

# Cat Tails 2009

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## Hartley's Surprise

By Dr. Kevin R. Wood

A flash of dark fur with off-white streaks,  
The cat judges its leap in milliseconds.  
Exploring polished troughs and peaks,  
He makes it look easy, he reckons.

From the floor he ascends the mighty dresser,  
Claws grip the silky woven runner  
That begins to slip! Hartley the Lesser!  
Towards the chasm! Bold feline gunner!

Waving its silken flag, the cat descends  
Towards the shining parquet floor.  
Whisker and twitch, his flight he amends,  
Lands four square and shoots the door!

A streaking bullet of off-white fur,  
Withdraw? Regroup? Not a rout!  
The open garden. Branch and spur!  
This is what he thinks he's about!

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## Hartley Praised!

By Dr. Kevin R. Wood

A scurrying movement betrays the mouse,  
Cat stiffens, attentive, ever on guard.  
Hartley assumes he's the head of house,  
His writ is the unspoken word!

Hartley investigates the scuttling noise,  
Pushes his paw towards the creature's lair.  
Pair of mice are spoilt for choice –  
Which way to run, table or chair?

An athletic flash of black and white,  
Hartley leaps with talons raised.  
Scoops them both and with a bite  
Dispatches mice, so Hartley praised!

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Article by  
Helena Fishlock-Lomax  
Photos : Robert Fox

We have been showing our Norwegian Forest Cats and Maine Coon cats for several years now. I have always said that we would never breed because I was worried I wouldn't be able to let the kittens go.

Around a year ago, a very good friend offered me a young Norwegian Forest Cat Queen whom we had admired as a kitten. Initially we were wary – was it going to work introducing an older cat to our multi cat household? We took Roseanna on with the strict understanding if it didn't work out, she would go back! Roseanna fitted in like a dream and soon made friends with all the male neuters. The females took a little longer to 'thaw' but after a few weeks she felt like one of the family, spending afternoons curled up on the bed. I had intended to neuter her but my friend said 'she really is rather nice, why don't you let her have just one litter'. We duly thought it over, and decided that this would probably be our only chance. Our friend very kindly found us a beautiful stud who lived within travelling distance so all we had to do was wait for Roseanna to call.

Early Feb she called and we drove her down to the stud. We waited for a few days until it was certain that she had been 'mated' and we then collected her. It was quite difficult waiting to see if she was pregnant or not! When 21 days went by and she didn't call we started to feel optimistic. She then started to substantially gain weight. We purchased a proper kitten pen and put it in our spare room with a basket. As the due date approached, I put Roseanna in the pen for part of the day, especially if we were out,



and at night to get her used to it. The day before 'K' day as we called it, Roseanna came out of the pen and into the kitchen when I got up. I noticed her on the floor, face to face with Quish (Grand Champion Vanquish) her special friend, and noticed she appeared to be kneading him. I then looked again, and saw her sides moving! I realised she was having contractions and screamed for Eric to help. We gently picked her up and put her in the kittening pen. Within 10 minutes, out had popped kitten one. In the next hour, out came 2 more. Roseanna settled down and we thought it might be over. We kept checking and at around 1 pm she was pacing up and down. I was very worried about inertia since she still looked very large. We waited, worrying in case we would have to rush her to the vet,

but thankfully she gave birth naturally to 2 more kittens. She was very tired at this point, and hadn't cut kitten number 5's cord. A quick phone call to my friend resulted in 'you had better cut it for her, don't

wait, do it NOW'. Thankfully, our scissors had been sterilised 'just in case' but I am mega squeamish so made Eric do it!

We went to bed praying that all the kittens would still be OK the next morning. One thing about the web rings: whilst very useful, they really scare the novice breeder, in my opinion, with all the things that can go wrong. I had to stop looking at them at one stage since it was worrying me too much. The kittens were OK the next morning and all appeared to be feeding. We duly purchased scales and took notes as to what they weighed. Roseanna was fine with our handling them although she was understandably watchful. Quish howled at the door, so we did let him in since the kittens were safe inside the pen. He was

fascinated and he and Roseanna cheeped at each other.

Things went well for the next few days, and we started to think about names. We were pretty sure we had at least 2 maybe 3 torties and one 'high white' who might be a tortie or a brown/silver tabby and white and one red or red silver tabby and white. However, on day 5 this kitten was very limp when weighed and didn't feel 'right' we duly put him on Roseanna's nipple and although she was very patient he didn't seem to have the strength to suck. We put him in the kitchen on a hot water bottle to try and hand feed him. It was very distressing since he was just fading away before our eyes. Quishy was howling at the kitchen door so we let him in. He just tenderly sat next to the kitten, washed him thoroughly then his eyes met mine, and we both knew...the kitten died a few minutes later, but at least he died loved and warm. We took him to the vet and were told his mouth hadn't formed properly so although he appeared to be suckling he wasn't absorbing properly. It was truly distressing and I honestly don't think I could go through that again. He was called 'Moonbeam' and we had him cremated. (Any long time breeder reading this is going to think we are crazy!)

We now were worried about the other kittens. We decided 'no names' until they got to 8 weeks so they became known as High Whitey, Bluebell, Red spot and Redneck which caused much amusement within my social circle since I am known for choosing pretentious cat names! I also found myself prodding the kittens when they were asleep to make sure they hadn't died. At 4 weeks old, they started going onto solids – they would paddle in their mother's food, sit in the middle of the bowl and eat! Quishy had decided they were 'his' and he spent many hours on top of the pen just willing them to come out of the closed off bed part so he could look at them. We also started to bring them into our lounge for part of the



day. We have the hospital pen in the lounge so we let them explore but have the pen as a den to eat and sleep in. The other cats were gradually allowed to see the kittens. Vroom (Premier Vantage Vroom) adored them and if we ever couldn't find them, they would often be in a corner curled up with him or Quishy! Beaus, my asthmatic Maine Coon, initially hissed, but when he thought I wasn't looking, would wash them. He is now totally entranced and often spends the afternoons on the bed with them. The most amusing was Voodoo. He was great with the kittens and let them curl up with him until one got a bit confused and started to try to suckle

from him. His yowl had to be heard to be believed.

