



## Galapagos Islands Sterilization Campaign Report June 2009

### Summary of the Campaign

The Animal Balance team joined forces with CIMEI and visited 3 islands; San Cristobal, Floreana and Isabela Islands in 2 weeks and sterilized 204 cats and dogs and performed one amputation. CIMEI is the sector of the Galapagos Municipality who is mandated to control and manage invasive species. Animal Balance has worked closely with CIMEI since 2004. We have donated drugs, medicines and helped outfit their animal clinics with anesthesia machines and autoclaves. We donate sufficient supplies to CIMEI so that they can continue to sterilize the animals effectively and safely. We continue to offer to train their veterinarians in spay and neuter techniques.



In addition to sterilizing the animals, Animal Balance and CIMEI provided a humane education program which culminated in a dog training competition for the students and their dogs on our last day of the campaign. We also trained the local Police in basic animal care as they have a number of drug sniffing dogs in their charge.

We also re-homed 4 animals locally and in conjunction with SPECIEES we sent 2 dogs, who were special cases, to the US for re-homing. SPECIEES works with Animal Balance to identify those animals who need to be removed from the islands for their own safety, or the safety of the delicate native species. SPECIEES organizes their transport and medical certificates and re-homes them in the US. SPECIEES ensures that no US rescue dogs are displaced in this process.

None of this critical work would have been possible without the support of the Galapagos Conservancy who kindly provided the funds for the medicines and drugs. In addition, an anonymous donor covered a substantial degree of the costs of the controlled drugs. Thank you too to the Protection of Animals Ecuador (PAE) for working with us to ensure that we could carry in the enormous quantities of controlled drugs, medicines and equipment.



Twenty four volunteer Vets, Techs and Assistants came together to create the team and covered their own costs. We are indebted to all of you who sacrificed so much to work together to help ALL the animals of the Galapagos Islands and directly protect her delicate ecosystem.

### **Pure Breed Dogs – The New Contraband on the Galapagos**

Animal Balance and CIMEI have been working together since 2004 to steadily and efficiently sterilize the cats and dogs on the 4 inhabited islands of the Galapagos. As of 2007, 98% were sterilized.

However, after this date a new contraband appeared; pure breed dogs. Dogs such as Siberian Huskies, Spaniels and Terriers are sedated in Guayaquil, put in special holding facilities in the hulls of the cargo ships and delivered to the Galapagos. The dogs are smuggled onto the islands, avoiding all quarantine check points and taken to homes in the highlands where they are bred and later sold. Small puppy mills are now appearing on the islands. The threat to bio diversity via these introduced animals, plus the massive risk of the arrival of new infectious diseases is very real and very frightening. If the authorities do not act soon there will be an absolute disaster on the islands for many, many species.



Animal Balance is very proud to have sterilized the majority of cats and dogs on the islands and encouraged humane pet care. We are devastated that the authorities are turning a blind eye to this enormous threat that now looms. We are very efficient at sterilizing animals, but we are in no way prepared to stop a pure bred dog smuggling trade. This is a dangerous activity which is generating huge amounts of money. One dog can be worth \$1,000. As such, we have created a Phase 2 of our program to address this issue as best we can.

### **Phase 2 of Animal Balance's Program on the Galapagos**

Animal Balance Director, Emma Clifford, met with the Director of CIMEI in Puerto Ayora for 3 days reviewing what we have accomplished together since 2004, the current situation specifically in regards to pure breed dog contraband and how Animal Balance

and CIMEI can work together to combat this in coordination with the authorities who are responsible for controlling importation, which is primarily SESA-SICGAL. In summary he explained that:

1. The Police can only act when dog is on the islands'; they cannot prevent his/her entry.
2. The Galapagos National Park Service (PNG) can accompany SESA-SICGAL to intercept cargo boats, but cannot go aboard boats unless SESA- SICGAL is present.
3. SESA-SICGAL can search the boat and confiscate contraband. However they are mostly looking for shark fins, sea cucumbers and seahorses when the boats leave the islands. They do not have enough patrols to check boats coming in. They have the power to fine the Captain, but this rarely happens.
4. CIMEI can only enforce laws on the islands as they pertain to cats and dogs. They are very weak, they allow breeding and cannot enforce spaying or neutering. Each dog has to be registered. It costs more to register an intact dog or cat, but only by a few dollars.
5. People living on the Galapagos without legal residency are being sent back to the mainland. Many have dogs and cats. Aerogal, a local airline, has offered to take their pets off Santa Cruz for free.
6. The CIMEI Director is now looking to send street dogs and unclaimed dogs as well in conjunction with PAE in Quito and Guayaquil. This program has not yet started.

