

SURVIVING T

UAN's mission to India helps an innovative animal

Editor's note: Since January, UAN has partnered with the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights (AVAR) to sponsor three shelter missions to India. Thanks to its generous supporters, UAN has spent \$30,000 in direct aid to help the Visakhapatnam SPCA, the Blue Cross of India and the Soi Dog Foundation in Phuket, Thailand recover from the tsunami and implement lasting improvements for the animals in their care.

**By Michael Bannasch, RVT, Coordinator of the Shelter Medicine Program
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When Dr. Richard Bachman and I visited the Visakhapatnam SPCA (VSPCA) in May, nearly five months had passed since a devastating tsunami claimed more than 200,000 human lives and left scores of animals with limited access to food and potable drinking water.

The devastation truly taxed the VSPCA to a near breaking point. The shelter's tsunami relief team traveled over 400 kilometers to outlying villages of India's hard-hit eastern coast, rounding up bovine survivors as they went. The shelter staff saw it as their moral obligation to rescue these otherwise doomed animals that they encountered on their way to help the village animals. Today the shelter's cow population stands at well over 500 animals, and still more cows enter the shelter each day.

Undaunted by the overwhelming destruction, or in spite of it, Pradeep Kumar Nath, the shelter founder and president, recognized that the VSPCA now had an opportunity to make a better future for the animals in India. In many instances VSPCA staff were the first responders to these remote villages, some of which had never encountered people from outside the village before this disaster. These rescuers made their dangerous trek through washed-out roads strewn with debris and downed power lines. The value that the VSPCA team places on every living creature is profound and most assuredly left an indelible impression on these villagers; I know it did on me.

The Mission

Our primary objectives in visiting the VSPCA were to purchase much-needed equipment for the shelter, to increase its capacity for



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shelter care for animals today and into the future

spay and neuter surgeries, and to train the staff how to minimize the spread of infectious disease.

After several visits to the local chemist, a surgical supply house and a mattress shop (where we had soft beds made for dogs recovering from surgery) we began our work back at the shelter. Some of the dogs there have skin conditions like mange that are easily spread in large groups of closely housed animals. In India, few dogs receive vaccinations, so diseases like distemper and parvo routinely enter the shelter. Teaching the staff how to manage this highly susceptible population was one of our first major challenges.

We first set up a diagnostic laboratory where the technical staff could use a donated microscope to study skin conditions and identify which dogs required medical treatment and isolation. Next it was on to rudimentary blood testing. In the United States, we are fortunate to have a simple test for parvovirus; however, in India this test is not feasible. So we trained the staff to use the microscope to look for low white blood cells – a characteristic of an ongoing parvo infection – and to search for internal parasites that allow parvo to spread more easily.

We then talked about controlling the spread of disease. We taught the kennel workers how to identify animals who should be tested and how to properly disinfect the cages. We helped them develop a plan to isolate potentially infectious animals from the rest of the population. We recommended that workers construct a wall to separate the isolated animals, and to our amazement, the wall was completed in a matter of days!

A Successful Sterilization Program

Five years ago, the local government abandoned the use of extermination to manage the overwhelming homeless dog population. It now pays the VSPCA 30 rupees (about \$1.40) for each street dog that it sterilizes and vaccinates against rabies.

Dogs who are sterilized receive an ear notch and are returned to the street. The city's residents have embraced the VSPCA's Animal Birth Control (ABC) program and regard the sterilized dogs highly. One

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All photos courtesy of Michael Baumrath

Dear UAN,

My colleagues and I would like to thank you for all the help you gave following the tsunami in December 2004. In May, you and AVAR sent Dr. Richard Bachman to help us develop protocols for gaseous anesthesia and his vast experience helped us to make several (inexpensive) changes or modifications that have been invaluable in our day-to-day operations. Yesterday, Dr. Bachman was back with your continued support with an anesthesia machine which he is helping us develop locally so that other groups in India and abroad can have access to a very cost-effective machine. What can I say but "thanks a million" and God bless you all.

Regards,

S. Chinny Krishna
Chairman, Blue Cross of India
Chennai, India