

ANIMAL BALANCE

December 2004 Project Report

Animal Balance is a humane, community-based project to control and then sustainably manage the cat and dog populations of the Galapagos Islands.

Project Goal: To stop the population growth of cats and dogs on Isabela Island and then use the Isabela project as the model for the other two inhabited islands, San Cristobal and Santa Cruz.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2002, Animal Balance became aware that the authorities of the Galapagos Islands were poisoning their escalating cat and dog populations. The Galapagos National Park Service (GNPS) was concerned that these non-native species were impacting the local environment; the Municipality (CIMEI) was concerned that large numbers of free-roaming dogs would discourage tourism; and the local people were concerned about the perceived health risks associated with the animals. However, local people were outraged with authorities for killing the cats and dogs. Communication between them became very difficult. Animal Balance suggested that a comprehensive, community-based sterilization program would provide the solution.

In May 2004, teams of 34 US veterinarians, technicians and volunteers sterilized 320 dogs and cats on Isabela Island. Having formed similar relationships on Santa Cruz Island, Animal Balance later sterilized another 100 dogs and cats there. We also donated the equipment and supplies for these campaigns and left enough supplies for the local veterinarian to continue sterilizations and treatments during our absence.

PROJECT UPDATE - December 2004

In December, Animal Balance returned to the islands with a team of 3 veterinarians, 3 animal technicians, 2 dog trainers, 2 humane educators and a number of helpers for a two-week campaign on both Isabela and Santa Cruz Islands. With the support of the GNPS and CIMEI on both islands, we were able to sterilize a total of 231 animals, thus stopping population growth on Isabela Island¹ and making a strong impact on Santa Cruz. We will now use the Isabela project as the model for the remaining two islands that need help. (Please see attached worksheet for the 2004 statistics).

Animal Balance's multifaceted model consists of: collaboration, sterilization, dog training, education, outreach and sustainable practices.

1. Collaboration



As we had already carried out a larger campaign in May 2004, the local people already had a thorough understanding of why we were there and how well we would treat their animals. The negative reactions we experienced in May were gone in December. The people trusted us and allowed us to perform the remaining surgeries.

On Isabela Island, the Charles Darwin Research Station donated their laboratory for our use as a temporary clinic. The CIMEI was able to coordinate our visits to the schools and helped to organize public announcements during the campaign. Many local taxi drivers and local business people assisted the project in differing ways, from washing laundry to giving out aftercare instructions.

¹ [The CIMEI will be forwarding the results of the 2005 census and we will be able to substantiate this statement.](#)

On Santa Cruz, relationships with many local organizations are being fostered through the sterilization campaigns. The University of Guayaquil lent us two classrooms for a temporary clinic and the CIMEI provided two employees and many volunteers to help with each project. WildAid provided logistical support and ushered the constant flow of incoming animals through the clinic. Local veterinarians assisted Animal Balance veterinarians and were further trained on sterilization techniques.

Collaboration with the local organizations is essential to the success of these campaigns. The community is suspect of foreign organizations. Having a humane management program supported and run by the local authorities as well as local leaders will be the only method in which the community will trust and accept such an innovative plan.

2. Sterilization Program

Together with the support of local organizations, Animal Balance sterilized 105 animals on Isabela Island and another 126 animals on Santa Cruz Island. Every animal was rechecked to ensure there were no complications. Every sterilized animal was treated with Revolution². Many other animals seen at the clinics were injured or were suffering from Parvo.



Each animal was permanently identified: each dog with a microchip and each cat with an ear tip and recorded into an ACCESS database designed by Animal Balance and CIMEI. Eventually every CIMEI on the islands will have identical databases so they can easily track the animals.

Each guardian was given a collar and leash to further help manage their dog. These proved, once again, to be very popular as you cannot buy them on the islands. Soon, more people were having their animals sterilized in order to get a new collar and leash.



3. Dog Training Program

Robert De Franco President of the American Foundation for Animal Rescue, Inc. and 12-year veteran dog-trainer, Paulina de la Velesco, trained and certified 14 people as Dog Trainers on Isabela and Santa Cruz Islands. This included employees from GNPS and CIMEI who were extremely pleased with this program. In turn, these new dog trainers conducted daily dog obedience classes with the rest of the community. They will continue to hold these classes on the islands on an ongoing basis. Animal Balance provided them with clickers, collars and leashes to carry out this initiative.

The dog training classes culminated in a 'fun doggie parade' through the village to music. Each guardian walked their dog through the village on leash showing off their dog's newly acquired skills. Local people came out of their homes to watch the parade of people, dogs and children. Each guardian was presented with a dog toy for passing the class, further encouraging them to interact and play with their dog.



Controlling the dogs benefits the local ecosystem enormously. Not only does it help the local people bond and take responsibility for their animals but also it physically keeps the dogs away from the beaches and Park areas where the flora and fauna are fragile.

² [In November, Animal Balance partnered with Pfizer to run a 'click and donate' email campaign with Aide, Inc. Pfizer and our supporters donated the 750 doses of Revolution that treated many animals. Some of the Revolution was provided to the other islands, paving the way and building confidence for future campaigns.](#)

4. Humane Education Program

In May, the local ecology school (a pre-school) had painted three beautiful murals on the side of the classrooms. Each mural depicted how all animals can live together if we take responsibility for our pets. Animal Balance picked the winner and for the December campaign we had put the winning image onto t-shirts.