After this discussion we created Phase 2 of the program. Animal Balance will fundraise in order for AB to put a Vet and Tech on the islands for 3 months. They will continue to perform spays and neuters and train the CIMEI vets. CIMEI and Animal Balance will split the costs. They will move from island to island during those 3 months. This will take place in 2010.

However, Animal Balance will not request funding from foundations for this until we have received the following:

1. A letter from the Mayor of Santa Cruz, PNG Director and SESA-SICGAL, CIMEI and the Government Representative from Quito for Galapagos stating that they acknowledge the smuggling of pure breed puppies, that this is detrimental to the ecosystem of the Galapagos and that the risk of disease from this activity is paramount. They will also state exactly what actions have been taken and what actions will be taken in the future to combat the smuggling.
2. CIMEI will write a statement explaining their role in combating this activity.
3. CIMEI and Animal Balance will create a spreadsheet listing all the surgeries since we started working together in 2004. In addition CIMEI will provide accurate census data for each year from each island, if available.

In addition we discussed how to strengthen the laws so that CIMEI would be able to have assistance at the highest level in encouraging the spaying and neutering of cats and dogs and the elimination of breeding.

## **Summary of the Animal Balance Sterilization Campaigns per Island**

### **San Cristobal**

We spent the first week of the campaign on San Cristobal Island, after which we split the team and half went to Isabela Island and half to Floreana Island. We reconvened back on San Cristobal Island for the last 2 days of the campaign.

The Coordinator of CIMEI was very well organized and had arranged for a truck and for his staff and the Police to help us. San Cristobal was covered inch by inch by AB volunteers from the Veterinary University in Quito. They went house by house checking to see if the animals were sterilized or not. The only dogs left intact are the pure or mix pure breeds that no one wants sterilized as they want to breed them. In addition, a new rumor had spread that sterilized dogs become lazy and fat so quite a number of people refused to have their animals sterilized due to that. However, in the first week we sterilized 100 animals.



CIMEI and AB visited the schools 3 times each week giving a humane education lecture and showing the students a power point about CIMEI and AB. All the students were invited to come to our dog competition on the last Friday of the campaign, 25 kids and their dogs participated. Most were pure breed or pure mix breeds i.e. had dominant features. Many people came to watch and we gave away prizes and had fun with the animal and kids. The curriculum covered; how to care for your pet, dog training, animal communication/bite prevention and then who can eat the quickest competition. An AB volunteer assisted each kid with the dog training aspect. Very soon the majority of the children were walking their dogs on leash and having them sit on command. It was a very successful community event to have held on the last day.



## Floreana Island

During the second week Animal Balance sent a team of 12 volunteers to the island of Floreana for 4 days. The team consisted of three veterinarians, five technicians and assistants, two translators, and two staff members from CIMEI. The goals of Animal Balance and their work on Floreana were to perform a feasibility study to assess the dog and cat populations on the island and their environmental impact and also to perform spay and neuter surgeries for the dogs and cats living there.



The island of Floreana has a very mysterious and interesting history and some of the current residents are the descendants of the original inhabitants. Today there are approximately 100 inhabitants who live very simply in the small village of Puerto Velasco Ibarra or amongst the six highland farms located a few kilometers above the village, accessed via a lone dirt road. The island itself is very isolated from the other islands, and tourists visit a few designated tourist sites located on the outskirts of the island. Overall there are approximately 50 dogs and 25 cats on the island of Floreana and approximately 25% of the animals have been sterilized through the efforts of CIMEI veterinarians and Doctor Marilyn Cruz, a Galapagos veterinarian whose brother lives on Floreana. The majority of the dogs are working dogs for

the farms and there was no presence of pure bred dogs on the island at this time. The main hotel on Floreana, which is owned and managed by the Wittmer family, has a large semi-feral Siamese cat colony.

The Animal Balance team set up their clinic in the headquarters of the Armada (Ecuadorian Navy) on the edge of town near the boating docks. The team performed five sterilization surgeries, 2 dogs and 3 cats. This was the first time that an Animal Balance team had visited or worked on the island of Floreana, and the experience of working there was very similar to the first Animal Balance campaign on the island of Isabela nearly five years ago when the team faced some resistance from the community to have their animals spayed and neutered.

