

Dog Rescue Center Samui

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Dear Animal Lovers

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Welcome to the third and final 'international' newsletter of 2003. I hope it has been a good year for you and that next year will be even better. It has been a good year for us at the shelter (on the whole) and a better year for the dogs and cats on Koh Samui. DRCS could not exist without the help and support of all of you. It takes about 4,000 Euro a month to keep the shelter running and each donation, large or small, adds up and keeps us afloat. I cannot thank you enough for helping us help the dogs and cats on this island.

For those of you who are 'new' to our work, this newsletter will give you a good idea of what has been going on in the last year. It has been a very busy year and the highlights were opening our big animal shelter and our own vet starting with us. Those things made life so much better for us and the animals. If Dr Joe our vet hadn't started with us, I do not think we could have continued to afford Dr Somsak so our work would have been cut back severely.

DRCS started in April 1999 with a very small clinic, Dr Somsak and one helper. Prior to that, there was no vet on the Island and the animals were left to suffer terrible wounds and breed freely. The Government's idea of controlling the animal population was to poison as many dogs as possible. This happened twice a year and in the middle of the night. The Government stopped poisoning the dogs when our work started to become effective but, unfortunately, some hotel managers on this island feel it is their duty to continue the poisonings. Poisoning is a terrible way to die – it can take many hours for a dog to die and it is in pain all the time.

JANUARY

While we were on holiday for Christmas in Germany, work on the new shelter continued and Sud, our President, supervised this. Up until the big shelter opening, we had 120 dogs living in the small compound round our house and there was insufficient space (300 m²) for them, particularly when it rained (and oh how it rains on this tropical island paradise!). As patient as our dogs can be (they are Buddhists), the lack of space led to bad feelings and some nasty bites and fights. Of course, the sickest and oldest dogs will continue to live at our house in Chaweng so we can keep a close eye on them and give them their daily medication.

When we left Koh Samui in December, there was nothing built at the shelter but, by the end of January, the main building was just about finished. The building is 19 x 4 meters and comprises a living room, bedroom, operation room, storage room (now the cat hotel), bathroom and outside kitchen. A 500-meter-long wall was erected round the animal shelter and I asked all animal lovers whom I got to know over the last years to donate money for the wall. When the entire wall has been sponsored we will paint it white and write the names, cities and countries of the donors on it. The "sale of the wall" to date has been very successful and, at November 2003, we had sold 422 meters. One meter of wall is only 25 Euro and there is still time to sponsor a bit of wall for your loved one's Christmas. Originally, one meter of wall cost 25 Euro but the cost eventually increased to 32 Euro. However, sponsoring a meter of wall continues to be 25 Euro as it is more of a symbolic gesture.

FEBRUARY

The number of guests at our shelter rocketed this month with an extra 70 dogs arriving within a short space of time, among them three bitches and their puppies. We try our very best to photograph each dog (and cat) as it arrives, name it and mount the photo and the animal's story on the web. This plan cannot always be executed

immediately as looking after the animals takes priority over updating the web page. Keeping the web page up to date, however, is very important as that is how potential godparents for the animals get to know us and choose their dog or cat. At November 2003, we have had some 22,000 hits to our web page since we set it up. It only costs 0.5 Euro per day to sponsor one of our dogs, which works out at 15 Euro a month. Currently, we have godparents for some 150 of our dogs (that's about half of them).

As the animal shelter came to completion, some hotel managers on Koh Samui felt that all they had to do was call DRCS and we would collect their stray dogs and take them away. We cannot do this as we have not the space or the money to house the 3,000 stray dogs on the island. Also, if we pick up dogs and take them to our shelter, new dogs just move into the vacated spot at the hotel.

In February, we had to organise a third enclosure for the dogs at the big shelter. The biggest enclosure is 1,400 m², the second is 800 m² and the third one is also about 800 m² in size. Each has about 10 doghouses that have bamboo beds and provide shelter from the sun and rain. The third shelter was designed to hold animals that are only temporary residents after accidents or neutering/spaying.

Dr Yanni, a vet from Greece, visited us this month and gave us much helpful advice. He suggested adding highly concentrated vitamin powder to the dry food. This works fine as we buy the cheapest kind of dry food to which no vitamins have been added - we cannot afford Pedigree or other expensive brands. The dogs took to the concentrated vitamin powder and became even more active than before.

