

2. Companion Animals

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Introduction

The overpopulation of dogs and cats is probably the most visual example of animal suffering, and many animal protection societies feel compelled to help. Indeed, the great majority of animal protection societies work on companion animal issues. There are also many excellent programmes and resources available to help groups working in this area.

There are many viewpoints on the best way to provide help on companion animal issues, and some of these are deeply based on ethical standpoints and/or practical experiences in a certain national/local situation. Whatever approach is adopted, the aim should always be to avoid animal suffering and killing through effective, preventative programmes. This ensures humane and sustainable solutions, which have the potential to end the thankless and heart-breaking task of caring for the suffering stray animals that are the 'end result' of this man-made problem. Any programme that only concentrates on the 'end result' is no more than a 'sticking plaster' approach, and simply perpetuates the problem.

Stray Animal Management

In many countries, stray dogs are a common sight, congregating in populated areas and scavenging for scraps of food and attention from passers by. There are an estimated half a billion dogs in the world and uncontrolled breeding and human neglect have led to a population explosion of stray dogs, with over 80% of the world's dogs thought to be strays. Similarly, large numbers of stray/feral cats often live in colonies around food and shelter points.

Regarded as man's best friends in some countries; in other parts of the world stray animals are brutally caught and killed by a variety of inhumane methods including shooting, poisoning, hanging and electrocution in a futile attempt to control their numbers.

For many years, WSPA has played a leading role in promoting the development of humane and sustainable systems of stray population control. In 1992, WSPA was invited to become part of the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s Expert Committee on Rabies. This committee found that rabies was on the increase, partially due to the growing number of uncontrolled stray populations and the failure of traditional 'catch and kill' approaches to deal with uncontrolled breeding, the root cause of the problem.

WSPA's Pet Respect campaign built on this knowledge, working together with authoritative bodies like the WHO and FECAVA (the Federation of Companion Animal Veterinary Associations), to develop humane and sustainable programmes to tackle these issues.

WSPA's companion animal department is working throughout the world to promote responsible pet ownership and to end the terrible cruelty inflicted on millions of stray animals. It works with its member societies to analyse each situation in order to develop appropriate proactive solutions, often with WSPA providing necessary training and equipment. Although no single standard approach will suit all situations, there are some fundamental principles of the stray control management programme that remain constant. These include: -

- Legislation - animal welfare laws should incorporate measures to protect companion animals and promote responsible ownership.
- Registration and identification - cats and dogs should be recorded on national databases and identified by tattoo or microchips and collar tags.
- Neutering and vaccination - companion animals should be vaccinated and neutered (unless they are part of a controlled breeding programme).
- Garbage control.
- Control of breeders and sales outlets.
- Re-homing, release or euthanasia – for stray animals, depending on the circumstances and the prospects for the animal.
- Education - programmes to change attitudes towards companion animals, promoting responsible pet ownership, including neutering.

It is, in the broadest sense, the government's responsibility to provide stray control services for the community. It is vital to ensure that the government/authorities take on this responsibility, including the financing – instead of allowing them to abdicate responsibility to voluntarily funded animal protection organisations. Furthermore, without government responsibility and action it is difficult to introduce an effective programme.

Neutering

Whilst many animal protection societies and Trusts and Grants consider neutering to be the preventative solution to the stray animal problem, this is in fact only one part of the picture. Neutering is a major part of the solution to the stray control problem, but in isolation it is unlikely to provide a sustainable solution unless the stray population is located in isolation (e.g. on an island) and it is possible to neuter all strays and owned animals that are allowed to roam! The problem is too complex to be solved with a single-thrust solution. Resolution requires much study and thought. This involves an understanding of both the root causes and wildlife ecology (i.e. understanding the dynamics of stray animal populations). Key to this is the fact that each area has a 'carrying capacity' for stray animals that is influenced by aspects such as available food and shelter sources. To this are added the various factors that trigger the stray problem in the first instance. The range of measures used in WSPA's programme (see above) reflects the complexity of this problem.

Alternatives to an Animal Shelter

Many animal protection societies decide to start an animal shelter, when faced by the enormous numbers of stray animals in their community. However, this is an enormous commitment that often leaves animal protection societies with no time and commitment to

tackle other important priorities such as humane education and campaigning, and lobbying for legislation and enforcement. Two key publications are: -

- HSUS - 'Issues to Consider before starting a Shelter'
- WSPA - 'Alternatives to Animal Shelters'

Shelter Management

HSUS suggests that a society has funds to cover the first year's running costs before starting on a project to establish a shelter. Its publication 'Issues to Consider Before Starting a Shelter' contains excellent advice and caution.

If – despite the advice and significant resource needs - a society does decide to start an animal shelter, or if it is already running one, there are many useful publications and guide available to help with design and management. Some of these are listed below.

