



Street Dogs *of* Nepal

In the wake of a catastrophic earthquake that devastated the Nepalese community in 2015, hardworking heroes have emerged, volunteering with the local people to help treat an epidemic of stray dogs left without care, food or shelter. The Nepalese people, together with volunteer veterinary carers, work in makeshift surgeries to treat everything from mange, to broken bones and malnutrition. One day at a time, they are making a positive difference.

STORY: ELIZA CRISP & PHOTOS: CHUEN MAN CHANG



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WHEN WE THINK OF NEPAL, in 2015 Nepal was devastated by an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale. This catastrophic natural disaster left the local communities shattered.

Amongst the many thousands of deceased, displaced or injured victims, the quake proved to be a catalyst for another local problem — the already burgeoning street dog population.

Nepalese people love dogs, and celebrate them yearly during the Tihar festival. Dogs are honoured on the second day of the weeklong festival, and are draped with flower garlands as a sign of respect.

Despite this, the local street dog population is an ongoing issue. Dogs are often forced to scavenge for scraps, and with the lack of organised rubbish disposal, this means that waste is easily accessible to them.

In Kathmandu, the city government previously poisoned the street dog population with chunks of meat laced with strychnine. It quickly became apparent, however, that since the remaining dogs weren't desexed, the population swiftly stabilised. After some street children were mistakenly killed after eating the baits, the program was abolished.

The Humane Society International estimates the worldwide street dog population to be between 250 to 300 million. After the Nepalese earthquake, the local street dogs became an afterthought, as the people struggled to rebuild their lives. Now, more than 20,000 dogs crowd the streets of the Nepal capital, Kathmandu.

DEALING WITH THE AFTERMATH

For RSPCA volunteer, Chuen Man Chang, the plight of the Nepalese street dog is very close to his heart.

He grew to love the Nepalese people after the massive quake rocked the region. He happened to be hiking at the nearby Mount Everest Basecamp just before the earthquake hit, and rushed back to Kathmandu to offer his help.

“I’d never felt an earthquake before, but I realised how serious it was when the power and internet went down. Once we regained phone service a few hours later, my phone went crazy with worried messages from my friends and family.”

Chuen Man camped in the Australian Embassy grounds, and used his skills as a Social Worker to assist local organisations in rebuilding shelters for the local people. “It was destiny — I was at the right place at the right time.”

After previously spending time working with asylum seekers through the Australian Red Cross, Chuen Man ventured further into Kathmandu. Like most of us, he had never been in a disaster zone.

“To see rubble, whole buildings collapsed, cars under rubble...” he shakes his head in disbelief.

MORE THAN 20,000 DOGS CROWD THE STREETS OF THE NEPAL CAPITAL, KATHMANDU.

“The amount of dogs on the streets shocked me. Imagine over 100 street dogs, living in an area the equivalent of the Queen Street Mall, in Brisbane.”

Chuen Man works with local organisations such as Nepal Animal Welfare and Research Centre (NAWRC) to treat the dogs, and ????? focuses on their Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR) program.



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WORKING IN EXTREME CONDITIONS

The conditions are basic: using a canvas tent left by a Spanish earthquake relief organisation, a simple surgery room is cloaked in plastic sheeting. Large boilers are used to sterilise equipment, and meticulous medical charts are attached to the exterior of the tent. Dogs are brought in on rickshaws, and recover from their surgery in simple crates.

Using this process, Chuen Man and his volunteers were able to neuter 66 dogs in one of his recent visits.

One benefit of this makeshift operating room is the attention it attracts. When the local people see the work that Chuen Man is doing, they are quick to help; offering to administer medication, check bandages, and feed the dogs post-operation. Some of the young men in the community have been trained in how to humanely catch the dogs, and take great pride in their work. This requires considerable skill and strength, and Chuen Man would eventually like to introduce automatic traps to supplement their abilities.

Of course, there are challenges every step of the way. Diseases that could be easily vaccinated and treated in Australia, can prove to be a death sentence for the street dogs in Nepal.

Both demodectic and sarcoptic mange are common amongst the dog population; with the former being spread

by scabies, which is highly contagious. Rabies is also an ongoing issue with over 200 Nepalese people dying per year after being bitten by infected dogs. Parvovirus, in both the cardiac and intestinal forms, is another critical problem; many dogs are not sufficiently vaccinated against this from a young age.

The weather conditions are extreme in Nepal, with the mountainous region dropping below freezing during winter. Street dogs often shelter under cars to keep warm on cold nights, meaning animals can be run over.

FINDING THE COURAGE TO CARE

Chuen Man admits that the conditions are initially quite confronting for Western vets, but he hopes to eventually see more professionals offering their expertise in Nepal. “That is my eventual



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plan for the program. I would love to see more vets travelling to Nepal as part of a cultural exchange," he says.

Hong Kong born, but now living in Australia, Chuen Man has been back to Nepal three times since 2015, and is planning another visit later this year. He documents his work with animals on his Facebook page, Wild Connections.

Chuen Man credits his long-term volunteer work with the RSPCA Wacol as vital to his success in Nepal.

"I've learned so much through volunteering as a photographer at the RSPCA. They treat the animals so well, and they always focus on positive reinforcement. This volunteer work gave me the courage to go to Nepal."

"THE HAPPIEST MOMENT IS WHEN YOU RELEASE THEM, BUT IT'S SAD ALSO BECAUSE YOU WISH THEY HAD A HOME."



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Despite Chuen Man's unwavering dedication to the TNR program, the overall future of Nepal's street dogs remains unstable.

With eight of the world's 10 highest mountains located in Nepal, the underlying fault line is a constant cause for concern. In addition to this, Nepal's already-struggling economy was hit hard by the 2015 earthquake, with economists predicting that it will take many more years for the nation to recover.

In order to successfully control the street dog population in the face of these financial and environmental threats, community education is the cornerstone of a successful street dog management plan.

By teaching locals how to make cheap, nutritious food for the dogs, families can provide a more stable diet for the animals in their area. Providing information about animal behaviour may also help decrease the number of people being bitten by scared or threatened dogs. Furthermore, local support for shelters and sterilisation programs provides an important community function: allowing a positive place for discussion and support.

Several organisations work in Nepal to help control the street dog population, and Chuen Man is motivated by the satisfaction in his work.

"The happiest moment is when you release them, but it's sad also because you wish they had a home. Nepal is so different to Australia, it's a developing country, and the local people can't always afford to keep dogs as pets. But to see a dog recover — It's priceless." ■

Meet the Nepalese dogs



FUCHI

Chuen Man found Fuchi slumped on the cold, concrete floor of a disused building. Her mange was so severe that she barely had any fur remaining. After several months of treatment, her improvement is incredible — It's hard to believe that this is the same dog!



PIMA

Pima was forced to give birth to eight hungry puppies in the only space she could shelter: a large industrial pipe. Chuen Man gave her the name 'Pima' as a combination of the words 'pipe' and 'mama'. Pima's litter of puppies will luckily be her last, she was successfully desexed via the TNR program.



SNEAKING IN!

Chuen Man found this sweet pup at the nearby Monkey Temple, and she was in terrible shape: Parvovirus, skin problems, and a badly broken leg. Concerned that she wouldn't last another day, Chuen Man and his volunteer snuck the puppy into their guesthouse for the night. Eager to keep her calm and warm, they took turns sleeping with the sick puppy until they got access the local vet in the morning. She has gone on to make a full recovery!