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(World Society for the  
Protection of Animals)

# Better lives for dogs

Managing the dog population  
in Ras al-Khaimah



This case study highlights how Ras al-Khaimah, part of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is implementing a comprehensive dog population management programme. Their example shows how such programmes can be tailor-made to suit the needs of the local community and government and benefit dogs at the same time.

## Global context

Here at World Animal Protection, we have been advising and supporting governments on humane dog population management for more than 30 years. Together we are building a world where people respect and value dogs and act compassionately towards them to create a harmonious existence.

Where problems do exist, such as rabies transmission and dog attacks, we advocate comprehensive multi-faceted humane dog population management programmes with a One Health focus<sup>1</sup>. These address the root causes of problems associated with free-roaming dogs while also improving their welfare.

We follow the International Companion Animal Management Coalition's dog population management methodology<sup>2</sup>. This involves: education and training; primary dog healthcare; reproduction control; identification and registration; legislation; holding facilities and rehoming centres, and limiting access to resources like food waste.

## Background

Ras al-Khaimah is the fourth largest Emirate in the United Arab Emirates. It has a population of nearly 300,000 people. Forty one percent of the population are Emirati. The area is an up-and-coming tourist destination, and is known for manufacture of building materials, agriculture, and high-tech industry.

Ras al-Khaimah's government and NGO, the Ras al-Khaimah Animal Welfare Centre (RAKAWC), started a humane dog population management programme in 2011 along with a trap-neuter-release programme for stray cats. We advised on the implementation of both programmes and provided training for newly-employed dog and cat handling teams.

Since 2011 we have remained in regular contact with the government of Ras al-Khaimah and RAKAWC and provided technical support for the programmes.

This case study focuses on the implementation of most components of a comprehensive humane dog management programme. The outstanding components - new legislation and a compulsory identification and registration scheme - will be implemented in the near future.



## Designing a humane dog management programme

### Assessing the problem

**The first step in achieving a successful and sustainable humane dog management programme is identifying the problems caused by dogs and the types of dogs causing any issues. It is also important to identify the stakeholders - the communities, organisations and government departments affected by unmanaged situation and those likely to be affected by programme implementation. The factors that precipitate dog related issues need to be assessed and understood<sup>3</sup>.**

Before the programme, Ras al-Khaimah had large and visible free-roaming dog population of three identifiable groups. These were: unowned dogs living in the surrounding desert and mountains; freely roaming owned dogs in rural areas, and dogs abandoned by expatriates returning to their home countries. These three groups bred with each other and created a large population of dogs that spilled over into neighbouring Emirates and Ras al-Khaimah's densely populated urban areas.

Dogs were regularly involved in road traffic accidents and were cruelly treated by some local people. Complaints about dogs included: threatening behaviour, the number of dogs on the streets, and fear of disease transmission. 'Nuisance' dogs were usually killed by the government.

- ❖ No formal dog population survey took place before the programme was implemented. This was due to the difficulty in surveying the unowned dogs roaming Ras al-Khaimah's large open spaces and the surrounding desert and mountains.

## Initiating a programme

**Successful implementation depends on identifying root causes of problems associated with free roaming dogs and engaging with relevant stakeholders. Pilot dog population management projects should be done before full country-wide implementation of a programme<sup>4</sup>.**

The programme was initiated by RAKAWC and Ras al-Khaimah's public works and services department, with assistance from World Animal Protection. The ruler of Ras al-Khaimah, His Royal Highness Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr Al Qasimi, gave his support to the programme.

In return for his support, His Royal Highness asked for a public veterinary clinic to be set up for those unable to afford private veterinary care and to run alongside the programme.

The first step in the programme's implementation was to train RAKAWC's newly-employed stray animal handling team. We trained staff how to use dog-catching equipment safely and humanely.

Safe and humane handling of dogs is a vital starting point in any dog population management programme. And RAKAWC already had an experienced veterinary team in place who were able to carry out neutering surgery and other procedures necessary for the programme.