Sheltering and re-homing animals is dealing with the 'end-results' of the stray control problem. When an animal protection society takes over the responsibility for sheltering and re-homing unwanted animals it is taking personal responsibility away from owners. It is allowing them to feel OK about giving up their animals (or letting them roam to later be caught), because they are given somebody who will look after them on their behalf. It is also allowing the government/authorities to abdicate their responsibility for providing stray control services for the community (unless they fund this e.g. through tender schemes/contract). There is, therefore, a case to be made that shelters are 'perpetuating' the problem - unless they are also campaigning and educating.

Pet Trade

Each year many millions of animals are bred to supply the pet industry. Many of these are sold in pet shops, but others can be sold in markets or fairs, in the streets, through advertisements and even on the Internet.

Breeders breed pedigree animals to supply the market for 'designer' pets. People may want their 'pet' to look a certain way but they are frequently unprepared for the health and welfare problems that these animals bring with them. Breeders also support 'mutilations' such as tail docking, because these are favoured by show purposes and breed standards. Some breeders, such as 'puppy farms', have atrocious conditions leading to disease and deaths.

Wild or exotic animals, such as primates, reptiles, ornamental fish and birds such as toucans, parrots and finches are not suited to life in captivity. It is impossible to recreate the environmental and climate to meet their needs in captivity.

With so many abandoned animals in need of a home, and many still being killed each year, it is a tragedy that millions more are being purpose bred or captured from the wild to be sold as commodities through the pet trade. Many animal protection societies, including the HSUS, campaign against the commercial pet trade, using slogans such as: -
'Until there are none, adopt one'.

Euthanasia

There is an ongoing debate amongst animal protectionists about the extent to which

euthanasia should form part of a stray control programme. There are three main reasons why euthanasia is used: -

- Sick animals (who cannot be cured by veterinary intervention)
- Dangerous animals
- Animals considered 'surplus' e.g. unsuitable for re-homing or return to the streets, or for whom there is no available shelter/fostering space.

There is general agreement about the first two reasons: it is the third around which the debate is centred. This category may also include animals that have non-critical illnesses and/or behavioural problems but do not fall into the first two categories.

'No-Kill' is generally defined as saving both adoptable and treatable dogs and cats. 'No Kill' organisations work to increase the demand for shelter dogs and cats, and reduce the supply being born. The 'No Kill' movement is gaining momentum in some leading 'developed' countries, including the USA. The Web Site of Maddie's Fund in the USA gives guidance on building a 'No Kill' organisation and 10 reasons why to be 'No Kill'.

Organisations that decide to euthanise often do this because they feel the alternative is worse. For example, where there is an abundance of stray animals and these suffer, starve, succumb to illness, are subjected to inhumane 'catch and kill' methods from the authorities, or are victimised, beaten and run down by citizens. Such organisations feel that with limited shelter space, they cannot compromise the welfare of the animals by overcrowding, and can maximise re-homing potential by keeping the animals most likely to find a home (rather than filling their shelter with animals that they have no chance of re-homing, and will therefore have to spend the rest of their lives incarcerated). Many organisations that decide to euthanise have the contract for running official stray control services, and feel this is the only practical way to manage this service.

In addition to practical considerations, there is a strong ethical dimension to the euthanasia decision – and each individual has to take this decision personally. This is not something that can be dictated or instructed, and there is no 'right answer'. It is particularly important that shelter workers support the euthanasia policies of their organisation; otherwise they can suffer terrible stress and unhappiness. The full facts can help organisations and individuals with this important decision.

There is, however, no debate about the fact where euthanasia is necessary it should be done only by humane methods. Indeed, 'euthanasia' is – by definition - putting to death by painless methods. WSPA's leaflet and video on euthanasia provide valuable guidance on methods. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Euthanasia Report (see below link) provides detailed guidance on many different methods of euthanasia. However, the AVMA report is only reviewed periodically, so does not reflect up-to-date concerns about some of the methods included: the advice is, therefore, to use the report to positively reject unsatisfactory methods (especially for providing proof of unacceptability to authorities), rather than using to seek positive acceptance of methods.

Companion Animal Care

Companion animal care is an important part of responsible ownership. There are many resources available on this, and a selection is listed below. Many animal protection societies, including WSPA and the Dogs Trust, are only too pleased to let other societies translate and use their resources, if approached.

Wild Animals as Pets

Wild and exotic (non-native) animals are unsuitable for home rearing and handling. They have complex needs that are difficult to meet. Most individuals have neither the finances nor the experience to care for them properly. It has been estimated that 90% are dead within the first two years of captivity. Many wild animals forced into a domestic situation cause injury to humans, especially children. Others, if released into the environment, can cause irreversible and costly damage to our ecosystem.