We now decided that we had 4 torties which meant we had 4 girlies. There are no colour splits in Norwegian Forest Cats. I could have sold the kittens easily, having had enquiries from my lovely neighbour and from the vet who had suggested us to a family who had always wanted a NFC. We also had friends who would have liked one! We both decided that there was no way we could part with any of these – I think I decided that the day we lost the little one who I am sure was my only boy. Names were tossed around and at six weeks: old High Whitey became 'Reine La Chateau' (named after Rennes le Chateau but reine is queen and Chateau we pronounce Cateau), Queenie for short: Red Spot became 'Empress Elisabeth aka Emma: Bluebell became Penny Parfait d'amour aka Penn, and Redneck became Haute Cataure – see what I mean about my names? The lad would have been Harvey Nicholas had he lived.

We took a lot of time socialising the kittens, inviting our neighbour to visit and handle the kittens. We also invited her daughter and grandchildren to visit and they had a lovely afternoon playing with the kittens. Friends visited and we did everything possible to get

the kittens used to people, the vacuum cleaner, and normal household noises.

I was amused as to how different the kittens are. Penn is very 'feisty' and at 3 weeks old hissed when I clipped her claws. When I tapped her on the nose and said 'no Penn' she thumped me although her claws were in! We handled her more and initially her little legs would cycle for Britain when held aloft. Now she is becoming calmer when we pick her up. She has acquired two very good friends as Godparents. Haute Catoure is also known as 'Cuddles'. She is totally trusting and relaxed when we pick her up. She also loves to snuggle and burrow down in the bedclothes when we allow her to come and see us in the mornings. Emma already has Godparents too and is a little charmer; a real flirt; and we only have to talk to her for her to chat back and purr. Queenie who is so like Quish as a kitten is, in my opinion, very beautiful and she too has a very sweet nature. She will play 'fetch' and has a fixation on one of my gloves. She loves to sit next to us on the sofa.

Quite often in the afternoon we find 4-6 cats and 4 kittens on the bed with more in the windowsills. The girls are now fine with the kittens. We were horrified when Emma tried to climb to the top of the Coon Tree – floor to ceiling frame – where Mars was. (Grand Premier Mabalakat Mara Serendipity aka 'Naughty Tortie') but Mars just looked somewhat disconcerted and let Emma share the 'top spot'. My 16 year old moggie isn't too impressed when the little ones go after her tail but so far she has only hissed at them. I do think the kittens need to learn their place in the hierarchy so do not interfere in inter-cat relations if I can help it.

Now, would we breed again? This is very difficult. I will neuter two early next year. My 'challenge' is to be able to have another litter, take the greatest of care to socialise

them, and then let some of them go! Eric and I both think we are going to have problems doing this, which is why we are not rushing into any decision yet. I would also make sure we had homes with good friends lined up in advance. We would obviously keep at least two but there is no way we could keep six! Next time I would ask my vet to come and check the kittens in my home 24 hours after the birth to make sure that all were able to absorb properly – I would rather let a kitten be put to sleep than watch it literally fade away in front of us. I was shocked by how much this kitten wanted to live – it was heartbreaking. I also know things like this are fairly common so need to become a little more hard hearted if we do go ahead. We know of breeders who

have lost whole litters at 4 or 6 weeks so breeding is not for the faint hearted. Roseanna is now neutered.

I don't regret this litter, despite the amount of teasing I have had on the show bench taking four to the same Open class. It was the most terrifying and exhilarating experience of my life! Watching them grow day by day and being able to handle them and see their eyes open and witness that

first 'toddle' has been wonderful. Thankfully, it hasn't upset our other cats, and this was a major worry. They were not happy about being shut out of the spare room but Roseanna seemed happy to let them in part of the time, and the kittens were protected in the pen. I must stress that none of my cats go out so the risk of bringing in disease wasn't a worry.

Thanks to Jennifer Sedgwick for entrusting Roseanna to us, and for all her support during the pregnancy and when the kittens were very young Thanks to Tony and Jill



Rowberry (Rowgarnor NFC) for allowing us to take Roseanna to Champion Moonshadow and for taking such care of her.

Thanks to Liz Allen for telling me to 'go for it' and for her telephone support and patient answers to my endless questions in those first few days after birth.

Thanks to Bev Spooner for being the only breeder who didn't laugh at me for keeping the whole litter – she had done the same thing herself with her first litter.

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**If you have any articles, poems or matters of general interest to cat people then please send them to Geoffrey Tarr for inclusion in the next newsletter**

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## Hartley and the Ball of Wool

By Dr Kevin R Wood

A ball of wool will roll and  
bounce,  
Rules of motion don't apply.  
So all of Hartley's guile and  
flounce,  
Sheer frustration, his pride  
deny!

Hartley is unsure of a ball of  
wool,  
It's a creature self-possessed!  
Not responsive to 'push' or  
'pull',  
All reason is unexpressed!

Wool has a mind of its own,  
It unravels across the floor!  
Threatens Hartley's comfort-  
zone,  
He juggles it towards the door!

Hartley is both swift and deft,  
He still misreads the signs.  
Wool in this mood is warp and  
weft,  
The schemer of its own designs

More of Kevin Woods poems  
about Hartley will appear here  
in the next issue.