About the Animal Welfare Problems of the So-Called Stray Dogs Outside of Germany

An approach to finding solutions from the point of view of the German Animal Welfare Federation

Introduction

In numerous countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as in other parts of the world, there exist large numbers of abandoned dogs. These dogs and their offspring are called "stray dogs".

The original cause for the development of stray dog populations is to be located in peoples’ households. Bitches are neither spayed nor sufficiently isolated from males when in heat. Therefore, bitches as a rule whelp several times during their lifespan. For the whelps, frequently no new owner is found. The sad reality is that frequently one of the whelps, often a male, is kept to avoid bothering the household with new unwanted offspring in the future, while the other puppies together with their dam are abandoned.

The next generation of these strays is generally not habituated to humans during the sensitive phase when they are puppies. These dogs remain shy of humans during their lifetime. A later socialisation is not possible.

Photo: a group of dogs not socialized to humans in Odessa (Ukraine)

All these dogs have lost their homes and seek shelter in empty houses or parks, feed themselves by eating garbage or field mice and begging from humans. The living conditions of these strays are relevant in light of animal welfare, for many of them suffer from infectious diseases and parasites. But even weakened dogs have high rates of procreation when not castrated.

Because of their domesticated background and being accustomed to livings in the vicinity of humans, strays usually remain near human habitation – seeking food, water and shelter. While those dogs that have been socialized to humans at a young age remain closer to people and may attach themselves, provided their experience is favourable, non-socialized animals usually keep a marked distance.

Solutions contrary to animal welfare:

Catching and killing:
Communities of the respective countries are confronted with a large number of animals in the streets and frequently react in ways completely contrary to animal welfare. Year after year, thousands of friendly, healthy dogs are caught and killed, often in very cruel ways. These unjustifiable actions are rendered possible by low or lacking awareness, inadequate animal welfare legislation or the desolate state of implementing existing regulations.

Furthermore, the total senselessness of these actions is highlighted by the fact that in spite of the killings the number of stray animals does not go down. For on one hand, households continuously provide a fresh supply of dogs, and on the other hand, the chances of survival of new puppies of strays increase, for, when other dogs are removed, there is more food for them. (In-depth information in the chapter „Approach to an animal welfare friendly and effective solution“).

**Catching and confining animals in animal shelters:**
Practical experience shows that catching and confinement constitutes a considerable animal welfare problem in many southern and eastern countries. To save the animals, animal protection activists found animal shelters without clearly considering the consequences for the animals in their care. Dogs are saved from killing stations and from the streets. Even though structural, personal and financial capacities of the animal shelters may already be exhausted, so that adequate housing and provisions as well as veterinary care cannot be guaranteed, more and more dogs are accepted. As a consequence of the inadequate housing, crowding leads to increasing aggression among dogs. In addition, insufficient room and lack of veterinary care can promote the spread of diseases among the dogs. Dogs are often healthy when brought in from the street (excepting parasite infestations) and develop severe diseases in the shelter. In addition to all that, costs for such „animal warehouses“ are immense and rising year after year. These animal warehouses contribute nothing to animal welfare.

In addition, catching dogs off the streets (by private persons or municipal dog-catchers) does not change the number of stray dogs (on this subject, too, see „Approach to an animal welfare friendly and effective solution“). When, in any country, dogs are habitually living in the streets, the moving of dogs into animal shelters is not effective. Within a short period of time, the shelters will be full. But the animal welfare problem – the problem of stray animals – remains unchanged. To help the dogs and to solve the problem, castrated dogs should be set free at the place where they have been caught.
In this animal shelter in Turkey, about 500 dogs are taken care of by two people. New dogs are accepted continuously. The death rate in the shelter is at least 56 dogs/month (not counting puppies), at least 12 of which result from biting incidents in the shelter.

Approach to an animal welfare friendly and effective solution:

Biological basics:
Every habitat provides subsistence for a given number of animals of the same species (holding capacity). The number depends directly on the possibilities of finding food and water, climatic influences and safety from predators.

![Diagram of number of stray dogs in an area](image)

Number of stray dogs in an area
“holding capacity”

Depends directly on

Food
- garbage
- feeding by animal lovers
- mice
- cadavers

Water
- rivers
- lakes
- creeks
- springs
- wells
- puddles
- broken water lines

Shelter
- Empty houses
- caves
- bushes/shrubs

Graphic: the availability of water, food and shelter limits the number of dogs in a given area. These external factors can hardly be influenced.

