

# Humane Stray Dog Control

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All animals are equal  
but some animals are  
more equal than  
others.

George Orwell  
*Animal Farm*



This quote was written by George Orwell in his essay animal farm, and can be easily applied to dogs alone, for it is true to say that not all dogs are equal. Pure bred or pedigree dogs are the most sought after, and very seldom are they seen, in Asian countries, wandering the streets, usually being confined to owners properties, many live very pampered lifestyles. Whereas indigenous dogs, or street dogs are regarded, by many, as vermin, rarely wanted as companion animals and even when people feed a group of street dogs, they are very seldom admitted to their homes.

# Dog Statistics



Yet although purebred dogs are the most valued, they form a very small number of the world's population of dogs. Various kennel clubs around the world recognise, on average, over 400 different breeds, and with an estimated world dog population in excess of 500 million 75% of this population are not pedigree or even crosses between 2 recognised breeds. By far the largest proportion of dogs are from local indigenous stock. These dogs are often given a variety of names such as community dogs or pye (or pariah) dogs and some fortunate ones have now become recognised types in their own right, take for example the Australian Dingo, in mid-1993 the Dingo was recognized by the Australian National Kennel Council as an official dog breed and adopted as Australia's national breed. The ancestors of which originated from south east Asia and in particular Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Burma, Thailand and southern China. Some experts claim that Thailand presently has the purest populations of Dingoes.

# Dog Problems



Arguably, in light of recent research into the domestic dogs origins, maybe we should be conserving many of the local indigenous dogs, as they are rather unique, and should have a higher value placed on them rather than many of the already recognised pedigree dogs.

However it is an unfortunate fact that there must be limits to the dog population, which can be directly linked to the worlds human population which has an average ratio of 1 dog for every 10 humans, and with an ever growing human population the dog population, unless checked will continue to grow. Problems that are associated with stray dogs are generally

Direct physical injury to humans, their pets or livestock.

Indirect injury as a result of road traffic accidents

Reservoir of disease to humans and their pets

Pollution from faeces, urine etc

General nuisance – noise

In particular the greatest concern for human populations in south east Asia from stray dogs is the threat of rabies. This threat is real and according to the World Health Organisation It is estimated that at least 55 000 human rabies deaths occur yearly in Africa and Asia following contact with rabid dogs.

## Common Response to Population Control



The problems associated with stray dogs can lead to pressure on the municipalities to come up with an instant solution which is often mass slaughter. Inhumane methods such as poisoning, drowning, electrocution, gassing and starvation are regularly used, the argument doing so is that it is thought of as cost effective .

Aside from the inhumanity of attempting to control a dog population with methods such as these, it simply does not work and to reiterate a section from the recommendations World Health Organisation Expert Consultation on Rabies held in Geneva, October 2004 (TRS 931,WHO 2005) I quote

*“Dog destruction alone is not effective in rabies control. There is no evidence that removal of dogs alone has ever had a significant impact on dog population densities or the spread of rabies. In addition, dog removal may be unacceptable to local communities. However, the targeted and humane removal of unvaccinated, ownerless dogs may be effective when used as a supplementary measure to mass vaccination. “*

# Humane Alternatives



Unfortunately there is no universal blueprint or magic bullet to control the stray dog population, there are no quick fixes either.

A stray dog control programme is a package of measures that can be implemented and is designed to manage a given population.

Often it is better to have a reasonably safe managed population of dogs rather than an uncontrolled population.

There are five major tools which should be introduced as part of a comprehensive stray management programme which consist of;-

- Education.
- Neutering of both owned and un-owned dogs.
- Legislation (directed towards owners of dogs)
- Environmental and habitat controls.
- Humane euthanasia of unwanted, sick or aggressive dogs.

A comprehensive stray dog control programme does not come cheaply, but it can work, if it is applied in a disciplined manner.

## Identify Type of Dog



Stray dogs consist of basically three types;-

Feral dogs – which are dogs that live on the fringes of human habitation, usually coming to feed from garbage dumps etc at times when there is little or no human activity.

Community or street (soi) dogs – Which are widely found in many of the cities of South East Asia. These dogs do not appear to have an apparent owner in the real sense, but many local people do provide food for them, and in a sense regard them as their own although would not tolerate them living in or on their property.

Genuine owned dogs – These are more usually of the pedigree variety but not necessarily so. Dogs such as this do live on or near the owners property, and are mainly dependant on the owner for food etc

This mixed population can be fluid and interchangeable. For example owned dogs can be abandoned and become permanent strays, owned dogs that are allowed to roam free, and are not neutered, can mate with community or feral dogs.

Before initiating any type of stray dog control programme it is important to first identify what category of dog you are mainly concerned with and to focus your resources on them.

# Strategies for Dog's

Owned Dog	Community Dog	Feral Dog
Education/Neutering Legislation Removal of Strays Homing potential	Education Neutering/vaccination Programme Environmental Controls Homing/CNR/Euthanasia	Neutering/vaccination Programme Environmental Controls Euthanasia

The above is a simple flow chart on measures which can be taken when dealing with each category of dog.

As the vast majority of stray dogs that are found in South Asia are of the community type we shall continue to focus on these.

