

CALL OUT REQUESTS

The BSPCA regularly receives requests from the public to help with stray, injured and abused animals, and we do our very best to respond within our limited physical and financial resources. Unfortunately, we cannot manage everything. The following is a short guide to what we can and cannot do:

- Where a member of the public is unable to bring an animal to the Shelter, we **will** attend to the call out if the animal is contained in a garden or house, or is otherwise under control, e.g., on a lead or in a container.
- We **will** attend to call outs for injured animal at the side of the road if there is some one to show us or can describe precisely where the animal is.
- We **will** respond to reports of specific animals being abused.
- We **cannot** respond to requests to deal with packs of stray dogs or unconfined animals, as we do not have the resources and means to chase and catch these animals.
- We **will** rent out humane traps for dogs and cats for BD1 a day. Dog traps require a BD75 refundable deposit and cat traps a BD50 refundable deposit.
- We **will** collect animals caught in traps (preferably during day light hours).

Please contact us on 1759 1231.

For further information on our ability to deal with Bahrain's stray population, please read below.

Dealing with Bahrain's strays

Stray dogs are an increasing problem in Bahrain. Animedics, an animal charity, estimated in 2009 that there were around 15,000 stray dogs on the island. One of the consequences of the BSPCA's higher profile in Bahrain is the increasingly number of calls from residents asking the Society to do something about packs of stray dogs roaming their neighbourhoods. Residents are often understandably reluctant to contact the authorities, as Bahrain does not have a system of dog wardens, and the response of the authorities is therefore to send police marksmen to shoot the animals.

No easy solution

There are no easy solutions. A suggestion mooted by some (not the BSPCA) is to round up and dump the animals deep in the south of the island. However, this would result in many dogs dying painful deaths through thirst and hunger. Also, many dogs would make their way northwards back into human areas and continue to breed.

Alternatively, it has been suggested that the government sets aside some specific enclosed land where strays can be put and cared for. However, it is not financially or logistically practical to provide adequate food, water, neutering (to prevent new dogs being born), vet care, disease control, etc. to what would soon be a population of thousands of dogs for the remainders of their natural lives.

Another suggestion has been that the authorities employ dog wardens who would humanely exterminate all the dogs they catch. However, the packs will quickly be replaced through the remaining dogs breeding more successfully (as some of the competition for scarce food and water resources have been removed) or animals will move in from other areas of stray overpopulation.

Trap, Neuter, Return

The BSPCA therefore advocates that Bahrain implements a Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) programme. Under a TNR scheme, dogs (and cats) would be humanely trapped on a systematic and comprehensive area-by-area basis. Captured animals with serious health or aggression issues would be humanely put down. The healthy animals would be sterilised and returned back to where they were taken from.

Returning strays is likely to be controversial. However, the BSPCA, as already mentioned, will not countenance mass extermination of healthy dogs that pose no public danger, and it is not feasible to care for many thousands of dogs for the remainders of their natural lives.

As the stray population is sterilised, the numbers of strays will, over time, decline, as has been the experience in the many countries where TNR has been done. With a reduced stray population, there will be fewer desperate animals competing for food, and so less need for dogs to encroach close to people. With the sick animals removed from the pack, the pack will be healthier and happier, and with aggressive dogs also removed, they will be less of a risk to themselves and people.

TNR will require significant resources, including teams of dog handlers, vehicles, temporary animal shelter, and vet staff and facilities. It will need to be carefully managed and coordinated, with the TNR team working together with the authorities and affected communities.

TNR can therefore take place only with considerable financial backing, which we hope will be provided by the government and a major international animal NGO. TNR will also require political support to obtain permission to take and return stray animals. The BSPCA has been discussing TNR with the government for many months and we are hopeful that we will soon receive financing and permission to commence the programme.

Requests for help

Which brings us to dealing with the calls that the BSPCA is currently getting from residents to come and take away stray packs. The BSPCA will always try to respond positively and practically to all the requests for help that it receives. However, the Society is limited in money and manpower in what it can do.

To round up a pack of strays in a public area requires people to set traps at night in the area and to return at first light to see if an animal has been caught, to ensure that trapped animals is not being abused by locals, and that the trap has not been stolen. This is very time consuming, and requires dozens of hours of valuable staff that the Society does not have available, the 3 kennel staff we do employ cannot handle this as well as their duties at the Shelter.

There is also the question of what the BSPCA does with the captured animals. We already take many more animals than there are people wanting to adopt them. Also, most stray dogs, unless they recently were let loose, are feral and are therefore not at all suitable for adoption. Without permission to do so, it is not possible to return healthy, non-aggressive animals to the areas they were taken from, and it would be wrong to put them into other areas where they may die of starvation and thirst. The BSPCA already has to euthanise many animals where re-homing is not viable. It is not the purpose of the Society to increase the amount of euthanasia by becoming an extermination centre for Bahrain's stray population.

The BSPCA can and does provide practical help to deal with strays where it is feasible to do so. For example, we have humane traps to rent out, and we will receive the captured animals. We also respond to reports of specific cases of cruelly-treated animals in captivity, injured animals found by the road, etc. However, until a funded TNR programme starts, and as much as we would like to, we do not have the resources to deal with a large pack of strays in a public area.

#