Dangerous Dogs

There have been various attempts to control 'dangerous' dogs, many involving strict legislation and control following public outcry after media coverage of attacks on children. Most animal protection societies denounce attempts to control (kill) dogs based on breed alone. Less draconian control methods include the requirement that all dogs declared to be 'dangerous' be identified/recorded, neutered and controlled by muzzle and leash when in public places. Indeed, control based on breed alone not only condemns all dogs of given breeds (regardless of temperament), but also excludes dogs with dangerous temperaments from non-specified breeds.

Further Resources

🔗 Web Sites

WSPA

<http://www.wspa.org.uk/wspaswork/strayanimals/Default.aspx>

Resources

A range of leaflets, reports and videos are available for WSPA members and member societies. Download leaflets in PDF format or contact WSPA's London office to obtain the following resources: -

Leaflets

· Setting up a Cat Cafe · Early Age Neutering · Care for your Dog · Care for your Cat · Humane Euthanasia · Population Survey

Also:

'Planning and Running an Animal Shelter' and 'Alternatives to Animal Shelters'.

Reports

· Stray Dog Control · Cat Care & Control · Animal Control Officer · WHO Population Control

Videos

· The Pet Respect programme · Stray Dog Control · Cat Care & Control · Animal Control Officer · Neutering techniques · Setting up a Cat Cafes · Humane Euthanasia

HSUS

<http://www.hsus.org/>

Large selection of materials and advice on: -

- Pet care
- Issues affecting pets
- Pet adoption
- Animal shelters
- Videos

HSUS Electronic library

<http://www.hsus.org/ace/14954>

Includes: -

- Animal sheltering
- Animal care
- Euthanasia

RSPCA

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/>

Wide range of leaflets and publications.

FECAVA – The Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations

<http://www.fecava.org/>

World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA)

<http://www.wsava.org/>

Society for Companion Animal Studies

<http://www.scas.org.uk/>

The International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations

<http://www.iahaio.org/>

Alley Cat Allies

<http://www.alleycat.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=359>

A wide selection of publications, including many useful ones about trap-neuter-return programmes.

Maddie's Fund

http://www.maddiesfund.org/Resource_Library.html

resource library

The Dog Trust

<http://www.dogstrust.org.uk/information/>

Information and advice

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)

<http://www.ufaw.org.uk/>

UFAW publications are based on sound scientific research, and include the international journal “*Animal Welfare*”.

Companion Animal Welfare Council (UK)

<http://www.cawc.org.uk/>

The Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement (APLB)

<http://aplb.org/>

A worldwide clearing house for all information on pet bereavement

Pet Finder USA

<http://www.petfinder.org/index.html>

Shelter index and adoptions. With online registration for humane organizations and zip code searching.

Companion Animal Behavior Program
Veterinary Medicine, University of California, Davis
<http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/CCAB/main.htm>

American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Euthanasia Guidelines
<http://www.avma.org/resources/euthanasia.pdf>

The Latham Foundation
<http://www.latham.org>

Animal Sheltering Resource Library
http://www.animalsheltering.org/resource_library/

National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy
<http://www.petpopulation.org/>

Books

The APBC Book of Companion Animal Behaviour
By: David Appleby (Editor)
Publisher: Souvenir Press Ltd
ISBN: 0285636995

In the Company of Animals
By: J. Serpell
Publisher: Cambridge University Press
ISBN: 0521577799

The Domestic Dog: its Evolution, Behaviour and Interactions With People
By: J. Serpell
Publisher: Cambridge University Press
ISBN: 0521425379

Companion Animals and Us
By: Anthony Podberscek (Editor), Elizabeth S. Paul (Editor), James A. Serpell (Editor)
Publisher: Cambridge University Press
ISBN: 0521631130

Euthanasia of the Companion Animal: the Impact on Pet Owners, Veterinarians and Society
By: William K., DVM Kay (Editor), Susan P., CSW ACSW Cohen (Editor), Herbert A., PhD Nieburg (Editor), Carole E., CSW ACSW Fudin (Editor), Ross E., DVM Grey (Editor), Austin H., DDS Kutscher (Editor), Mohamed M., DVM PhD Osman (Editor)
Publisher: The Charles Press
ISBN: 0914783254

Dog Housing and Welfare (UFAW Animal Welfare Research Report S.)
By: R. Hubrecht
Publisher: Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)
ISBN: 0900767820

Noise in Dog Kennelling (UFAW Animal Welfare Research Report S.)

By: Gillian Sales

Publisher: Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)

ISBN: 0900767952

Ethogram for Behavioural Studies of the Domestic Cat: Felis Silvestris Catus (UFAW Animal Welfare Research Report S.)

Publisher: Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)

ISBN: 0900767901