



## **Animal Balance Report American and Western Samoa**

### **Summary**

In January 2009, Dr. Byron Maas, Dr. Larry Richman and I visited American Samoa and Western Samoa to research the possibility of collaborating with the local NGO's and Governments regarding any assistance we could provide to reduce their ever growing dog population.

The local animal protection organizations, The Animal Protection Society of Samoa and the American Samoa Humane Society, had contacted Animal Balance a year before explaining that they had a huge problem with the over population of dogs and needed a humane solution. They had read our website and contacted AB to help create a sustainable strategy for dog management and control.

After a year of fundraising, thanks to the Alice Morgan Wright/Edith Goode Trust and The Milton and Tamar Maltz Family Foundation, we were able to hold a feasibility study on both islands.

Our hosts kindly showed us the problem, organized meetings with the Government and we were able to gather evidence of the situation, create agreements with our new partners and are now in the process of writing for grants to help the dogs and people of American and Western Samoa.

We also assisted with 2 sterilization clinics; one on each island. We sterilized a total of 67 animals in those 2 days with the Animal Protection Society of Samoa and the American Samoa Humane Society.

### **American Samoa**

American Samoa is a 5 hour flight directly south from Hawaii. It is a staggeringly beautiful island surrounded by an iridescent blue and green ocean, broken up only by the reefs that hug the coastline. White sandy beaches circle the island and a huge mountain range of misty tropical rainforest blankets the center. It is off the tourist route and as such is quiet and peaceful. There are few shops, one bar and a very small selection of American style foods in the stores. You quickly realize you are off the beaten track here.



Samoan society is very different to the US, even though it is a territory of the US. There are hundreds of little villages on the one road which surrounds the island. Each village has a Chief and a council of Chiefs that run the village, maintain order and keep the rituals and customs alive. The Samoan's speak Samoan, but the younger people often know some English.

The most obvious problem to the first time visitor is the huge number of free roaming dogs.

Cheryl Morales of the American Samoa Humane Society greeted us at the airport presenting each of us with a beautiful lei. She spent the next 4 days driving us around the island giving us insight into the culture, language and customs. She took us to the areas where the dogs congregate and explained the relationships between people, the dogs, the government and the humane society. We are indebted to Cheryl for her kindness and incredible hospitality she showed us during our visit.



The dogs are everywhere. Most are over the age of one and are searching for water, food, shelter and shade. The majority have mange and show scars or wounds from fighting, road accidents or human cruelty. Packs of dogs are found on the beaches, parks and along the road. They are scared of humans for the most part, but can be very aggressive if approached. This is due to the fact that everyone throws stones at them to keep them away. The result has caused the dogs to be un-socialized to humans, aggressive and pack orientated.



The Department of Agriculture works with the American Samoa Humane Society to organize 'de-sexing' campaigns. The DOA also picks up dead dogs, euthanizes dogs for people and provides some veterinary care. Occasionally they also round up unowned dogs and kill them.

The American Samoa Humane Society comprises of approximately 20 volunteers, who are mostly foreigners. They work to rehome dogs, care for injured dogs and organize the de-sexing campaigns. They do not have an office, but have formed a close and very effective network over the phone and email.

While we were visiting we helped with a day long campaign at the DOA building, working alongside the ASHS and the DOA.



We are now working with Cheryl to raise funds and return to American Samoa with an AB team to help reduce the dog population humanely, train the DOA techs and work with the government to stop the killing of street dogs.

### **Western Samoa**

Western Samoa is a 40 minute flight from American Samoa. Much of the scenery looks the same as you descend into the airport; however once you land you quickly realize you are in a different country. It is heavily influenced by Australia, New Zealand and Europe. The architecture, produce sold and accents all remind you that you are no longer in the US.



Dr. Skye of the Animal Protection Society met us at the airport and kindly hosted us for our 3 days visit. She showed us the APS clinic and introduced us to 2 other vets, techs and assistants. The majority of the people at APS were foreigners. They were performing de-sexing operations when we arrived and Dr. Byron and Dr. Larry were able to quickly catch up on techniques being used, equipment and available supplies.

The next day we helped with a day long de-sexing campaign in one of the villages, Fasito'o-tai.



Before we set up the MASH clinic under the trees we were asked to take part in an ava welcoming ceremony in the Fale, the Council's meeting building. The Talking Chief welcomed us and thanked us from coming so far to 'clean the dogs'. Many of the other council men made welcoming remarks that were translated to us. After drinking the ava

and praying we were able to build the clinic. The Chief instructed the 'servants' who are the young men in training to become council members, to build a shade for us and then to go and get their dogs.



Many men came with the dogs. We had 4 vets working and many techs and helpers. Most of the men were shy to talk to me. However finally one man asked me what we were doing, I explained and he translated it to the small group that was forming around Dr. Byron's surgery table. After the surgery, I asked who the owner of the dog was. The same man said he was the owner. He had no idea why we were operating on his dog, he had been told to bring his dog to us by the Chief. Once his dog was on the table he had asked me what we were doing and why.





The Council provided us with a huge lunch and performed another ceremony in our honor. It was an incredible experience. They took very good care of us and warmly invited us back to help them reduce the number of dogs in the village. The focus had been to build trust, disseminate information and break through cultural barriers.



The following day we met with various members of the Government of Western Samoa presenting information about Animal Balance and discussing a possible collaboration with APS and the Government. We are currently writing agreements and fund raising so that we can return later this year with an AB team and help the dogs and the villagers.

### **Conclusion**

The over population of dogs on both islands is strikingly obvious. Both islands through a mix of the traditional and modern styles of governing have a solid infrastructure and are very organized. However, both have a terrible problem of free roaming in tact dogs. Both islands need help establishing high volume spay and neuter clinics in order to control the situation. The need is there and the NGO's, Government and councils are all willing to cooperate. Animal Balance has a chance to help establish MASH clinics on each island and pave the way for a long term sustainable strategy of humane dog control and management.



I would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Byron and Dr. Larry who covered all their own expenses in order to accompany me to the islands and worked so hard in the severe heat to help the dogs. Thank you!

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