

Vet Trek Bora Bora Clinic Spays/Neuters 664 Animals in Four Weeks

The island of Bora Bora welcomed 20 most unusual visitors during the months of February and March of this year. These guests were a group of veterinarians, technicians and volunteers associated with the Esther Honey Foundation (EHF), who came from Oregon, Alabama and Sydney, Australia, to participate in a Vet Trek Clinic that was set up at Place Motoi next to the boat dock in Vaitape village. Between February 18 and March 18 they succeeded in spaying/neutering 664 animals, which included 508 dogs and 156 cats.

This program was the result of joint efforts of the EHF of Oregon, presided by Cathy Sue Anunson, and Fenua Animalia, a Polynesian animal welfare organization that is headquartered in Tahiti. Bora Bora's government also supported this campaign, as well as the airlines, hotels, restaurants, tourism committee, service providers and many of the local residents.

Eric Loeve, president of Fenua Animalia, had been working for several years to get something done about the problem of errant dogs in Bora Bora. A sounding revealed that the island has 4,000 pets and 10,000 inhabitants. These figures appeared to the leaders of the Commune as a threat to the security and health of the population, for the notoriety of the destination and for tourism in general.

The Bora Bora mairie (town hall) and other government members agreed that a volunteer sterilization campaign was needed for both adopted and homeless cats and dogs, as the fee of at least 30,000 CFP charged by



the vets in French Polynesia is more than the average family can afford to pay.

Fenua Animalia then made an appeal to the Esther Honey Foundation to proceed with the surgeries.

Twenty volunteers paid their own airfare to come to Bora Bora for a month. Air Tahiti Nui gave discounts on their airfare. 11 hotel managers guaranteed their lodging and breakfast, the town hall provided lunch and the volunteers were invited out for dinner at various restaurants and snacks around the island, as well as being hosted by individual families who appreciated the contribution these foreigners were making to the community.

These young vets, technicians and support staff of volunteers were given gifts of black pearls and shell jewelry. They visited one another's rooms and bungalows at the various hotels, enjoying the chance to check out the decor and amenities of the 4- and 5-star establishments that had offered them accommodations. They were all invited to Bloody Mary's restaurant one night, and to eat pizza at Chez Ben's on another occasion. Yvon of Shark Boy Excursions took them all on an outrigger canoe ride to feed the sharks, and TOPdive offered special rates for divers. Marc-André Zani of l'Appetisserie brought them 6 animals to neuter and rewarded them with a big cake. The mairie of Bora Bora invited them to a Tahitian feast prepared by the owners of Le Paradis that was held on their Motu Paahi. The maitre d'hotel at Bora Bora Lagoon Resort offered them all the maitai's they could drink if they rounded up the stray cats who

prowled the hotel grounds, and the Hotel Bora Bora offered them each a bottle of champagne if they managed to catch the unwanted felines who inhabited this posh establishment, but to leave their precious pet cat who is the hotel's mascot.

The Vet Trek clinic was sheltered by big top tents provided by the mairie, which were set up on the quay in Vaitape. The mairie also provided a dozen employees and various materials, including the use of vehicles to transport the animals to the clinic. Special cages were made by school students in the Mahina district of Tahiti and in Bora Bora. Whenever a pet owner made an appointment to have a cat or dog spayed or neutered, the mairie delivered a cage to the owner's house, and the driver returned the following morning to fetch the animal, who had not been fed during the night or morning prior to the scheduled operation.

The animals operated were at least five months old, and were required to be clean, without fleas and ticks, and fasting. At the clinic the vets examined the animal and treated any health problems there might be. Then, following a general anesthesia, the sterilization operation was performed, which lasted only a few minutes for a male and a little longer for a female. An identification tattoo, proof of the sterilization, was made in the animal's ear and then it was returned to the owner after spending a few hours of observation in the recovery room of the clinic.

Fenua Animalia absorbed the cost of the medicines and bandages used during these operations, which amounted to almost five million French Pacific francs. For Eric Loeve, president of the association, it was worth it. However, he said that they would need to sterilize 75% of the animals for the campaign to make a difference in the over population in coming years.

The local vet in Bora Bora, Wilfred (Willy) Clarke, also worked to bring about the sterilization campaign. He said that he had already proposed the idea to the mayor. He added that after the massive campaign of sterilization, they should have the means to assure a daily follow up in order to prevent another problem in two or three years.

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Vet Trek

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To even the most casual observer, it is obvious that there are too many dogs in Bora Bora. Some of them have an owner who takes care of them, but many of them are errant beside the roads, sick and sometimes aggressive. They cause real problems with their noise—barking and fighting whenever there is a female in heat. Add to this the problem of accidents of 2-wheel vehicles that happen primarily because of dogs. Along with the human sufferings, these numerous accidents are an expense for the community, especially for the CPS (government insurance coverage).

Tourists and residents have also been the prey of the jaws of the most ferocious of these animals and the idyllic image of the Pearl of the Pacific in particular, but also Polynesia in general, suffers.

The expected life span for a dog in these islands is an average of 8-10 years. If nothing is done, a female dog will give birth to about 120 little ones during this period.

Byron Maas, one of the American vets, expressed the hope of all the volunteers that the local veterinarians will understand that they did not come to steal business away from them. Most of the people who brought their animals to be operated on had never taken their cat or dog for professional care, he said, and some of them did not even know there was a vet on the island. He added that this type of campaign concerns not only the animals, but it con-



Cathy Sue ANUNSEN (on right) with a vet trek volunteer and 2 friends.

tributes to the well-being of the people.

Everyone who participated in this first sterilization clinic in Bora Bora agrees that it was a great success. The Vet Trek volunteers said that one of the things they wanted to do here was to educate. The people were able to watch the surgery and see what was happening with their animals. The

volunteers taught them how to touch their cats and dogs and the importance of taking care of their pets.

Cathy Sue Anunsen said that the Esther Honey Foundation has been asked to come back to Bora Bora to complete their work, and then to provide similar services on additional islands.

HISTORY OF THE ESTHER HONEY FOUNDATION

In 1993, while vacationing in the Cook Islands with her family, Cathy Sue Anunsen so enjoyed the company of her motel's resident canine, Honey, that Anunsen contacted Cook Islander Tom Wichman to make a donation to his new animal welfare group in Honey's name. She learned that there was no veterinarian for the country's thousands of dogs and cats and that, in an effort to control the canine population, unwanted dogs were shot.

Cathy Sue returned to the United States and in 1995 she formed The Esther Honey Foundation, Inc., named in honor of her grandmother, Esther, and the inspirational Cook Island companion, Honey. The foundation, with the help of its generous supporters, sent a veterinarian, clinic manager, veterinary assistant, and the medications and supplies needed to Rarotonga, to establish the Cook Island's only domestic animal clinic to this day that provides palliative, emergent and preventive care to the nation of the Cook Islands—the Esther Honey Foundation Animal Clinic.

You can learn more about their programs by going to their website at:
www.estherhoney.org.



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