Within a given habitat, a "steady state" will be reached between the increase of dogs on one hand (births, influx of abandoned dogs) and loss (adoption, animal shelters, death, euthanasia, moving to other countries) on the other hand.
If catching all the street dogs in a given area within two months (gestation time), and preventing all abandoning of dogs cannot be managed, survival chances for puppies increase and new dogs immigrate into the area, until holding capacity is again reached. Since catching of all dogs within two months in an area in combination with reducing subsistence factors (water, feed, shelter) is impossible, continuing the catching of dogs can be regarded as senseless as this will not contribute to a solution of the problem of stray dogs.

In summary, this means: Catching and killing campaigns, as customary in many southern and eastern countries to this day, are not only cruel but absolutely senseless. Neither does catching and warehousing in animal shelters meet animal welfare standards, nor does it solve the problem. Catching and placing of socialized, friendly and healthy dogs in other countries can mean an improvement in living conditions for the individual dog, but does not solve the problem, either, for the other strays that are left behind will continue to procreate until the original number is reached.

**Catch, castrate, release:**
The reason for the problem of stray dogs is the reproduction of animals. Therefore, animal welfare friendly and effective solutions should target prevention of reproduction. Castration of dogs – as long as they stay in the area – is the only way to lessen and solve the problem of strays in the medium or long term. A two-pronged approach is of prime importance: both strays and household dogs must be involved in these projects.

After castration and a short recuperative period in human care the strays should be released at the places where they have been captured. Dogs that have been released reoccupy their territory, reproduction is stopped and the immigration of other dogs is reduced.

![Diagram]

**Graphic:** approach to an animal welfare friendly and effective solution

<table>
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<tr>
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Animal welfare friendly and effective solution according to the procedure of the animal welfare project „Odessa“ of the German Animal Welfare Federation:

In May 2005, after long and thorough preparations and negotiations with the authorities, the Odessa Animal Welfare and Castration Centre of the German Animal Welfare Federation opened its doors. The project aims at lowering the number of stray animals in a manner conforming to animal welfare.

The original situation in Odessa:
In Odessa, there live an unknown but large number of stray dogs. According to information supplied by the authorities, they number about 70,000.

The large number of free ranging dogs are characteristic of the city both in the centre (municipal parks, pedestrian area, port etc), and in the outskirts (market, between apartment buildings, at the airport etc.). Some of those dogs are accustomed to humans. While they are reticent towards humans, they may, when approached gently, allow themselves to be touched and behave in a friendly manner. In part, these dogs are more or less closely associated with a given household, which often provides food. Another subset of the dogs is not at all socialized toward humans. These dogs usually live in groups. They are very timid. They keep as much distance as possible between themselves and humans. Individual dogs might be enticed with food; however, they stay distrustful and do not permit touching.
The authorities of Odessa have been trying for decades to reduce the large number of stray dogs by continuous capturing and killing. Thousands of healthy and friendly dogs were captured each year by the municipal dog catchers and, after a grace period of seven days, gassed inside leaky steel containers at a facility named budka (death house) by the locals.

In spite of this, the total number of animals did not change, for the reasons detailed in the chapter „Approach to an animal welfare friendly and effective solution“. New dogs took over the freed territories.

Beginnings of the German Animal Welfare Federation’s castration project:
After much negotiating, and with the support of the German Ambassador to the Ukraine, the city authorities were successfully convinced to cease killing actions. A contract was signed with the authority to cease killing dogs.
Under makeshift conditions and with the help of a Ukrainian veterinarian, who was a supporter of the concept of „catch, castrate, release“, all dogs brought in by the dog catching service were castrated.

With the opening of the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre at Odessa in May 2005, this work was continued, now under hygienically sound conditions, systematically and on a large scale.

Animal welfare work at the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre in Odessa:

1. Catching:
Catching is still being done by the municipal dog catching service in Odessa. In the initial phase, the dog catchers used the old cars, with which they formerly took the dogs to the budka. In addition, frequently dogs were delivered twice or the place of capture was not noted down.

After many exhaustive discussions with the municipality and after several setbacks the municipality was successfully convinced to approve the procedure and even to actively participate. In May 2007, the municipality passed a set of regulations concerning the dealing with stay dogs in Odessa. At their core was an animal
welfare friendly municipal dog capture service working according to rules set up by the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre.

The capturing service proceeds by city quarters and catches all freely roaming dogs that are not marked as castrated. Capture should be easy on the animals and as little stressful as possible. Tame dogs are caught by hand or, when required, with implements (rope, net, or rod) and held in place. A mobile box is brought to the dog and is put inside. The box is then fixed inside the car.

Catching non-socialized timid dogs presents far larger difficulties. For this, traps were manufactured in close cooperation with veterinarian Dorothea Friz (Lega pro Animale), who is doing successful animal protection work by the same method in Naples, Italy, and surrounding areas.

