DEFINITIONS

A stray animal is a homeless animal, or one that is not currently under direct human control, or is not currently restricted by a physical barrier. Homeless animals outnumber homeless people five to one. Dog and cat strays may be purebreds, true mixed-breds, or unbred ferals. Homeless animals suffer from malnutrition, disease, starvation, infections, aggression, injury through traffic accidents, injury through fighting, and injury from violent acts directed at them. Aside from strays being a humane animal issue, it is also a health issue not only for the animals, but for humans as well. Rabies, dog bites and diseases from free-roaming dogs and cats predominately affect communities inhabited with large stray populations. Only one out of every 10 dogs ever finds a permanent home. Animals with permanent homes live a much healthier and longer life span than the life endured by a stray animal.

The main reason an animal becomes a homeless stray in the first place is usually because of an owner’s bad behavior. Animal control finds stray cats and dogs on the street because (1) its owner has not kept it properly indoors or on a leash, (2) the pet has escaped from its home, (3) the animal has no proper identification, (4) strays become feral and have reproduced, or (5) the animal was simply abandoned. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Humane Society International (HIS), Veterinarians Without Borders (VWB), Let’s Live Together, and Animals Need Us are committed to combatting the stray crisis in the world. The American Strays Project aims to establish a volunteer infrastructure to survey for stray dogs annually in the United States, (the American Strays Canine Survey); and the American Strays in Schools project is creating interactive lesson plans for school children that teach good guardianship and responsible pet ownership in an effort to successfully prevent stray populations in the future.

GEORGIA LAW

It is the responsibility of the Georgia State Department of Agriculture and local jurisdictions to write regulations governing a wide range of animal-related matters
generally referred to as animal protection or animal control ordinances. These regulations are to ensure public safety and to help protect animals.

In Georgia, the power to pick up stray animals is given to counties and municipalities to protect the citizens from the dangers and nuisances that are associated with free roaming and diseased animals. Rescue organizations (licensed by the Georgia Department of Agriculture) are not allowed to impound Stray Animals. Only government agencies or organizations that are contracted with a government agency to perform animal control services have the authority to impound animals in Georgia. All stray/found animals must go to Animal Control, and it is there that all owners of lost animals should go to look for them.

“Only government agencies or organizations that are contracted with a government agency to perform animal control services have the authority to impound animals. “Rescue Group” is further defined by stating they are not allowed to impound animals unless they are under contract with a government agency in Georgia to provide animal control services” (GDA, Chapter 40-13-13-04). This requirement allows citizens to have an opportunity to reclaim their animal if it is impounded by providing a single entity that holds such animals and is legally designated as such. Thus, the law stipulates that only Animal Control can hold or impound stray animals. Accordingly, rescue groups and individuals must turn any captured strays in to Animal Control. Thereafter, animals not claimed during the requisite five-day hold period are made available for adoption or for transfer to licensed rescue groups.

POPULATION ESTIMATES

It is impossible to determine how many stray dogs and cats are homeless. Currently, no government institution or animal organization is responsible for tabulating national statistics for stray animals. Estimates vary from state to state. Some estimates in the U.S. for cats alone range up to 70 million per year.

Stray populations exist in virtually every corner of the world. Globally strays pose catastrophic problems in many areas of the world. The American Stray Project (developed by the World Animal Awareness Society to estimate numbers of strays in the world), estimates that there are three million strays in Mexico City; one million strays in Baghdad; 45,000 beaten to death in a single incident in China; 42,000 shot to death in Baghdad; 40,000 killed in Serbia; 30,000 poisoned in Rio; 35 million estimated in India; 500,000 in Bali; and exportation in Romania of strays for experiments and vivisections, as well as other abusive treatment has been well documented. During the winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia made international news for the proposed rounding up and killing of stray dogs in that region, until billionaire Oleg Deripaska stepped up and arranged for a shelter to be built to house the dogs that were roaming around the Olympic Village and the airport.
SHELTERS

Twice as many animals enter shelters as strays compared to those relinquished by their owners. Out of approximately 650,000 stray dogs at shelters, only 26% are returned to their owners. Out of the 100,000 or so stray cats at shelters, only 5% are returned to their owner. If not adopted, the rest are euthanized. More than 35% of cat owners acquired their cat as a stray. In this country tax-payers spend $1 billion dollars annually to pick up, house, and euthanize homeless animals. If only 5% of that total were allocated to spay/neuter programs, 250 public, low-cost spay/neuter clinics could be opened across the country and more than 4 million animals each year could be sterilized (ryanneumanfoundation.org/news).

The solutions require involvement of local and state governments to initiate relevant policy and statutes and to monitor and evaluate progress. Involvement of veterinarians, NGOs, animal rights and human health organizations, animal shelters, fostering and rehoming communities, academic communities, legislators responsible for both writing and enforcing legislation, local media, local community leaders and both animal owners and non-animal owners are essential participants in combatting animal homelessness.

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