



Rural Animal Care

*Helping Our Community with their Animals
& Accessing Veterinary Support*

It has been conservatively estimated that there are upwards of 3 million dogs in Zimbabwe and, in a failing economy where a large proportion of the population are either unemployed or living from hand to mouth, domestic animals - inevitably at the bottom of the pecking order - are not faring well. With no help from the government, the vets and animal welfare organizations are doing an amazing job, but the burden is overwhelming and they need all the help they can get.

Difficult as it may be in town, the situation is much worse in the rural area and, unable to turn a blind eye to the emaciated little dogs on the side of road, we decided that we had to try and help - hence the name Rural Animal Care. However, the scale of the problem soon became apparent and, realising that we needed help, we approached VAWZ (Vets for Animal Welfare Zimbabwe) just over a year ago.

Their response was amazing and, unfailing in their concern, they have made it possible for us to help the neediest cases in our area. However, operating throughout the country entirely on donation, their resources are also limited, and we need to raise money to try and help pay our own way. We are determined to continue improving the lot of these desperate animals but, as we try to meet their needs, we need your help...

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- ❖ *Providing a link between our Zimbabwean animal welfare organisations (such as VAWZ, Friend Animal Foundation and the SPCA) and the rural people in our area - Caledonia, Chishawasha, Gardener Road and Arcturus - we help to make veterinary care accessible to many needy animals.*

Most of these people are subsistence farmers who have recently been allocated small plots through the Government land resettlement program and they do not have the money to take their animals into town to see a vet, let alone pay consultation fees and veterinary charges. Without help, all these animals would be left to fend for themselves - as they have been for as long as they have been living out here - and many of them have short lives that all too often end in long drawn-out deaths.



Chita is brought in for attention



White comes in a wheelbarrow



Some arrive on the back of bicycles



And this is a packet of pups...

- ❖ Offering an 'animal ambulance' service, the sick and injured animals of our impoverished rural community are taken into Harare, where their treatment - or euthanasia, when necessary - is done by Kamfinsa Veterinary Surgery and paid for by VAWZ (Vets for Animal Welfare Zimbabwe).

The word has spread that help is available and we are now called upon almost daily to assist with dogs and cats that have been run over, poisoned, ripped open in fights, gored by wild pigs, broken legs or have just stopped eating because they are sick.

We try to sort out minor problems ourselves, only taking the more serious cases into the vet, but often have to deal with unvaccinated animals that have infectious diseases like STD's, canine parvovirus and distemper which are much more prevalent than they would be in the urban animal population.



Hit by a car, Lucky has broken bones



Bruno, after surprising a wild pig



Taking a very sick Ginger into the Vet



... and the same dog, a few months later

- ❖ *Facilitating rabies vaccinations for these rural animals, we act as intermediaries between VAWZ and the locals, organising vaccination days at various venues in the district. We also notify the government veterinary department (and collect the district representatives to help if they are available) as it appears that they are unable to provide this service to the community at present.*

Rabies is a very real threat in Zimbabwe - in the last 9 months we've had 5 dogs in our immediate vicinity that have been confirmed positive - and this is just the tip of the iceberg. It is very fortunate that VAWZ has stepped in to assist the local animals in need of inoculation and they have managed to vaccinate approximately 500 dogs in our area in the last year.



Owners & dogs gathering at a store



Caro (VAWZ) doing rabies vaccinations



Mel (VAWZ) hands over a certificate



A pack of hunting dogs waits its turn

- ❖ Taking many of their dogs and cats into Harare for sterilisation, we have been able to introduce and physically demonstrate the benefits of animal family planning (a concept that has not traditionally been part of the local African culture) to many of the rural people in our area.

With the surgery funded by a collaboration between VAWZ and Kamfinsa Vet, we took 4 dogs a week into town for spaying and neutering in the first half of last year, sterilising 78 needy dogs and a few cats. The vast improvement in the health of all the animals treated has had a hugely positive impact on the community and there are now a steadily increasing number of people asking for assistance, (although this is also a 'Catch 22' situation as it inevitably entails more of an outlay of our already limited funds).



