



## World Animal Day

### Caring for man's best friend

by Ethna Brave

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Dogs are believed to be man's best friend, so why is it that hundreds of dogs are mistreated and left to roam the streets every year? Why are man's best friends being left to this fate? The main aims of World Animal Day which is being held across the globe on October 4 are to celebrate animal life in all its forms, to celebrate humankind's relationship with the animal kingdom, to acknowledge the diverse roles that animals play in our lives and to

acknowledge and be thankful for the way animals enrich our lives.

The first World Animal Day was celebrated in 1931 in Florence in order to highlight the plight of endangered species. Over the years the event has grown and now encompasses all kinds of animal life. October 4 was chosen to be World Animal Day as it is the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals.

Throughout the world there are numerous organizations, groups, animal shelters, places of worship and individuals who have dedicated their time in order to protect the welfare of animals across the globe. World Animal Day is an occasion to celebrate man's relationship with the animal kingdom and to raise awareness about the plight of the many endangered and mistreated animals worldwide.

Among these organizations that are concerned with animal welfare in Sri Lanka are Embark and Blue Paw Trust (BPT) both focus on helping animals that have been mistreated and protecting them

against ever being abused.

Launched in 2007 by Otara Gunawardena, CEO of Odel, Embark's mission is to reduce animal cruelty, to improve the wellbeing of stray dogs and to enhance the lives of animals across Sri Lanka. This mission is carried out through programmes of education and support which create awareness on animal welfare issues.

Activities carried out by Embark include sterilization, surgeries, puppy re-homing campaigns and care of injured stray animals. At a recent media briefing on World Animal Day, Otara, who is the Sri Lankan ambassador for World Animal Day spoke about how Embark was founded in order to "speak for animals", to give them a voice in order to help them.

She highlighted a new concern which is becoming increasingly serious in Sri Lanka, the issue of puppy breeding. Many puppies are beings sold in small cages at the side of the road, the conditions in which they are bred and their mothers are kept are unknown. Otara mentioned a recent harrowing discovery of five Great Dane puppies who were found in unimaginable conditions. Unfortunately the breeders called Embark too late and the organization was only able to save one of the puppies. This is only one instance of the alarming and increasing cruelty involved in puppy breeding programmes across Sri Lanka. It is something that must be addressed and stopped immediately.

Like Embark, Blue Paw Trust is primarily involved in stabilizing the stray dog population. The ultimate objective of this organization is to obtain a 'Rabies-free-Sri Lanka'. Since President Mahinda Rajapakse ordered halting the killing of captured stray dogs in 2006, the number of incidences of rabies in dogs has decreased dramatically with thanks to organizations like BPT.

A non-profit organization, BPT has raised a lot of awareness regarding the issue of rabies, which kills over 55,000 people around the world annually. Their programmes are helping other countries facing similar concerns with a plan to combat the problem of rabies. BPT staff is trained in the humane handling of dogs, community education programmes particular in schools are carried out and two specialized mobile veterinary clinics have been set up in Sri Lanka to treat and vaccinate dogs against rabies.

This year, like every other year, sees numerous events being organized in order to celebrate World Animal Day. Animal lovers across the globe are being called on to join in this special celebration in

solidarity and appreciation of their pets and animals of all kinds. Do your part this World Animal Day to ensure that man's best friend and all other animals on our planet are treated right!



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