

SARAH PROGRAMME REPORT - March 2008

TRAINING:

The training of local veterinary staff continues to be very successful. Three clinical units are now in fulltime operation. In addition to the permanent unit in Gangtok, two mobile units are currently operating in west Sikkim.

A total of eleven Sikkimese veterinarians have now completed the formal Animal Birth Control and Anti Rabies (ABC/AR) training programme established by Vets Beyond Borders. Two new veterinarians are undergoing training in Gangtok and will soon join the SARAH team, bringing to eight the number of local veterinarians working fulltime with the programme. Additional vet aides and kennel hands are being employed and trained as required. This aspect of the programme ensures its long-term sustainability.

It is hoped that again this year two more vet aides from Sikkim will be able to travel to Ladakh to assist in the training of local LACS staff and to participate in the proposed dog catching workshop. The trip to provide training in 2007 was certainly enjoyed by Hissey and Dupchen, and has been much talked about since. It is also hoped that a senior veterinarian and a senior vet aide will soon have the opportunity to travel to Bhutan to assist Vets Beyond Borders in training local veterinary personnel.

Vets Beyond Borders is committed to providing ongoing training and education to all SARAH veterinarians. All new VBB volunteers have been asked to prepare a short seminar on their favourite veterinary topic to be presented at a monthly meeting. Local and government veterinarians will also be invited and encouraged to take part in this continuing education effort.

CLINICAL WORK:

To date, over 10,000 street-dogs have been surgically sterilised and nearly 20,000 animals have been vaccinated against rabies. It is anticipated that in the coming year the case load will continue to increase as additional staff commence work and the mobile clinics move to more remote regions of the state. Two new dog-transport vehicles have recently been purchased with Government funds.

In addition to street-dog ABC/AR work, these teams provide essential veterinary care in areas of Sikkim which, prior to the establishment of the Programme, had no access to appropriate veterinary services.

Equipment purchased with FBB funds allows SARAH Programme veterinarians to perform life-saving procedures including orthopaedic and cancer surgery; procedures which would otherwise be unavailable in the State. The imaging

suite at the SARAH Hospital is currently under construction and should be ready for use in the next month, providing X-ray and diagnostic ultrasound capabilities. It will be the first such veterinary facility in Sikkim,

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION:

There is a great need for school and community education to increase awareness of animal-welfare issues and the need for rabies control amongst the people of Sikkim, as many are still uninformed of important issues such as the mode of transmission of rabies and other zoonotic diseases. Programme staff visit schools and communities when time permits, but they are often very busy with clinical work. It is critical that the education component of the SARAH programme is expanded during 2008.

The Sikkimese population is very proud of the work being performed by the SARAH Programme, which features regularly in the local media. All vehicles operated by the programme bear the programme banner, including the logo of the Brigitte Bardot Foundation. SARAH veterinarians now have a uniform: blue scrubs tops with the Vets Beyond Borders and Brigitte Bardot Foundation logos on the front and the Sikkim Government Animal Husbandry Dept and SARAH logo on the back. Photographic identity cards are also being produced and will be worn by all staff whilst performing official duties.

Discussions are underway regarding the design and placement of several educational signs/billboards in central Gangtok to promote rabies awareness and the good work done by the SARAH programme.

WORLD RABIES DAY – 28TH SEPTEMBER

The inaugural World Rabies Day in 2007 involved activities in 74 countries with reported participation of nearly 400,000 people and estimated public outreach to over 50 million.

The Alliance For Rabies Control has suggested that the SARAH programme be included as one of the World Rabies Day events in 2008. As part of this important occasion it is hoped to hold a large awareness event in Gangtok such as a dog fun day.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION:

We continue discussions with the Sikkimese Department of Forests, Conservation and Wildlife Management aimed at developing a collaborative initiative to reduce the increasing extinction pressures on several critically threatened wildlife species. Vets Beyond Borders hopes to be able secure funding to enable this work.

GENERAL NEWS:

As a result of the commitment of programme staff and VBB volunteers, the SARAH Programme continues to perform splendidly. Fourteen VBB volunteer veterinarians and nurses are thus far confirmed for the year and more enquires are being received on a daily basis.

Efforts to promote the programme with other veterinary volunteer groups will generate even greater volunteer interest in the programme. All the SARAH staff members are very enthusiastic about the prospect of continuing their clinical education this year and look forward to meeting and working with the new volunteers.

Dr Diki is well and back at work (we are not letting her work too hard) and the baby is due in June. With Dr Thinlay and Dr Diki as parents he/she is destined to become a SARAH veterinarian and animal welfare advocate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The continuing generous support of Fondation Brigitte Bardot for this important and effective animal welfare initiative is gratefully acknowledged.

Dr Beth McGenniken
Programme Manager

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