

# Newsletter

Issue 1 - 15 January 2006

The best news of the year was the registration of ASAP under Greek Law. It is to be hoped that our legal status will allow us to function more effectively in our stated aims of the promotion of respect for all animals, the feeding and provision of shelter for strays and the raising of public awareness with respect to their care. We would like to be able to influence the local authorities in matters of animal welfare and, in particular, pressure them to enforce Greek Law #1197 which states that those responsible for poisoning animals are liable for prosecution.

A preliminary meeting open to all interested parties was held on 05/05/05 to discuss how the society should proceed, where the priorities lay and to ascribe different functions to willing individuals. The support shown by members of the community was very gratifying and there was no shortage of volunteers for fund-raising, feeding of stray animals and the generation of materials to raise public awareness. Owing to the imminence of the summer season (a period during which many of the members are at their busiest) we didn't achieve all the objectives set, but we were able to do a great deal and now have a very firm idea of what we need to accomplish over the winter to ensure that by next summer we will have the appropriate materials ready.

On the most important front – visits to the island by vets – we have done well. George Michail (yes, the real George Michail!) visited the island 4 times in 2005. Another visit was scheduled for early December but the elements were against us and we had to change the dates. We now expect him here on 21<sup>st</sup> January and greatly appreciate him giving up his weekends to come here. He has done a great deal to promote animal welfare among the local population and has proved invaluable for his advice at any time and for the supply of medicines which otherwise we would be unable to purchase.

In addition to George's visits, the 'Friends of the Cat' sent us a vet for 4 days earlier in the year. Hazel managed to spay 16 cats, neuter 3 toms and perform 9 assorted consults. We were scheduled for another visit from a UK vet, but very bad weather meant that the flying dolphins were cancelled. This resulted in Michelle being stranded on Skopelos: our misfortune, their gain. In addition, there have been some 'gonad' days during which male cats have been neutered: something which we are able to do 'in-house', as it were!

It is now law that any animal leaving Greece has to be micro-chipped. This has made it more difficult for us to home stray animals abroad. However, some brave individuals have taken cats to the mainland for chipping and therefore a number of cats have found good homes elsewhere. A group of dedicated volunteers are feeding strays over the winter, especially in the Old Village, Roussoum, Patitiri and along the coast at Vamvakies. Another couple are busy making shelters for known colonies of strays. It has been proposed that we purchase a number of 'pre-fab' shelters, to be located in areas in which we know there are colonies of stray cats: this will hopefully be done after (if?) we get the blessing of the council.

Meanwhile, the traditional past-time of putting poison down for animals continues. Some animals have been saved, others have not fared so well. A stock

of antidotes is always kept, but unfortunately sometimes we either don't get their fast enough or the dose of poison used is just too high. In one case recently Strychnine had been used, resulting in an extremely painful but mercifully rapid death. Few of the people who have reported incidences of poisoning to ASAP have been prepared to go to the police. This is an area in which the Society wants support from the council. However, in one notable case our local doctor, a great cat lover who has even more cats than I do, was prepared to report that several of his animals had been poisoned. Given his authority and standing in the local community, the police were obligated to follow up on his report and the person deemed responsible has been warned. Of course, this still falls short of prosecution but it is a start. Notices have been prepared detailing the procedures to be taken in the event of poisoning, and also notices aimed at preventing the dumping of unwanted animals in rubbish bins.

There have been many animals abandoned during the course of the year, some of whom were lucky enough to find good homes, many others who are at least being fed and sheltered. For those of you who remember Byron from previous news letters or personal experience, we have now put a stop to his stud days. He remains a free spirit and has identified various watering holes where he stops for a free meal as and when the fancy takes him (mostly at Simon's house in the Old Village). It was hoped that by having him neutered he would calm down a bit and stop chasing cars, but we're still waiting to see some sign that this is happening. He managed one more offspring (or one that we found, anyway) and Edward is safe and well with Julie & Nigel at Steni Vala (or at least, when he's not being a chip off the old block and decides to go walk-about). Carol & Mike and Annie & Les have adopted several bin cats in addition to looking after their own animals and the 'white family', a group of exo-cats who have graciously decided to share their time between the two houses. We also have acquired quite a few 'stray' cats which are at this very moment draped all over every seat in the lounge in front of a roaring fire. One of these is 'Rocky', a beautiful ginger tom, so named because he had got trapped in a wall and Chris had to dismantle most of it to get him out. Visitors to island in late July onwards may remember seeing posters of 2 tiny kittens found in a rubbish bin. Unfortunately the white kitten, whose eyes had been destroyed by infection, didn't make it. Her sibling Tosca, despite also being very ill, is now thriving and is a very happy 6-ish month old. Although she still weighs less than 1kg she manages to keep three 20+kg dogs exactly where she wants them!