Public involvement and understanding was key in getting the programme up and running, and in deciding what elements of a comprehensive programme to introduce. For example Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR) schemes are not effective without public support.

Arabic and English information material was distributed and RAKAWC's stray animal team made particular efforts to talk to the public while they were working. This helped the local people understand the purpose of RAKAWC's stray animal team and how their work can benefit both dogs and the community. People were also informed about the programme via local newspapers.

A pilot project for Ras al-Khaimah was not initiated for this particular dog population management programme. This is because it covered a relatively small area.

### Who takes responsibility for the programme?

Ras al-Khaimah's public works and services department is ultimately responsible for the programme. The department funds the programme. RAKAWC are responsible for the day-to-day running of the public clinic, the animal shelter and co-ordinating the stray animal team. Any funds raised by RAKAWC on the back of the programme are reinvested by the public works and services department.



## Education and training

**Education is a key part of any humane dog management programme. Problems associated with free-roaming dogs can be traced back to human behaviour. Education can influence human behaviour in a positive way and change people's attitudes towards dogs, and how they are treated<sup>5</sup>.**

### Education

Educational activities are an on-going part of the programme. RAKAWC runs an education programme for children between three and 19 years old, and invites all schools to take part.

RAKAWC produces literature on basic care of dogs, neutering, and how to deal with roaming dogs. It is available from their centre and office and is also distributed by the handling team.

There is a good relationship with local media. RAKAWC contributes articles raising awareness of the humane dog management programme and promoting responsible dog ownership practices. The programme is also publicised on the RAKAWC website and through social media.

RAKAWC operates training classes for dog owners once a month, and employs a dog behaviourist. Training classes include sessions on how to socialise dogs (especially

puppies) appropriately. This can help reduce dog bite incidences. Tackling behavioural issues can also help reduce the number of dogs being relinquished to shelters or being abandoned by their owners.

These education initiatives have led to an increase in people bringing their pets to the veterinary clinic. This indicates dog owners taking more responsibility for their animals. Moreover, RAKAWC has seen significant increase in numbers of people reporting abuse or cruelty to dogs representing an increase in public awareness and empathy for dogs.

### Training

**Everyone involved in humane dog management programmes must be trained to ensure the safety of staff and dogs.<sup>6</sup>**

We provided training for RAKAWC staff in humane catching and handling, basic dog behaviour, and transportation of cats and dogs. Veterinary staff at the centre are all trained by the head vet.

We also regularly review the handling of stray animals, day-to-day procedures and the centre's welfare standards. We also give the handling team refresher training every year to make sure standards remain high.

## Primary dog healthcare

Primary dog healthcare includes: reproduction control, vaccinations and parasite control.

Reproduction control may be used to help lower the number of dogs in an area or to lower the probability of various diseases. In some cases it can help control aggression and/or the desire to roam too<sup>7</sup>.

Vaccinations and parasite control are essential for the welfare of dogs. Rabies vaccination will benefit public health by controlling zoonotic disease transmission – those diseases that spread from animals to people<sup>8</sup>.

### Reproduction control

RAKAWC's stray animal team operates a TNVR scheme in rural areas where local residents are happy for dogs to roam free. Once dogs are caught, they are taken to the centre for neutering, vaccination and microchipping. Healthy and non-aggressive dogs are released back into the community where they were caught. But this only happens if there is someone in the area to care for the dog long term.

Dogs with ill health, those that cannot be returned to the area for any reason and are not suitable for rehoming through the shelter may be euthanased.

### Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Release programmes

The benefits of a TNVR scheme:

- reduces number of dogs born on the streets
- may help to keep other dogs out of the area
- reduces the numbers of unowned roaming dogs being euthanased
- helps with pest control (controlling number of rodents).

TNVR schemes work best:

- if those expected to be involved agree about its implementation
- in quiet areas where dogs are not at risk of cruelty or traffic accidents
- if communities commit to providing care for the dogs
- when communities tolerate dogs on the streets.