To achieve the goal of animal welfare friendly reduction of stray animal populations, it is important that:
- The capturing should proceed systematically, quarter by quarter
- Within two months, as many animals as possible should be captured in the same quarter
- The capturing service should note down the place of capture carefully
- The capturing service has to work to establish trust in the population, in order to elicit cooperation
2. At the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre:
When the dogs have been delivered, they are initially transferred in small groups (if possible not more than three) into the group pens of the separate quarantine area of the Centre.

![Photo: a row of pens at the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre in Odessa](image)

After a short stay, the dogs are given a veterinary examination. After a basic medical check, dogs are castrated as soon as possible by a Ukrainian team of veterinarians.

![Photo: castrating is done in an operating room according to state of the art techniques](image)
I order to achieve the aim of reducing stray animal populations in an animal welfare friendly manner, it is important that:
- The operation is done under hygienically sound condition, with state of the art technique, small cuts and resorbable suture material.
- The dogs are routinely treated against parasites
- The dogs are vaccinated against rabies before release. Rabies vaccination protects both the dog and the population, as rabies is a zoonosis.
- The dogs are marked indelibly with tattoos on their ears and bellies during the operation and this mark is registered at the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre.

3. Release:
In close cooperation with the capturing service, dogs are released at their respective place of capture. The stay at the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre
should be kept as short as possible (at the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre it is about 5-7 days).

Only healthy, castrated, rabies-vaccinated, and non-aggressive dogs are released at their places of capture.

In many places, there are people taking care of these animals. Many dogs, as described above, are loosely associated with certain households. These caretakers continue to supply food to the – now castrated – dogs.

Photo: a castrated stray dog after release in his original territory

4. Numbers:

The Animal Welfare and Castration Centre keeps statistics. Numbers are continually actualized and may be obtained directly from the German Animal Welfare Federation.

65% of the dogs were released at their original territory in cooperation with the municipal capturing service.

25% of dogs (those who are associated loosely with certain households from which they receive food) were picked up by their caretakers.

10% of dogs (among them pure-bred dogs and puppies dropped at the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre) were placed with new owners in Odessa.

5. Further tasks of the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre:

An important task of the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre is to communicate their experiences to other cities and communities, on order to convince them of the advantages of animal welfare friendly and sustainable actions. To this end, there are yearly animal welfare conferences for scientists and authorities.

Practicing veterinarians can educate themselves in the technique of castration with minimal incisions. These private practice veterinarians can then contribute to establishing a basis of trust in dog owners so that they will have their animals castrated.
Regular newspaper, radio and television coverage educate the public about animal welfare work. To this end, once a year there is an open house. Furthermore, there is a close relationship to an orphanage in Odessa. The children regularly visit the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre. They are playfully introduced to the animals and learn to treat their fellow creatures with respect.

Summary

In many southern and eastern countries dogs live in the streets, the so-called stray animals. The reason for this is that humans do not sufficiently control the reproduction of their dogs. The dogs multiply without there being found new owners for them. Thus, many dogs and generations of their offspring are living in the streets.

Killing campaigns are to be judged cruel and non-effective, and the German Animal Welfare Federation condemns these actions sharply. But the long-term housing of dogs in animal shelters, too, does not make sense, as it does not lead to animal welfare. As the placing of dogs with new owners is only possible for a small minority of dogs, animal shelters fill up quickly. This kind of shelter will become mass warehousing facilities, as examples from Italy or Turkey with several hundred and up to a thousand animals have proved. The animals suffer from far too little room and lack of care and veterinary services. In these animal shelters the number of severely ill animals will increase and aggression among animals will mount. The costs of such animal warehousing stations are huge and rising each year. Immense animal suffering is caused here. This way of keeping animals is no contribution to animal welfare an not a solution to any problem.

The German Animal Welfare Federation is advocating measures that will contribute to a solution of problems within respective countries. The Odessa Animal Welfare and Castration Centre of the German Animal Welfare Federation work rationale is „Catch, Castrate, Release“. A small part of the dogs can be placed with new owners in the area. Each animal that is castrated and remains within the country contributes to the solution of the problem. Furthermore, the dogs are vaccinated against rabies, also in order to protect the population against this zoonosis, and each animal is marked.

Equally as important as the castration of privately owned and stray dogs, the population and the authorities must be informed comprehensively, and there must be close cooperation with veterinarians, municipal administration and the local animal protection societies.

Summarized in key words, the German Animal Welfare Federation regards the following elements as both fundamental and crucial for the implementation of an animal welfare project in a given country:
- Castration and remaining of the castrated dogs within the country
- Marking and registration
- Vaccination against rabies
- Information
- Cooperation

Postscript:
In the Animal Welfare and Castration Centre at Odessa, cats, too, are temporarily accepted and castrated. The number of animals to be castrated is rising continually. Cats are brought in by their owners and picked up after castration.