



We support the sterilisation of pet dogs and strays in the East Algarve area

STRAY ANIMALS IN PORTUGAL

In August 2019, The Portugal News published an article about stray animals in the country. A lack of resources, overcrowding in kennels and no support for poorer families have all contributed to the “absurd” number of abandoned animals in Portugal.

Implementing the “no kill” law in 2017, whilst a wonderful achievement, will exacerbate the situation when it’s not supported by comprehensive sterilisation programmes. Of course, with the Covid pandemic, the plight for stray animals will only worsen.

The irony is that the “no kill” law serves to promote cruelty and suffering because without charities and a sterilisation programme, there’s very little relief for these stray animals.

Ricardo Lobo from The Association of Municipal Vets (2017 and 2018) estimates that around 50,000 stray animals are collected each year by official collection centres. With 17,000 adoptions a year, it’s easy to do the math..... a 33,000 gap each year and no sterilisation programme! Given that an unsterilised female and her progeny are able to generate around 67,000 dogs over six years and this figure for cats is around 2 million after 8 years, one can only imagine the catastrophic situation Portugal will be facing in the short term.

Bear in mind that this does not take into account, the animals that are not collected!

In addition to the “no kill” law, in April 2018 the government pledged an amount of €500,000 for the sterilisation of dogs and cats. However, by the end of 2018, only 50% of that amount had been used.

The President of the Order of Veterinary Doctors, Jorge Cid, has accused the authorities of failing to comply with the law requiring them to collect abandoned animals and elaborates that this failure is due to the fact that there is no place to put these animals.

Mr Lobo further explained that it would not be feasible to build the number of municipal kennels required to take care of these animals and described the problem..... “We have a lack of general education about what it is to own pets”. He believes that it’s possible to “change mentalities” through awareness campaigns in schools.

The general lack of education seems to include a resistance to the sterilisation procedure by some local folk. Of course, any objections to the sterilisation of an animal have been thoroughly debunked throughout the world by many veterinary scientists.

Somehow, the irony of the resultant unwanted litters, suffering and cruelty seems to escape notice.

From a tourism perspective, it bears mentioning the negative impact on the travel industry when visitors see this level of abuse. Those from countries like the UK, Scandinavia, Holland, Switzerland and Germany where there is strong animal welfare education and protection laws, do not want their holiday ruined by the sight of abused, starving and unwanted animals. Although anecdotal, some private animal shelters have reported animals being handed in by tourists and just a cursory search of expat/tourism sites will reveal the massive extent to which the "stray dog problem in Portugal" is mentioned.

Most shelters will confirm that they are overwhelmed by requests to take strays/ unwanted pets and litters of puppies.

Numerous strays come from hunters who have a tendency to dump their dogs when it suits them.... because they're pregnant, because they've been hurt, because there are too many..... or just because they can! They seem to do this with impunity and very little fear of being legally penalised.

From a sterilisation perspective, it's important to note that just two charities on the eastern Algarve managed to **sterilise around 1,200 animals** in 2020 whilst the Loule Camara, for example, only undertook 125 sterilisations in that same period.

A further piece of legislation recently announced is that all dogs must be microchipped and the chip registered to the owner. Sounds like a good idea but to whom do you register the chip in a stray? Strays don't have owners! Local Camaras have rejected the idea that they would become the owners of stray animals. Same attitude coming from Municipal Vets! It's understandable that these organisations and/or private citizens are reluctant to take on the associated responsibility.

There is a self-perpetuating conundrum therefore, in fining Vets for not microchipping an animal and then charging them again when they have technically "abandoned" the stray by putting it back on the street. Although not ideal, some strays are better off being free..... fed by local restaurants and kind citizens, rather than being kept in a cage in a shelter. Of course, as has been indicated in this article, the municipal canils are overflowing so conditions are not optimal!

The reality is that strays that land on the doorstep of shelters (mainly private... funded by donations and run by volunteers), are vaccinated and sterilised, and live in a kennel and hoping to be adopted. If they are not collected from the streets, the danger of overwhelming stray animals becomes very real. It's clearly not a wise strategy to implement ideological concepts and laws without backing them up with comprehensive programmes - this type of thinking only creates an even worse situation. Other countries recognise the issue and many have taken the decision not

to penalise people for trying to help... it is sadly unfortunate that Portugal has not yet joined up its thinking.

A pertinent question at this point would be... "What would happen if suddenly, there was no care from private chartities to help these animals?"

Mahatma Gandhi..... humanist, political ethicist, non-violent activist and an inspiration for many successful global campaigns for civil rights and freedom said

"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."