All dogs rehomed through RAKAWC are neutered and vaccinated before leaving the centre. Regular discounted 'neutering days' are organised for dog owners. These are offered to discourage the overbreeding of both unowned roaming dogs and owned dogs. In some cases, owners bring their dogs to be neutered to help stop unwanted behaviours such as roaming.

### Vaccination and parasite control

RAKAWC recommends that all dogs are vaccinated against rabies, parvovirus, distemper, and canine hepatitis. All dogs that are part of the TNVR scheme, and are rehomed through the centre, are vaccinated against these diseases.

At the moment there are no mandatory vaccination requirements for the Emirate. It is hoped that this will be introduced as local legislation is implemented.

## Identification and registration

Identification and registration of dogs are essential parts of a dog management programme. They allow lost dogs to be reunited with owners, help enforce anti-cruelty legislation and can help in surveying the dog population<sup>7</sup>.

There is currently no mandatory identification and registration scheme in Ras al-Khaimah. It is hoped that a scheme will be implemented during 2015-16, following in the footsteps of the Emirate of Dubai.

Owned dogs can be microchipped at the RAKAWC's clinic, and at their owner's request. Unowned roaming dogs released through the TNVR scheme are given a microchip and registered on RAKAWC's own database.

## Legislation

Humane dog management programmes need to be supported by both national and local legislation. National legislation should ensure that minimum standards are maintained in its application. Local legislation can allow for variables in the local situation

The UAE has national animal welfare legislation, which is implemented by the ministry of environment and water. There is no local legislation in Ras al-Khaimah that relates to stray dogs. However, there are plans for future local legislation.

Local legislation will help the stray animal team carry out their daily work more effectively. They will have more power to seize dogs mistreated by their owners and to enforce punishments on owners who regularly let their dogs stray. It will also prevent disease outbreaks, as owners will be under a mandatory obligation to vaccinate their dogs. Breeding regulations will also help to control the number of unwanted dogs born and potentially abandoned.

## Holding facilities and rehoming centres

In some communities around the world, free-roaming dogs are well tolerated. But, temporary holding and rehoming facilities may be needed to manage aggressive or problematic unowned dogs, or owned dogs that have strayed from their home. Communities should be encouraged to adopt unwanted dogs from these facilities<sup>9</sup>.

There is just one holding facility in Ras al-Khaimah, funded by Ras al-Khaimah's government and managed by RAKAWC. The facility has 28 indoor and outdoor kennels, with outdoor areas allowing dogs to socialise and play together. It even has a pet shop, where pet-related goods are sold, to help generate funds for the dog population management programme.

The centre acts as a holding facility for dogs that have strayed away from home and are waiting to be reunited with their owners, and for abandoned and unowned free-roaming dogs.

RAKAWC works to find permanent homes for vaccinated and neutered dogs that are suited to living with people. Rehoming rates are increasing every year, and people come from nearby Oman and other Emirates to rehome dogs. Rehoming is well promoted on RAKAWC's website and social media.

## Controlling access to resources

Dogs may roam in areas around refuse and garbage dumps where they can access food waste. This may cause the spread of disease and raise public concern particularly if the streets are not cleaned<sup>10</sup>.

The Ras al-Khaimah municipality regulates food outlets and slaughter houses and provides them with large tamper-proof containers for garbage and waste to stop free-roaming dogs from accessing food.

Daily domestic garbage removal from streets is the responsibility of the public works and services department. Recently, rubbish bins with closable lids were trialled in local communities. But these exacerbated the problem as residents would put rubbish on top of the lid or on the floor, making food accessible to free-roaming dogs.



## Euthanasia

**For dogs with incurable illnesses, injuries or behavioural problems and no prospect of recovery then euthanasia may be a necessary part of a dog management programme. It is important for everyone involved in a programme to agree and understand the circumstances under which euthanasia should be used<sup>11</sup>.**

RAKAWC has a policy of euthanasing sick dogs beyond treatment and those unowned dogs that are caught and unsuitable rehoming or living as a community dogs. Euthanasia is carried out using anaesthetic followed by T61 by a qualified vet.