We have also experienced this winter the most appalling 'epidemic' of feline panleukopaenia virus (feline infectious enteritis). Stray cats are obviously unvaccinated and kittens are often immuno-compromised by either being removed from their mothers at a very early age so that few antibodies can be received via the colostrum, or by being born to queens that have either feline leukaemia- or immunodeficiency- viruses and so are themselves immuno-compromised. The virus multiplies preferentially in dividing cells and so targets those cells lining the small intestine which have a rapid turnover or the bone marrow where blood cells are manufactured. Many infections are asymptomatic, but clinical signs can develop from 2 to 10 days after infection: high temperature, depression, anorexia and dehydration. Vomiting and/or diarrhea may or may not occur, but some cats die within 2 or 3 days of exhibiting any symptoms. Without veterinary expertise it is very difficult to treat this condition. Ideally, animals should be put on an i.v. drip. Practically, the only thing we can do here is to keep animals warm and, in particular, hydrated by either subcutaneous injections of physiological saline or frequent oral applications of sugar-water or rehydration salts (the art is to get the fluid into the animal, not to make it vomit and so exacerbate the problem). When the cat is again able to manage solid food it should be given a diet of boiled fish or chicken for a few days: again, manageable

for pets but very difficult to achieve in stray animals. The FP virus is very hardy and can exist in the environment for a year or more. What has happened this winter to activate and spread the virus to such proportions? I don't know the answer to that.

Perhaps we are becoming more aware of animals and are paying greater attention to their whereabouts and well-being. Perhaps there are just more cats which survive past the first few days of life. Perhaps there is also a climactic input. What is apparent is that this 'epidemic' is not confining itself to Alonnisos but that other parts of the country are also experiencing an upsurge in cases. The answer, of course, is to vaccinate (preferably with inactivated vaccines and in combination with cat flu vaccines): given the distress caused by FPV this winter, to cats and cat-lovers alike, perhaps a programme of vaccination would be appropriate.

One negative point over the course of the summer has been certain comments published in the 'Aloni' newsletter. While the committee welcomes suggestions and constructive criticism, gratuitous insults, inaccuracies and attempts at one-up-man ship were not helpful and could, potentially, have been very damaging to our credibility and to what we are trying to achieve.

The Greek Animal Welfare Fund is again organizing a writing Competition, open to Greek Students studying English as a foreign language. The frontistiria on Alonnisos have been urged to participate, as merely discussing the topics for the essays promotes interest in animal welfare and awareness of the plight of strays.

Funds raised over the summer have gone mainly toward buying food for stray animals over the winter and in acquiring antibiotics, antidotes to known poisons, hormones used in delaying oestrus, assorted consumables and some 'temporary' housing for stray cats.

As usual, there are a great many people to thank for their support. Firstly I would like to pay tribute to the many visitors to the island who have expressed their concern over the welfare of the animals they see and who have donated their time and expertise, as well as their cash. Without you all we would not be able to do so much over the winter and I thank you very much. Our immense gratitude is due to the Edna Smylie Memorial Fund which has awarded us a grant of £5,000 to buy equipment and shelters: this is a huge boost, not only to our coffers but also to our credibility as a charitable organization. Ellen Stucki and her organization in Switzerland have contributed a considerable amount of medicines, animal cages and money. We hope that next year Ellen will be able to re-home some cats in Switzerland: you may remember that in 2004 Ellen took two kittens back to Switzerland with her and these fortunate animals are thriving in caring homes.

While on the subject of re-homing animals abroad, there was an article in the Mail on Sunday on 10/04/05 outlining the outrageous claims of Ioanna Garagouni, president of the Confederation of Animal Welfare Organizations of Greece, who said that animals sent abroad were used for their fur, meat or for vivisection rather than for adoption into loving homes. This woman has also been instrumental in blocking the transportation of animals from the airport in Athens, so causing a huge amount of distress to animals and humans alike. I'm sure that any sane individual will understand that a close watch is kept on any animals leaving Greece for adoption: micro-chipping, vaccinations, the huge amount of paperwork, transportation costs and the difficulty in even getting animals off the island is not something we do for our amusement.

Certain individuals have worked incredibly hard for the animals of Alonnisos. In addition to the ASAP committee I would like to thank Carol and Mike Holmes for the use of their house as a surgery during visits by veterinary surgeons (even when they themselves had been struck down by food poisoning), Sue Duckett and Dawn Kiriannakis for providing accommodation for visiting vets, Alex and Andrea Watson for the construction of cat shelters and for organizing a very successful quiz night, Anni Bason for post-operative care, Guy and Jane for taking on a number of strays within about 48 hours of arriving on the island, Diana and Steven Morris for their support and for the donation of a large dog box used to isolate animals recovering from surgical procedures, Renee Moens for the donation of medicines, Chris Browne for raising money for ASAP from his guided walks, and those people who have expressed their willingness to help in monetary terms, especially Monika and Ellen & Bob Mixon.

Once again the 'Friends of the Cat' have helped with locum vets and the Greek Animal Welfare Fund, in particular Carol McBeth, have been very supportive. October 4th 2005 was World Animal Day and the GAWF sent out promotional material to all co-operating animal welfare organizations throughout Greece. My very special thanks go to Barbara Bates from SCAN on Skopelos who was not only a great help in setting up ASAP but who is always there if I need a sounding board if things just get too depressing. I think we have managed to establish a good working relationship with SCAN, with exchange of vets, drugs and resources. However, in many aspects they are streets ahead of us, so I hope we can continue to learn from them.

Our first AGM will be held on 15/02/06 at 19:00, with the venue yet to be decided. Your comments or suggestions on any topic can be emailed to ASAP on [asapanimals@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:asapanimals@yahoo.co.uk). From the beginning of February the ASAP phone number will be [6976-874679]. At present some information about the animals on Alonnisos can be found on **[www.alonnisoswalks.com](http://www.alonnisoswalks.com)** but we hope to establish our own web site this year.

Finally, let me again express my thanks to the committee of ASAP for their support and enthusiasm and to all of you as well. I hope to see many of you again in the summer but for now I wish you all the very best for a happy and healthy 2006.

**JULIA BROWNE**