

LEH STREET DOG STERILISATION PROJECT 2007 REPORT

Overview

From June 10th to September 18th 2007, the second annual Leh Street Dog Sterilization Project took place. Vets Beyond Borders (VBB) worked with the Ladakh Animal Care Society (LACS) to catch and surgically sterilise over 900 street dogs. The facilities at the LACS site were improved and an agreement made with the local administration for further involvement and commitment to this project over the next 4 years. Local veterinary staff from the animal husbandry department started training in the surgical procedures of spaying and castrating. Representatives of the Brigitte Bardot Foundation, Paris visited our project and have generously committed to assisting us continue and expand the project over the next years.

The site and clinic

The LACS site on the outskirts of Sabu village saw improvements since 2006. During the project, two further dogs were pens constructed to contain around 20 dogs each and a small pen to use as an isolation area was built. The existing pens were extended to include a fenced off area and another gate to act as a security barrier between the outside and inside of the pen.

A water tank was purchased so that water can be piped and stored near the clinic. The supply of water is reliant on electricity that this year was frequently interrupted. A generator was purchased to power lights in the clinic and new electrical fittings were placed for stronger lighting.

Further leveling of ground made the access to the clinic easier, and gave the potential to make a small area of lawn and garden with a large tent for shade.

The site has been partially fenced with the remainder of the perimeter being fenced before winter 2007.

Staff and Volunteers

Kunzang Namgyal, president of the LACS, was employed as the manager of the Leh Street Dog Sterilisation Project.

Norbu and Namgyal were employed as the dog catchers.

Sonam was trained as a veterinary assistant and also as a dog catcher if needed.

Dolka was employed as a veterinary assistant and cook

Tsering Diskit was in charge of preparation of surgical kits and drapes, and washing.

Vets Beyond borders volunteers numbered 13 over the period of three months, with an average of 4 volunteers working at a time. The volunteer standard this year was

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extremely high with enthusiastic and motivated volunteers from Australia, the UK, Israel, Russia and the USA.

Dog catching

This year the method of dog catching was changed from the loop and pole method to the net method. The nets proved to be a more humane way to catch the dogs, as well as more efficient.

Dog Catching staff from the SARAH Program, Sikkim came to Leh for 2 weeks early in the program and trained three of our staff in the techniques of dog catching with nets.

This was a successful training period with the new Ladakhi staff in addition learning dog handling skills and paraveterinary skills.

The vehicle used for catching dogs is a van owned by the LACS. On average, 8-12 dogs were brought into the clinic each day for sterilization.

Dog catching still proves to be our limiting factor when it comes to numbers of surgeries that can be performed per day, and per year. The dogs in and around Leh have an average weight of 20 - 30kg, have the tendency for fear and dominance aggression, and the majority will not allow any human contact. Although there are some narrow lanes around Leh, there are also some vast spaces where the dogs prove to be almost impossible to catch.

This issue needs to be addressed and by 2008 we plan to use traps and will research into the use of darting for sedation.

The Foundation Brigitte Bardot have donated funds in order to purchase a vehicle that can be custom made with dog cages that will be used next year for catching the dogs

Surgery

913 street dogs were sterilized during the period of the project this year of which 443 were males and 468 females. The dog catchers intentionally tried to catch more females rather than males.

Surgery was performed under intravenous anaesthesia. The protocol of Xylazine premedication followed by intravenous Ketamine and Diazepam worked well. All dogs received one injection of long acting antibiotic and Meloxicam non steroidal anti-inflammatory for pain relief.

All dogs received triangular ear notches taken out of the leading edge of the right ear. Dogs were kept for a minimum of three days post operatively in open pens. Very few complications were encountered in the females. The most common problem in the male dogs was scrotal dermatitis. Dogs were monitored closely for three days for wound healing and eating and drinking before being released back to where they were caught. Puppies were wormed and fed separately to ensure they would not miss out on food.

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Agreement with the Deputy Commissioner and council of Ladakh

Vets Beyond Borders and the Administration of Ladakh agreed on a proposal that commits both parties to the project until 2010. The administration of Ladakh has agreed to provide will fund 50% of the running costs of the project, including the provision of rabies vaccinations for street dogs, and the provision of vehicle and fuel, as well as providing veterinary staff for training, and ensure that the project will be supported by and eventually run by the local administration. Vets Beyond Borders will continue coordinating the project, in collaboration with the LACS and with the Brigitte Bardot Foundation as its major sponsor. VBB will provide the required volunteer veterinary personnel with an emphasis on passing on skills to local veterinarians.

Training of Leh Veterinarians

An important aspect of this project is to train local veterinarians so that the project can continue running without relying on volunteer surgeons from abroad. Now the infrastructure of the clinic has been established, and with the support of the Animal Husbandry Department of Leh, local veterinarians can be trained. Three local veterinarians attended training sessions with the VBB volunteers towards the end of this year's project. The VBB team demonstrated and then scrubbed in with the local vets to assist in spey and castration surgeries. The training sessions will be continued early in 2008 with veterinarians from Leh and surrounding districts attending formal training sessions in anaesthetic and surgery techniques with experienced VBB volunteer teachers.

The Shelter

During the winter months, the facilities at the LACS site are being used as a shelter. The Foundation Brigitte Bardot contributed further funds so that the shelter can provide weak or injured animals a safe place to stay over the winter months. A dog catcher and shelter manager are employed so that sick or injured dogs can be brought to the shelter and given food and treatment until they are ready to be released back to the street. Veterinary advise is taken from the Animal Husbandry Department District veterinarian.

The future

The aims of this project are to provide facilities, staff and skills so that the following can be achieved:

- To humanely control the street dog population in Leh and surrounding areas through the capture and surgical sterilization and release of at least 75 % of the dog population.
- To expand operations to include field camps in surrounding villages in 2008-2010.
- To rabies vaccinate the dogs that are captured to ensure a rabies immune dog population.

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- To educate the local community about dogs being sterilised and rabies vaccinated.
- To encourage owners of pet dogs to surgically sterilise and vaccinate their dogs.
- To establish a permanent sterilisation clinic and train local veterinary personnel so the programme can continue independently in the future without the continued presence of Vets Beyond Borders staff.

The project this year has developed in such a way that we can have confidence in its future. The agreement with the Ladakh administration and the promise of continued funding from Foundation Brigitte Bardot has meant that we can be assured the project will continue. The Ladakhi staff have gained experience and with continued employment over the winter running the shelter, will be a great asset for future years. The involvement of the Animal Husbandry Department and the training of government vets is an important step towards a sustainable future.

The contribution from dedicated volunteer vets and vet nurses is enormous and thankfully the interest from volunteers to assist with the project indicates there should be no problem to staff the clinic in future years.