household pets. Feral kittens, on the other hand, can often be tamed if captured young enough. Considering the short life span and inherent dangers in the life of a feral cat, those kittens which can be tamed and adopted by humans are indeed lucky.

The process of taming kittens can take from 2-6 weeks, depending on their age and state of wildness. Individuals can differ greatly in temperament even within the same litter. This requires a major commitment on the part of foster homes to spend many hours working with kittens before they reach a stage where they are adoptable.

PAWS utilizes a trap-neuter-release approach with adult feral cats who have a committed caregiver. Working with caregivers, PAWS volunteers trap nursing mothers and litters, bringing them into trained foster homes. As soon as kittens are of weaning age (4-6 weeks), the adults are sterilized and returned to their colonies. Kittens are separated into smaller groups to allow for more human contact and socialization.

Feral kitten tamers expose kittens to human contact and household experiences. Kittens observe regular household activities: vacuuming, dishwashers, telephones and the like, from the safety of taming cages. Physical handling and contact is increased daily until the kittens readily accept human touch, and seek out the company of people.

PAWS adoption counselors work with prospective families to educate them about the individual personalities of reformed feral kittens, spending time on the need for a clearly defined socialization and introduction period in the new home, and the importance of having the kitten be an indoor only pet, since to some degree all former feral kittens retain some vestiges of their wild life, and may be easily startled or “spooked” when exposed to new stimuli.

Since 1998 PAWS has trapped/neutered/released 491 adult feral cats and rehabilitated and placed more than 175 feral kittens in adoptive homes.