As a follow-up to this, Animal Balance's humane educators, Dairne Ryan and Alexis Blaess, visited the local schools with the coordinator of the CIMEI in December. Using video, coloring books and role-play they taught the students how to behave around, look after, understand and humanely control cats and dogs.



The children responded very positively to the classes, often telling us the mistakes that their parents would make with the household pets. They would go home and explain how to change the animals' behavior without harming the dog. Often the children are given the responsibility of caring for the family pets so it was imperative that we teach them humane methods of control and educate them about proper animal care.



Each student drew a picture showing how you should care for your pet and why it's so important on the Galapagos. The pictures were hung at the CIMEI-Animal Balance booth on Darwin Day, a fun community event that was aimed at teaching the community about conservation. We chose three winners in three different age categories and gave each student a prize and medal in front of the entire community.

Animal Balance also gave prizes and created games for the children on Darwin Day. One game required that the children answer a series of questions about animal care that was taught in their classrooms. Each time they answered correctly, they jumped to the next Animal Balance logo 'paw' that we had drawn in colorful chalk on the ground. This game was a big hit and even the adults joined in.



For our Darwin Booth, Animal Balance and CIMEI built a giant dog cage out of chicken wire. All the volunteers and CIMEI staff wore dog collars and leashes and dog or cat ears, which were attached to their sunglasses. A community person volunteered to face paint all the children with dog and cat faces. Children would also sit and color in pictures of people taking good care of their animals.



Fun community events really help to break down any barriers between organizations working on the islands. Each had an opportunity to talk about their work and invite the community to participate in a entertaining way.

5. Community Outreach

Animal Balance and CIMEI wrote radio commercials about the importance of sterilizing your pets, how to take care of your pets and why to not put poison down. These ads ran the weeks before the team arrived on "Radio Isabela", the only radio station on the island. As many homes do not have telephones and there are no newspapers, we found the radio was the ideal way to inform the local people about the project.

Upon arrival, “Radio Isabela” interviewed Animal Balance on the work they were doing on the island. Project Director, Emma Clifford, spoke (in Spanish) about the project while Dog Trainer, Paulina de Valesco, talked about the importance of dog training and gave people tips to help control their dogs. Humane educator, Alexis Blaess, added why it was imperative that the children understand how to care for and behave around the animals. After the interview, announcements were made throughout the campaign regarding the various activities Animal Balance was conducting around the community.

Outreach to the Other Islands

Clifford also visited both Santa Cruz and San Cristobal Islands and found that the GNPS and CIMEI already had a wealth of knowledge about the Isabela project. Each island’s authorities were determined to arrange similar projects on their respective islands. Education has already begun with dog training on Santa Cruz while agreements between Animal Balance and the San Cristobal CIMEI have been drafted to conduct a 4-week campaign in May 2005.



6. Sustainability

In formulating our approach, Animal Balance realized that the local community must continue to humanely manage the cat and dog populations once we have achieved zero population growth. To this end, we have provided guidance, training, educational materials and medical supplies so that they can plan a long-term management strategy.



Supplies and equipment have been donated to each CIMEI on each island so that the local veterinarians can continue working between Animal Balance campaigns. The local veterinarian, Dr. Ruben, participated in the campaigns and received further instruction on administering Neutersol from Dr. Wang, the chief scientist for this drug. He is now fully trained in its use and continues to inject male dogs for sterilization, in addition to performing regular sterilization surgeries. Currently, he is recruiting vets from a university in Quito so they may also be trained and become a resource for the CIMEI in the future.

In addition, local people and members of the CIMEI and GNPS have been certified as dog trainers and continue to hold public dog obedience classes. The local schools are also using humane education materials in their curriculum educating the next generation about humane pet care. Meanwhile, the artwork that won Animal Balance awards during the competitions are being printed onto t-shirts and other merchandise to help raise funds to support the CIMEI. Relationships between the authorities have improved and Animal Balance is now poised to take the model from Isabela Island to Santa Cruz and San Cristobal islands.

As we start to plan our exit strategy from the islands, we will hand the management of the program over to the local authorities. Our partners on Isabela will now assist Animal Balance with the programs on the other two islands and gain more experience in program management. As each project unfolds they will take a greater leadership role and Animal Balance will provide any support or advice.

CONCLUSION

We have successfully provided a model to not only stop the population growth of cats and dogs but also two complimentary components, dog training and humane education.

We have achieved our 2004 goals and added other components to them making this project stronger than ever. Together with the CIMEI and GNPS we can now move forward and take this model to San Cristobal Island and replicate the project in 2005.

The Galapagos Islands face many dangers today, but we believe that this is one problem that we have found a humane solution to and can implement in collaboration with the approval of all the stakeholders. We can protect the marine iguanas, tortoises, flamingos and the cats and dogs without harming ANY of the animals that call the Galapagos Islands home.



“By taking responsibility for our pets, we can all live in harmony.”
2004 Puerto Villamil Education Campaign slogan