The major focus of the Animal Balance campaign in Floreana therefore shifted from surgery to providing client education and establishing a positive relationship between Animal Balance and the CIMEI and the community of Floreana. In order to do this, the Animal Balance team visited all six of the farms in the highlands in the Chiva (an open bus-like vehicle and the only form of transportation on the island) and spoke with the people about spaying and neutering their dogs and cats from the perspective of both health benefits to their pets and the protection of the endemic species of the Galapagos Islands. The team also did a door-door walking public education campaign to all the homes located in the village and conveyed the same message. The Animal Balance team provided internal and external parasite treatments for free to all the animals in town in an effort to educate the community about public health concerns, zoonotic diseases, and improve the health of the animals. The Animal Balance team also did a presentation in the local school to both the younger and older classes about the importance of protecting the Galapagos Islands and the endemic species that live there. This was perhaps the most positive and rewarding experience for the team as a whole because the children overall understood the delicate balance that exists in the Galapagos and the importance of conservation efforts. The children will also serve as strong advocates for the work of Animal Balance to both their parents and the future generations to come.

The Animal Balance team that worked on Floreana made a strong and positive impact on Floreana despite the fact that they did not perform a large number of surgeries. Through the data gathered from the feasibility study, the CIMEI will be able to target the unsterilized dogs and cats for surgeries for future campaigns. Animal Balance made two very strong community advocates in both the mayor and the local school teacher who both have their animals spayed and neutered and will serve as positive role models to the community. Based on their experiences in Floreana, the veterinary staff will also explore the option of vasectomies as an alternative to traditional surgical techniques to help control population growth.

## **Isabela**

In the second week the other half of the team, consisting of 8 people, were sent to Isabela. They packed in all the equipment and medicines they would need. The Charles Darwin Station kindly loaned us their research lab where we set up a MASH clinic. Having heard



that Animal Balance was coming, our first patient of the day arrived at 7:30am. For those two days, the demand hardly slowed at all and our unstoppable volunteers sterilized 68 animals and visited homes conducting health checks.

The Municipality has only one person assigned to the management and control of invasive species. This person is not a vet and has little animal handling experience. There is currently not a vet on Isabela Island. Due to the smuggling there are many mix pure breed dogs. A new Mayor will be voted in, in August and we hope at that time a new CIMEI will be created on Isabela Island. CIMEI Santa Cruz will oversee the operations and therefore bring much needed services to Isabela.

## Conclusion

Since 2004 the situation on the Galapagos, in regards to the cat and dog populations, has dramatically changed. In the first few years of working there we saw packs of street dogs, the 35 lb brown typical island dog. There was fighting, mating and upturned garbage. It was very noisy at nighttime. Now the majority of these dogs are either in homes, sterilized and being kept as pets, or have died.



Today there are far fewer dogs on the streets; however there are more pure breed and mix breed dogs in the homes and yards. Many Labrador type and large breed dogs are being used for guarding. These dogs are now behind fences or are tied up. The amount of construction on the Galapagos is incredible. Huge amounts of money have been put into housing and the paving of streets. Whole new communities are popping up. Each house has a wall or fence and at least one large protecting it. It is possible that as CIMEI created new laws to fine people if their dogs were found on the streets that people started to find ways to confine them. The dogs that are confined however are not the typical island dog, they are 80lb guard dogs. It also appears that people's income has risen as more tourists have arrived, giving them the opportunity

to buy dogs from the mainland. Bigger homes and bigger dogs. Puerto Ayora now looks like any small city anywhere in the world.

Animal Balance will continue to work with CIMEI and help ensure that humane practices are being used to control the populations. We will fundraise to send a vet and a tech for 3

months to help monitor the situation and perform surgeries, humane education and vet to vet training. However, none of this will be possible unless we receive some kind of assurance from the authorities that action will be taken against the smuggling of pure breed dogs.



The Galapagos is so delicate that it cannot sustain the ever growing human population, or the colossal number of visitors each year. Animal Balance has worked very hard to reduce the cat and dog populations humanely, systematically and efficiently. If the authorities continue to turn a blind eye to dog contraband, the Galapagos will be destroyed very quickly. These new dogs are not vaccinated and could be bringing in diseases that could spread to other animals. Vaccines such as DHLPP and Rabies are prohibited on the islands as they are 'live'. With a little foresight and planning disaster can be avoided. We will however, continue to fight for the preservation of all species, without killing any.

At the conclusion of the June 2009 Galapagos campaign, Animal Balance, in conjunction with the CIMEI, has performed a high number of spay and neuter surgeries and provided client education to all four inhabited islands of the Galapagos, and in doing so, laid the foundation for a plan for the protection of endemic species of the Galapagos Islands



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