## Monitoring and evaluation

**Monitoring and evaluation play an important role in the programme process. They allow a programme's effectiveness to be assessed, issues to be identified and adjustments to be made accordingly. Monitoring and evaluation also allow information regarding successes and failures to be published and shared<sup>12</sup>.**

RAKAWC use programme statistics to regularly monitor progress. Since 2011 the number of unowned roaming dogs in urban areas and those involved in traffic accidents have declined. There have also been fewer abandonment cases and livestock attacks and a reduction in complaints about nuisance dogs. Several hundred dogs are found new homes through the centre every year.

The number of reported incidences of cruelty to dogs have risen and this is linked with better public awareness of animal welfare.

Regular monitoring and evaluation has helped RAKAWC spot emerging problems such as illegal import of dogs and 'backstreet breeding'.

We are helping to evaluate the programme by conducting yearly visits and making recommendations based on our observations.

Because of restructuring within Ras al-Khaimah's government, there are few records relating to dogs before to the programme's implementation. However, in future it is hoped that recorded data will show the successes of the programme in numbers over time.

## The benefits to dogs and people

**"We would advise other governments to adopt this kind of programme as it is important for the people to have someone to contact when their pet is unwell. They also need to contact someone when they are concerned about street dogs and their own personal security. We want dogs to be well cared for, so the community feels safe and secure, and the dogs experience good welfare."**

**Engineer Ahmed M Al Hammadi, Director General, Public Works and Services Department – government of Ras al-Khaimah**

**"The humane dog management programme has largely been a success in the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah. This is thanks to the support from the government of Ras al-Khaimah and the training and technical advice and support we receive from World Animal Protection. Not only have we managed to reduce the roaming dog population, but we have also managed to change attitudes towards animal welfare in the community."**

**Dr Chenjerai Sigauke BVSc, Humane Dog Management Programme Manager, Ras al-Kaimah Animal Welfare Centre**

## Looking forward

Ras al-Khaimah's humane dog management programme has been set up successfully, but needs to continue with implementation of the remaining components. A mandatory identification and registration scheme, and the introduction of local legislation relating to unowned roaming dogs and owned dogs, will strengthen the programme and make it sustainable.

To date education of dog owners, increasing public awareness, the TNVR scheme and the promotion of rehoming dogs from the centre, have been particular successes. RAKAWC will be moving to a new facility in the near future. This will help to increase their capacity.

Consultation with the Emirate of Dubai will take place - Dubai has implemented all components of a comprehensive humane dog management programme.

We will continue to support RAKAWC and Ras al-Khaimah's government in the evaluation of the programme and implementation of local legislation and a registration and identification scheme.



## Conclusions

Ras al-Khaimah's humane dog management programme is particularly unique. This lies in the fact that it is managed by a non-profit animal welfare organisation with full support of the government and patronage from His Highness Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi. It also implements a TNVR scheme.

The main successes of the programme are:

- recognition of the importance of dog welfare by the government and local communities
- use of a TNVR scheme, which benefits both dogs and local communities
- a successful rehoming programme
- a good range of services for dog owners, including a low-cost veterinary clinic and access to a behaviourist
- a clear structure and definition of roles and responsibilities. Funding is provided by Ras al-Khaimah's government. The day-to-day service provision is administered by RAKAWC.

## Notes

- 1 Free-roaming dogs can cause concerns not only for animals, but also for people and the environment. To address these issues successfully, collaboration between animal health, human health and environmental sectors is imperative. This collaboration is known as the One Health concept.
- 2 International Companion Animal Management Coalition (2008). Humane dog population management guidance. [http://www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/humane\\_dog\\_population\\_management\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/humane_dog_population_management_guidance.pdf) (accessed 09/07/2015)
- 3 World Animal Protection (2015). Humane Dog Management. <http://www.worldanimalprotection.org/dog-population-management-training-guides> (accessed 11/09/2015)
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.

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