

‘Tis kitten season

On a recent warm spring afternoon, Billy Shifflet was outside enjoying the warm temperature and exploring the area around his home in Lancaster County.

He came across 3-day old kittens without a momma. Shifflet knew exactly what to do as he is the youngest volunteer at Garfield's Rescue Inc. (GRI).

He observed and saw momma cat return to her kittens. With the assistance of his mom, he gathered the kittens into a soft carrier. He knew those kittens desperately needed their momma.

Kittens at that age benefit greatly from the nutrients that momma cats pass on to their kittens through nursing. While neonatal kittens can survive without their mothers, it takes experienced 24/7 care by a rescue organization, such as GRI, due to bottle feeding every 2 hours using specific feeding positions. Survival chances increase greatly when kittens remain with momma.

Shifflet then set about trapping momma. Shifflet knew that momma would be hungry, so he put out some cat food for her and waited for her to go into the carrier to eat. When she did, he closed the door and reunited momma with her babies.

Shifflet did exactly what it is recommended. When you find neonatal kittens without a momma cat, you observe the nest to see if momma returns. If the kittens are content and have round bellies, you know that momma is nearby. If the kittens are thin and crying, momma has either been delayed in her return or something bad has happened to her.

Momma leaves the nest because she is hungry and thirsty and needs food for herself to feed her babies. When she returns, then you can capture the whole family. If momma does not return after a long period of time, then the kittens will need your assistance. You can gather them up and contact a local rescue organization for advice and next steps.

Momma Bella, babies Bart, Becca and Bettie are currently warm and cozy at GRI.

GRI welcomes new volunteers and fosters, especially during spring kitten season.

Kittens and momma cats do well in a quiet space close to humans. A small bathroom or porch (heated) works well. The kittens are then very adoptable as they have spent time with loving humans. GRI works with rescue partners to find loving homes for kittens and social adult cats.

To learn more about GRI's mission to "prevent suffering of homeless/community cats on the Northern Neck of Virginia" or to donate, visit www.garfieldsrescue.org.



Billy Shifflet gathers and transports Momma Bella, babies Bart, Becca and Bettie to Garfield's Rescue Inc.