Taking Rebecca to the vet for spaying



Dipped & ready for admission...



Returning Bolt & Shine after neutering



Dropping Bingo home after his operation

- ❖ Working with VAWZ on a fortnightly mobile animal clinic in our area, we are now assisting with the sterilisation of up to 40 dogs a month and the provision of vaccinations and veterinary care for hundreds more animals that belong to the poorest sector of society.

Operating from a thatched gazebo at a local butchery and bottle store, (newly outfitted by my husband, who custom made three little operating tables for it, each with an overhead light and instrument table), the VAWZ vets have sterilised over 90 dogs here in just over 3 months. There are also several wonderful volunteers who come in when they can (including two that are veterinary trained) and their help is always very much appreciated.



The gazebo at Caledonia Butchery



The operating theatre in action



Caro & Eugene (VAWZ) operating



Taking the first batch of patients home

- ❖ Transporting the animals home after their operations and treatment, we then monitor their progress and assist with any aftercare that might be necessary. Making 'house calls' to check on them (and any other animals in need) can involve anything from de-worming to treating minor injuries and fly-bitten ears, gives the owners the reassurance that they have someone to turn to in an emergency and allows us the opportunity to check on the conditions under which the dogs are being kept.

Some isolated homesteads are only accessible in a 4 wheel drive vehicle but, fortunately, we have the use of a friend's sturdy old Toyota pick-up truck (affectionately known as the 'Red Racing Snail') for when we have to venture out on the worst roads.



Duty eyes us with suspicion...



Tawanda dusts Tiger & Leya for fleas



Taking Ringo home in the racing snail



Spike ran home after his op - drama!!

- ❖ Supplying each dog with a very basic bed when it returns from the vet, we source old tyres, cut them in half, fill them with clean straw and line them with small blankets. We also give them second hand collars and leads when they are available. These are collected or made by caring friends and family and replace ones that have been variously fashioned from twisted wire, electrical cable, thatching twine, bits of cloth or bark freshly ripped from trees.

In rural Africa, dogs are traditionally seen as working animals rather than pets and all the dogs we deal with are outdoor dogs. Used for hunting or security, they are a far cry from the 'pampered pooch' of the western world and this is the first time that most of them have ever had a bed of their own, let alone a collar and lead.



New beds for Spice & Snoopy



Snoopy snuggles into her blanket



Checking on Smart's sleeping quarters



Beds, collars & leads for Ninja & Janey

- ❖ Providing a weekly dipping facility for dogs at two local centres, we are trying to reduce the incidence of biliary - a tick-borne disease that kills a huge number of dogs every year, especially in the rainy season when ticks are at their worst.

Although a new service, anything from 50 to 150 dogs are already being dipped at each session and, given that many of our animal owners were not previously aware of the causal connection between ticks and the disease that was killing so many of their dogs, this is already making a difference. The Triatix used in the dip also conditions the skin and will help to heal the mange and some of the other painful skin conditions that are so prevalent among the dogs.



Before dipping, Spot's ear is full of ticks



Siprin dips dogs at the mobile clinic



Taking Rex into the vet with biliary



... And the same dog, 6 weeks later

- ❖ *Arranging for the care of animals in urgent need of rehabilitation, special nursing or quarantine, (such as severely malnourished animals or dogs that have been in close contact with confirmed or suspected rabies cases), we take them into the Friend Animal Foundation, an animal shelter in Harare, for safe keeping. They have frequently taken in dogs for us - completely free of charge - and we are very grateful to them for their kindness, both to us and to the unfortunate victims.*
- ❖ *Taking unwanted dogs or puppies into them, we also help any of the very caring, responsible owners who have lost dogs to adopt from the shelter, always making sure that we continue to follow up on their wellbeing afterwards.*



Fluffy (on right) home from quarantine: her brother was euthanised with rabies



Pattori gets special attention at Friends: malnourished, she lost 9 of her 11 pups



Hopeful puppies at the animal shelter



Rambo & Spot meet their new family

- ❖ Trying to vaccinate as many dogs as we can against distemper (which is rife in the rural areas), we have started fundraising quiz evenings with our friends and are hoping that this will enable VAWZ to inoculate the dogs that we have already managed to sterilise with their help. Ideally, we'd like to do all the animals on our books, but there are about 500 of them (and just the vaccine would cost \$5 each) so it's not an option at this stage.

