

VOLUNTEERING WITH ANIMAL SOS SRI LANKA

By Clare Armstrong VN

I am a qualified Veterinary Nurse and an Animal Behaviourist. Currently I work in a mixed practice that covers the borders of Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire. In October of this year I had the fantastic opportunity to volunteer for a month to work for the charity, Animal SOS Sri Lanka.



During my time at the charity I was able to undertake and assist in a variety of veterinary tasks and procedures both on and off site. On site I dealt with routine and emergency activities such as assisting the veterinary surgeon with trauma and injured patients, blood screening, sterilisation, parasite control, postoperative care, vaccinations, administering medication and other medical treatments.

Off site I assisted in outreach programs that enabled local people the opportunity to have their animals sterilised and vaccinated for free. By providing this service the charity is able to aid in the management of the stray population and to help combat the rabies problem. These areas are an ongoing battle that the charity has to deal with on a daily basis.

Our Outreach Programs

On an average during our outreach days we would sterilise approximately 25 dogs and vaccinate 25 to 30 dogs as well as some cats. I was amazed by the whole experience. Yes, our theatre was a lean to shelter in someone's back garden with lots of on lookers. However, it was all carried out with great precision and sterility was always paramount with the use of sterile drapes, instruments and suture material. I was surprised that the surgical procedures were all carried out to such a high standard. Each animal was handled with care and anaesthetised effectively.



Animal SOS Sri Lanka team



Both Sri Lankan veterinary surgeons were methodical with each surgical procedure spending time to ensure that each animal was correctly anaesthetised, that the surgical procedure was carried to their best ability and that the animal was provided with the correct pre and postoperative care.

All animals that underwent a surgical procedure were provided with covering antibiotics and pain relief via injections.

For several days the charity's resident veterinary surgeon would liaise with the owners to ensure that there had been no

postoperative complications.

Other Outreach Programs

Whilst participating in the charity's outreach programs I also had the opportunity to observe another organisation at work in their outreach work. This particular organisation conducts themselves on a larger scale compared to that of Animal SOS. They periodically perform their outreach at different locations around the area sterilising both owned and stray animals. They had two teams of staff that would travel around the area in vehicles trapping and capturing any stray dogs bring them to the outreach to be treated.



On average this organisation and its three government Sri Lankan veterinary surgeons performed between 70 - 80 surgical sterilisations a day. However, during my day with them I experienced treatment and surgical procedures that I only expected to see 50 to 100 years ago.

The location and position of their surgical site and theatre was very similar to our own however their surgical techniques and approach to the situation was at the complete opposite end of the scale. For example, some animals appeared not to be completely anaesthetised, the same needles, syringes and blades were used repeatedly for different animals and hygiene and sterility protocols seemed to be non-existent.

Throughout the day I observed what I can only be described as "butchery." I agree that these are harsh words however often surgical procedures were rushed only taking a bare minimum amount of time. Regularly I saw that not all of the sexual organs/tissues were removed which in time may result in post operative complications or conditions such as pyometra and pseudo pregnancies. The veterinary surgeons were paid per surgical procedure and subsequently the correct care and attention was not taken. Vessels and tissues were not always tied and incised



correctly. I observed poor professional conduct and surgical technique. The aim of this account is not to tarnish or to bad mouth the work of another organisation however its aim is to highlight the important and the extremely high standard of work that is being conducted by Animal SOS in Sri Lanka.

During my time in Sri Lanka I observed and experienced a great deal of things and truth be known, I did not want to return back to the UK. I cannot praise the charity and the work that they do enough. Yes, there is still plenty of work to be done, but the staff of the charity strives to improve the lives of the stray, injured and abused animals of Sri Lanka.



Animal SOS Sri Lanka Team and Sanctuary dogs

