

Saving the strays

By Sonam Pelden



Thimphu - 14 January, 2008 - Dogs in Thimphu [the capital of Bhutan] and especially puppies have a good reason to be happy now. They have a new home with enough space to run around, warm huts with straws and sacks to sleep on, enough food and water and dedicated caretakers.

The responsibility of shouldering Thimphu's teething dog problem is now being taken over from the Thimphu City Corporation (TCC) by [Jangsa Animal Saving Trust](#) and the [Royal Society for Protection and Care of Animals \(RSPCA\)](#).

Waste disposal site

The Trust members and RSPCA officials decided to take it up about a month ago after they saw the condition of the impounded dogs at the unorganised, cold and windy dog pound at Memelakha [the waste disposal site of Thimphu]. "All the dogs were fighting for food. A puppy got eaten in front of us and another was almost dying. It's very cruel and inhuman to see the dogs in that state," said the founder of the trust, Lama Kunzang Dorjee. He said that he agrees with the notion behind keeping the city clean and wants to help by taking care of the strays before they either kill each other or the cold gets them.

Vaccinated

By December end, around 90 puppies and three nursing female dogs were moved to Serbithang [15 km from Thimphu] from Memelakha. Today, there are 200 puppies and 132 adult dogs, all of them healthy, vaccinated, de-wormed and sterilized. Except for the occasional barks when visitors come, one doesn't hear them crying or howling. And every day the dogs have visitors, who come with packets of milk, bread, biscuits, rice and vegetables to feed them.

There are three caretakers to cook and look after them. Their new home has a separate fenced shelter for puppies and disabled dogs. Each dog is also fed separately. One of the RSPCA staff, Sonam Choden, told Kuensel that initially about 20 puppies died because they did not have their mothers to wean on and also because of the cold. "We had to feed them milk with the help of syringes." Initially, they were kept inside the concrete house, which was warmed with panel heaters, and the cement floor carpeted with straws. "But the puppies were still cold, so we built huts outside and now they are fine," said Sonam Choden.

Shelters

[Lama Kunzang Dorjee](#) said that they would soon construct shelters for the dogs on the two acres of land given by RSPCA. To start off, they would use some funds from the trust and other donations they have received from friends. The estimated cost of the project, which would shelter about 500 dogs, is Nu 17,87,638 [±45,000 USD].

An awareness campaign to raise funds will also be organised through the sale of stickers of deities. Members and helpers hope that people will come forward to support them in their cause. They are also looking for a bigger area in other places.

Dog pound

Speaking to Kuensel, Hemraj Gurung from the Thimphu City Corporation (TCC) said that they have an understanding with the Trust that a certain number of adult and sick dogs and puppies would be taken care of by the Trust. The city corporation would however be lifting dogs from the streets and help the trust with other logistic and transportation services. Memelakha today has more than 1,000 dogs. Meanwhile, Chukha Hydro Power Corporation (CHPC) has built its own dog pound on an area that spreads to more than two acres. It has a capacity of about 500 dogs. Old, sick dogs and puppies are kept in separate compartments inside the pound. There are two caretakers to look after the dogs.

Rinzin Dorji, a CHPC staff told Kuensel that all impounded dogs have been vaccinated and sterilised and that they spent Nu 1.4 million on the pound. Thimphu City Corporation started pounding dogs on October 28 last year after the parliament discussed the issue during the 87th session of the National Assembly. A fund of about Nu 27 million [±680,000 USD] was distributed to all 20 dzongkhags [districts] to build dog pounds. According to livestock officials, there are about 50,000 dogs in the country.

