



THE ESTHER HONEY FOUNDATION

Our mission - To deliver a scientifically-proven, permanent and compassionate solution to the over-population of South Pacific Island dogs and cats by offering affordable, high-quality veterinary services with an emphasis on spay/neuter and humane education. No healthy animal is euthanized and homeless and owned animals receive comparable veterinary care.

Background:

Companion animal over-population is associated with a number of issues for both the human community and the animals themselves making humane population control a high priority for the EHF for more than 20 years. When visiting the Cook Islands in 1993 as a tourist, Cathy Sue Ragan-Anunsen learned that Rarotonga authorities were shooting dogs as population control. That disturbing fact and a spectacular Raro dog named Honey were the motivation for founding the Esther Honey Foundation. EHF's mission was (and is) to provide a humane solution to the Cook Islands dog management concerns through humane education and affordable veterinary care for all Cook Islands dogs and cats. The Foundation has provided free desexing since 1995. The Esther Honey Foundation practiced (and continues to promote) CNR (collect/neuter/return) widely regarded as the most effective and scientifically proven method of animal population control until the police re-introduced their dog shooting program in 2014 over EHF's objections. It has been shown that shooting dogs, especially desexed dogs, undermines the purpose and effectiveness of CNR.

The science and the logic of CNR:

There are two common approaches to controlling free-roaming animal populations - culling and animal birth control. Culling (the lethal removal of animals from a population) is ineffective if any breeding animals or neighboring populations remain, as these animals rapidly reproduce and migrate to occupy the vacant territories. The premise of CNR programs is to collect or catch free-roaming animals, desex them (remove their ability to reproduce) and then return them to the same location, resulting in a gradual population decline through natural attrition. This system is recommended by the World Health Organization and the majority of animal welfare organizations.

A comprehensive approach:

To be truly effective, animal population control programs must work on multiple levels to:

1. Decrease the source (stop animal breeding)
2. Reduce the environmental niche for true strays/ferals
3. Address current population concerns

To this end, in addition to our CNR program for stray animals, EHF promotes free desexing of owned pets. We also work to educate the community about responsible pet ownership and the benefits of sterilization. We support appropriate waste management, and worked with the police to promote dog registration. The police received the registration fees that our Spay/Neuter surgeries generated and EHF received none of those funds. EHF also offered a re-homing (and fostering) service for unwanted/stray animals. EHF did not support the construction of a specific animal shelter on the island because CNR experts do not recommend the building of shelters, warning that shelters can impede the effectiveness of the CNR program and may precipitate welfare issues such as the euthanasia of healthy animals and undermine responsible pet ownership.

Progress to date:

When EHF first arrived on Rarotonga, there were an estimated 6000 dogs on the island. During our last census December 2013 the dog population consisted of a small percentage of pets that were owned and confined; a large majority of dogs that were owned (or community supported) but free-roaming; and a small minority of true stray/ferals. EHF has spayed/neutered over 17,000 animals including more than 8,000 dogs.

Scientific evidence has shown that the successful method of long-term population management is achieved by creating a population consisting of at least 70% desexed animals. In 2010, The Esther Honey Foundation was the first program in the South Pacific region to achieve (and exceed) the target 70% sterilisation rate for their dog population.

EHF's Dec 2013 census identified a decrease in the sterilization percentage and a slight increase in the dog population resulting from a drop in the number of dogs brought to EHF to be sterilized in 2011/2012. The percentage rate could have returned to 70% in a short time through our strongly recommended island-wide campaign to encourage and facilitate an increase in the number of spay/neuter surgeries and a continuation of EHF's scientifically proven CNR program in 2014. Instead, a government decision was made to return to an ineffective and discredited catch and kill program that effectively halted EHF's CNR program. Dogs could no longer be returned to their original location (even dogs that Esther Honey had spayed and neutered) without being vulnerable to being shot by authorities.

It is a sad fact that unless the Cook Islands government officials end their inhumane and ineffective shooting program, the Rarotonga dog population will, as predicted, continue to increase.

In 2014, EHF urged officials to acknowledge that killing programs, as the World Health Organization and others determined years ago, simply do not work in the long term. EHF repeatedly encouraged officials to return to the only program proven to control dog populations on Rarotonga where EHF diminished the dog population from an estimated 6,000 to 2,000 using CNR and education.



Cook Islands News
Feb 10, 2014

Tourism forum found lots to talk about

Members of the wider tourism industry gathered this week for a major forum designed to stir up fresh debate and discussion about the country's number one industry. Reporter Ben Chapman-Smith went along to the forum to hear all about it.

<<One hot topic was the environment. Nearly half of the 1178 people involved in the July to September survey said the most appealing element of the Cook Islands experience is its unspoilt environment. Most comments focused on the beauty and cleanliness of beaches and lagoons, the beautiful views and scenery, good climate, and the warm and clean water. **Several respondents also noted the good health of the friendly free-roaming dogs and chickens.**

"I had visited in the late 1970s and was quite appalled at the state of many of the animals in Rarotonga - so was thrilled to see such a mostly happy, healthy and de-sexed bunch of animals," one person said. >>