

CANINE CENSUS, THE WAY FORWARD FOR ISLAND DOGS



In association with The Esther Honey Foundation, US scientist, veterinarian and award winning author, Cynthia Lauren Mills, is formulating a model for counting Rarotonga's dogs in preparation for a mass sterilization program (EHF VET TREK® Raro 08) to be conducted by EHF this year.

EHF is grateful to Aroa Beachside Inn for partnering with EHF to provide accommodation for Dr. Mills during her two week stay on the island.

Dr. Mills wrote the following about her work for EHF and island dogs:

Sometimes there are just too many dogs. Love them or hate them, it is a fact of life that sometimes in some places there are more dogs than there should be. In Rarotonga that is not as true as it used to be. Having the Esther Honey Foundation has helped to keep their numbers in check.

Not very many places in the world have an Esther Honey Foundation clinic. Without a place where you can take dogs for neutering or de-sexing, the dogs continue to breed and breed and produce lots of puppies.

Right now the Esther Honey Foundation on Rarotonga is doing its part to help other places where dog populations get too large. Right now we are working on a way to count dogs, to conduct a census of dogs the way a nation counts its people, and if it works here the method can be exported to other areas. It also proves that having a clinic on the island helps. Other countries or islands will be encouraged to start clinics of their own like the Esther Honey Foundation Animal Clinic.

Too many dogs can prove to be a danger to people. They can bite and they can cause road or automobile accidents. They can also carry parasites such as worms that can make people sick. Compared to places like Thailand and India, however, dogs here in Rarotonga are pretty safe as in those places dogs can become sick with rabies and when they bite a person that person can die.

So, the way the counting works is that only parts or samples of the island are counted. (Think of tasting a dish before you eat it - you can get a pretty good idea of what it will be like from taking just a tiny sample.) The particular areas for the dog count are picked randomly, they are selected quite literally by the role of a dice. A counter, a volunteer, walks down all the streets in that section and counts all the dogs he/she sees. He/she tries to see if they are boy or girl dog and if they are neutered (desexed). This means looking to see if the boy dog has testicles or if the girl dog is obviously nursing a litter of pups or if they have traces of their de-sexing tattoo in their ear given by the EHF when the desex all animals.

Also, the volunteer counter may simply ask someone if the dog is neutered or not. And the counter may ask someone how many dogs live on that street. These counters are only interested in the welfare of the dogs and the people, they are not concerned with whether someone has too many dogs or even who owns the dogs. They are concerned with getting the count right, so it is best if the answers they get are correct.

After all the sections are counted and counted more than once, the numbers will be submitted to a computer program designed by the World Health Organization and the World Society for Protection of Animals. This program will calculate an estimate of the total population of dogs on Rarotonga. This can be compared with other estimates and checked for accuracy. If it works, Rarotonga will have done its part to help other places learn to count dogs. With accurate dog counts, everyone can find ways to curb dog populations that are effective and, most importantly, kind.

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Dr. Cynthia Lauren Mills is the award winning author of *The Theory of Evolution, What it is, Where it came from and Why it works*, and articles for *Discover*, *Conservation*, *Bark* and *The Sciences*. Dr. Mills' articles in *Discover* and *Bark* magazines can be read on EHF Website's *News and Published Articles* page.

About the EHF Project: EHF Vet Trek® Rarotonga 2008

The Esther Honey Foundation will conduct the country's first scientific canine census (with the support of the community and local businesses) to determine how many dogs are on the island and how many need to be de-sexed (a minimum of 70% of the total number) to stabilize the population. The Census is the first step in the **EHF Vet Trek® Rarotonga** for which the foundation has recruited a large number of volunteer veterinarians, vet nurses and other qualified assistants through our head office in the US to come to Rarotonga to carry out the mass spay/neuter project.

To learn more about EHF **VET TREK** Raro or to assist in the project, please contact EHF at: info@estherhoney.org.

EHF thanks Jim and the team at Aroa Beachside Inn for partnering with EHF for this project and providing accommodation for Dr. Mills.