A highly contagious airborne disease, canine distemper virus can be absolutely devastating in a community like ours where the dogs are unconfined and unvaccinated. There is no cure for it - only prevention - and it is just soul destroying having to euthanise animals that have often fought their way back from the brink already. We've lost 25 of 'our dogs' to this horrendous disease in the last nine months, many of them healthy animals that had been neutered.



Distemper vaccinations at a store



All these healthy dogs are at risk



Another unfortunate distemper victim



A woman brings her dog for euthanising

- ❖ *Becoming aware of the plight of rural animal owners, we contacted one of the local animal food manufacturers and are now providing an affordable and nutritious dog meal through two local tuck shops. A high protein instant food that only requires the addition of water, (a huge bonus for people who have to source their own wood daily to cook over open fires), we buy it at \$2.75 for a 5 kg bag and sell it on for \$2.50, subsidising it very slightly to bring its price in line with the mealie meal that has traditionally been used.*
- ❖ *Supplementing the food of orphaned pups, kittens and many other malnourished animals, we are always grateful for help. Friends and family often drop in tins of animal food and the Friend Foundation has also been very generous, giving us milk powder for the use of tiny puppies on several occasions.*



Three skinny little dogs in need of help



A distended tummy from lack of protein



This family has over 20 dogs to feed



Dog meal for sale at the local mill

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❖ *Helping to find homes for animals, we can often put people who have lost an animal in touch with those who have more than they want, although we use our discretion and would never facilitate the buying or selling of animals. We frequently come across people selling their puppies illegally but, unwilling to jeopardise the trust that enables us to move freely among the community, don't report them. Instead, we offer them help with their animals, make suggestions where we can and have discovered that things can usually be resolved amicably.*

Because rural animals often have short, hard lives, they are replaced regularly in a vicious circle of permanently pregnant bitches and endless supplies of puppies. Many people don't know that a dog can live for more than a decade and more education is needed in this field, although, without financial assistance, most people would not be able to act on it.



Pups, pups



And more pups...



These were surrendered



Poppet, the tiniest pup, was rehomed

- ❖ *Providing information on animal care in clear and simple language, (either in English or Shona) we have written leaflets on basic animal care, rabies and distemper. We often deliver these to animal owners at their homes, where we can explain things that need clarification and physically demonstrate the magical effect of affection on their animals.*

This is more important than one would think and can be very rewarding - especially when one realises that the suffering endured by many rural animals is the result of ignorance, rather than deliberate cruelty. What is more, every person who learns to care for his or her animal becomes a teacher in turn; generating ripples that spread through the community like a stone that has been thrown in a pool.



April shows 'before & after' photos



Fluffy, home with a friend



The magic of affection...



Education & kindness can go a long way

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If anyone would like to donate anything (either in cash or kind) to help our project, it would make a huge difference. However, we are not a registered charity, so if you would like to make a donation, we would be grateful if you could pay it into the VAWZ Account (Vets for Animal Welfare Zimbabwe), with a note to specify that it is to go towards the veterinary expenses incurred by April's Rural Animal Care project.

We would also appreciate anything like blankets, (which we quarter, so that they are more likely to be used for the dogs), animal food of any description or sturdy drinking bowls - especially important for water, a precious commodity that is not always readily available. And now, having said all that, the only thing that remains is for me is to thank each of you on behalf of each and every one of the animals...



Snoopy arrives back from the vet



Lucky in front of his house



A malnourished Scoodoo with her owner



Rex sleeps in her bed at the front door

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For some, help comes too late, but...



These 3 dogs are happy & healthy

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