# Population Survey



An accurate assessment of the population is essential before the programme is developed, and repeated surveys are necessary to monitor progress. This is required to evaluate the success (or failure) of your programme

Quoted estimates of the population are often inaccurate. It is therefore essential that the methodology used gives consistent results. This will allow comparison to future surveys in the same city, and also comparison of different programmes used in different locations.

The above photograph depicts a survey being carried out in Jodhpur, India (Photo courtesy of Dr. Alexander Wandeler, WHO Advisor) . The dogs are marked temporarily in a vegetable dye to enable accurate daily counting of numbers.

# Environmental Control



The size of a stray dog population is dependant on the availability of food sources.

Popular areas for stray dogs are garbage dumps- street food vendors- slaughter houses and fish markets etc.

Poor hygiene of these premises is also an added public health risk.

More efficient garbage removal can assist in reducing the overall stray dog population. Additional benefits are less flies, rats and a healthier human population.

# Education



Education is the most important and yet the greatest challenge in a humane stray dog control programme. It is about changing attitudes towards stray dogs in general and also promoting a responsible attitude to dog ownership. All agencies involved have a role to play, including:

1. Municipalities
2. Community groups
3. Schools
4. Animal protection societies
5. Veterinarians in private practice
6. Animal legislation enforcement agencies.

It is also important that all these groups give the same message, and use resource material that is appropriate for the target audience

# Neutering



Neutering is an essential part of the programme and should be directed towards both owned and un-owned dogs.

Dogs that have been adopted from a shelter should be neutered prior to rehoming

If part of a neuter and release programme, then both males and females should be targeted.

## Responsible Ownership



Studies have linked that families that share their lives with a companion animal have a higher self-esteem and young children learn far earlier than other. In addition, children with companion animals at home score significantly higher on empathy and pro-social scales than other children. non-pet owners

Other benefits are that humans living with companion animals have;-

- Lower blood pressure.
- Lower blood cholesterol levels.
- A higher survival rate after serious illness.

Greater emphasis should be placed in finding genuine homes for many of the indigenous street dogs, puppies especially have a far greater chance in re-homing.

# Euthanasia



It is recognised that for many people, perhaps because of cultural or religious reasons, the direct killing of an animal is unacceptable for them, yet they find it quite acceptable for an animal to continue suffering, sometimes in appalling conditions.

Euthanasia comes from two Greek words meaning “good death.” and in my view a good death is far better than a slow end to a life that can be full of pain, or a life spent in the confines of a cage along with many other dogs.

In an ideal world no animals would have to be killed, and many people do advocate “No Kill” policies. While this may appear to be the ideal this could only be, arguably, realistic given limitless resources of space, manpower and money. The picture above was taken in a no kill facility in Asia (country of origin will not be mentioned and there are many other places similar to this). There are on average between 400 – 500 dogs in residence at any given time, accurate numbers are not available as no records are kept. Basic care is provided, food is handouts from local restaurants, minimal veterinary care, dogs are suffering and dying on a daily basis, yet the trustees feel good about this because they do not advocate euthanasia.

Where there are practical constraints (like in most of the World), a total no kill policy is unrealistic and can actually result in more suffering of the animals in the care of the welfare societies.

## CNVR Programmes



Catch- neuter- vaccinate and release (CNVR) Involves the capture, neutering, identification and vaccination of strays dogs and eventual release to the same site. The rationale is to replace an uncontrolled, potentially dangerous population with a smaller, non-breeding and vaccinated one. The target is to neuter and vaccinate 75% of a local dog population, which in theory is the point at which a given population will stabilise and also form an effective barrier from rabies.

Widely accepted throughout Asia but is only suitable in situations where the environment and culture make a community / feral dog population inevitable.

The World Health Organisation is currently evaluating a CNVR programme, if results prove favourable ( it is anticipated to be so) then this may finally put to rest many of those who do not agree with this particular method of control.

CNVR programmes have to be carefully monitored, large cities should be divided into sectors and catching should be organised in a disciplined, methodical manner i.e. work in one sector, catch/ neuter and vaccinate at least 75% of dogs before moving to an adjacent sector. This is vitally important when factoring in re-vaccination programmes (See next page).

## Vaccination of free roaming dogs



Where there are large numbers of free roaming dogs living in close proximity to humans, it is vitally important to vaccinate those dogs as a protection against rabies. At least 75% of a given population should be vaccinated and this should be repeated every two years.

It has been widely regarded that the average lifespan of a street dog is approximately two years, and many CNVR programmes have developed their own programme to factor this in, with the outcome being that once a dog has been neutered, vaccinated and then released it can then be left to fend for itself, no further vaccinations are required.

It is now thought that the life expectancy of the street dog is far longer than two years, therefore revaccinations are necessary.

# Conclusions



1. An effective stray dog control programme requires different elements.
2. Determine what type of dog you are targeting and focus your resources on those elements which would be most effective.
3. Municipalities should have responsibility for stray dog control, with NGO's in a support and monitoring role.
4. Although it may be difficult for an NGO to form a working relationship with the municipality, this is an absolute necessity.
5. Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) should be signed between NGO's and the municipality in order for both parties to understand clearly their own respective roles.
6. Plan in advance before commencing a strategy.
7. Conduct a survey of the dog population in the area to be covered.
8. Estimate what resources would be required.
9. Set a time frame for the programme, (Be honest and realistic).
10. Estimate the costs, and secure funding.

Good Luck!!