

Newsletter

Issue 2 - 20 June 2006

The Society has become much better organised over the course of the last 6 months since the last newsletter and I believe that at last we are achieving a significant improvement in the health and well-being of animals on the island. As always, this is largely due to the generosity of our visitors and the hard work of a few, very dedicated, individuals.

Since the start of the year we have had 2 visits from our 'resident' vet (I wish) George Michail. George was here in January, narrowly escaping being snowed in for the next 10 days, when he again worked very hard to neuter, microchip and treat a gratifying number of both pets and strays. His second visit was at the end of May and we hope to see him again soon.

In April, the Friends of the Cat very kindly donated the time of a locum vet who was working at the cat sanctuary in Thessaloniki. Amber was absolutely fantastic and, in her time with us, neutered or treated 32 animals. During the time that vets spend with us we work very hard to collect stray animals and my thanks are due to all those who donated accommodation, surgery space, time to assist with the surgeries, and time to collect and care for those animals which had been treated. Thanks are especially due to Zitsa in Thessaloniki who organised the visit: this remarkable woman works tirelessly to care for animals at the sanctuary.

This winter was an especially hard one on Alonnisos. The bad weather which almost made George Michail a permanent resident saw a metre of snow (drifting to well over this in some places). Our volunteers had a very difficult task in continuing our feeding programme and we were fortunately able to call in extra help from those who were able to get out. I know it sounds bizarre, but there was a period of three days when it snowed continuously. The Old Village was cut off for three days and it was impossible to get from Patitiri to Votsi. It is a testament to our volunteers that we lost so few animals. If that wasn't bad enough, we experienced two further snowfalls which meant that our problems continued until the end of February.

It has always been our aim, and our experience over this winter has reinforced our intentions, to provide shelters for animals in various locations around the island. To this end we have purchased a number of pre-fabricated shelters and feeders to locate at various points around the island. We have obtained the permission of the council to position these and, over the next few weeks, these shelters will be installed. Purchase of the shelters has largely been possible thanks to the generosity of the Edna Smylie Memorial Fund and to independent donations.

We have also been able to purchase new surgical instruments, replenish our supply of antibiotics and other drugs and consumables, and to provide foodstuffs for those who feed colonies of animals in various locations around the island. We have also armed ourselves with 4 extra animal transporters, 2 cat grabbers, and a supply of kitten milk to help us care for those kittens which have been separated from their mothers at far too early an age.

At last, and it has been an incredibly difficult and time consuming-process, we have obtained our tax number which has enabled us to open a stall in the port area of Patitiri. I have to thank the Port Police and the Council of Alonnisos who have been most helpful in this matter. We are able to sell second-hand books, t-shirts, and an assortment of (animal related) items, and I have been astounded by the response of the public in support of this. Of course, we have relied heavily on the ability of certain members of ASAP to man the stall, so if any of our members can help us in this respect we would be most grateful for your commitment and time. To promote our aims (and achievements) we have produced a calendar: each month features an animal or group of animals we have been able to help. The sale of these is exceeding all expectations and already we have requested a second printing. If any of our members residing outside Greece would like to purchase one of these (10 euros), please let us know via email.

Of course, there are still too many incidences of poisoning and abandonment. All we can do in the former case is to provide first-aid and hope that we have been successful in providing the correct antidote and saving the animal in question. In the latter, we have been able to find homes for a number of animals who have been abandoned and brought to our attention. There remains a problem with new-born kittens (and puppies too, but fortunately not as frequently) who have been dumped in rubbish bins and elsewhere to die a slow and painful death. Our aim is that we can persuade people that this is an appalling way to dispose of unwanted animals and, to that aim, we have prepared notices to discourage people from this barbaric practice.

We also rely on visitors and residents alike to bring to our attention animals which they consider to be mistreated. Recently there have been the cases of the ostrich which is enclosed in far too small a pen and of dogs chained up all day with no food/water/shade. We follow up on all reports of abuse and either contact the owners, if we can discover who they are, or report matters to the police. In either case, we try to ensure that the animal in question is fed and watered in an appropriate fashion. If anyone becomes aware of an animal which is suffering, please call ASAP on 6974592528

With respect to caring for animals, we believe that the best way forward is to educate children to be aware of both the responsibility and joy that come from owning a pet. Those children attending the local frontistirio to learn English have long been participating in the annual essay competition run by the GFAW (with remarkable success). It is our intention to organise a painting competition for pupils at the local schools. The theme for the entrants would be a topic along the lines of 'my pet' or 'my favourite animal'. We hope that this will take place between September and December, with the winner in each age group receiving their prizes when school closes in December. We hope to persuade the Council to display the winning paintings in their offices and around the island and perhaps we could include some of these in next year's calendar.

As always, it remains for me to thank those people who have been so generous with time and/or money. The Edna Smylie Memorial Fund has liberated us to do so much: without their grant we would have not achieved half our aims. Ellen Stucki and her group in Switzerland have not only been generous in the purchase of cat traps and donations, but have also re-homed stray animals which is the most tangible proof of our success. For those of our members here who have worked so hard, I can only offer my profound gratitude.

Julia Browne