MARCH

This month we finished building the big shelter at Bahn Taling Ngam. Olivia from Switzerland, who had been a volunteer with us for over a year, moved into the living accommodation there and will feed the dogs and clean the compounds. It has been four years since DRCS was founded and it is only now that there is a permanent place where stray dogs can find a home. If it was not for DRCS these dogs would not have a chance of survival. Before April 1999 there was no qualified veterinarian on the island and I honestly do not think that any veterinarian would have settled here had the DRCS not been founded.

Due to financial constraints, we had to stop all the construction work. The sick dogs were still taken to Dr Somsak or looked after at our house in Chaweng. When a dog recovers, it is taken back to where we found it but only if it can look after itself.

The Government's method of controlling the dog population, prior to DRCS being set up, was to poison them. It was the strongest animals that got enough meat to kill them quickly; the rest died a long and painful death. When tourists saw this, they refused to come back to Koh Samui. Due to the many castrations by DRCS, the government does not have to undertake the mass poisonings but some hotel managers seem to feel that it is their duty to take over where the Government laid off. When I challenge these people about poisoning the dogs, they invariably deny it or say that the tourists are doing the poisonings! Not all hotels or bungalow resorts are bad so if you would like to have a list of dog-friendly ones, please contact me.

APRIL

The animal sanctuary in Bahn Taling Ngam was ready for occupation, four years after the inauguration of DRCS. Olivia's daughter moved in to help take care of the dogs and welcome the visitors. We also take fit dogs (0.5 Euro a day), as many tourists are concerned that their favourite stray will not be there when they next return (it may be poisoned). This month saw the return of the dog poisoning at Chaweng Noi Beach. This happens every three months or so and it is not good publicity for Koh Samui.

Because of time and financial constraints, Dr Somsak could only neuter two female dogs per day for us. This was not enough so we decided to hire our own vet. The plan would be for our vet to neuter at least six dogs a day and treat all stray dog emergencies. A dedicated vet will cost 670 Euro per month (rising to 780 Euro after three months) for salary, 78 Euro per month for accommodation and 800 Euro for a new motorbike. We posted a notice at a university and the one applicant said he would visit us in May for two weeks.

MAY

The big animal shelter at Bahn Taling Ngam continued to operate so well, we needed to build some small enclosures as the big ones were not good for the puppies. After checking we could afford it, we ordered seven new enclosures, between 20 and 200 m² in size, and 10 single boxes (1 x 1.5 m) for pre- and post-operative dogs. The operating room was fully equipped by this month. We received donations of a very good microscope from a Swiss hospital and sterilization equipment from Germany. Throughout the construction work, our President, Khun Theerasud Chaichalremwong, supervised the work and that was a great help. Without him, there would be no DRCS and no sanctuary.

This month, the only applicant for the job as vet arrived. He had finished his training six months earlier and had worked in a clinic in Bangkok. When he arrived here, he was overwhelmed with the task of looking after our animals. He used the wrong suture material while neutering the dogs, one of which nearly died. Even after some on-the-job training with Dr Somsak, our vet candidate was not capable of working independently and left us without even saying goodbye (that's Thai style!).

JUNE

This month we completed the construction of seven more kennels (between 20 and 200 m²) and more single kennels for the dogs after their operations. We also decided to divide one of the larger enclosures and move the fit dogs from our house. The dogs we will not move are the very old, blind and paralysed ones, as well as the ones which require daily medication.

After advertising the vet job in the newspaper, we appointed a second vet who was meant to start on 2 June. However, he never appeared and didn't tell us why he decided not to work with us. That meant we lost a lot of time hanging around awaiting his non-appearance. We received a very nice offer from a female Thai vet who will come to Koh Samui for one week to perform castrations (for free).

Because this is the low season, the Bali bombing and the threat of SARS, many people cancelled their proposed holidays to the Far East so we did not have a lot of visitors to the shelter as we would have expected. That was a hard time for us as we rely on tourists for much of our income. Luckily for us, you never forget us and it was you who kept us afloat during those lean times.

Nick and Kirsche from the UK visited us, intending to stay on Koh Samui for five days but staying instead for five weeks. During that time they painted a large part of one of the walls and built a swimming pool for the dogs. The dogs 'helped' with the digging of the pool, unfortunately always at the wrong bits of the compound. We have had problems with the swimming pool, particularly with a mysterious leak that empties the pool soon after it has been filled. We haven't had time to concentrate on that problem (or the water supply problem) as we have been waging war on the millions of ticks on our dogs. However, we will sort the swimming pool and water supply problems in the New Year and then the dogs can have a lot of fun.

I received a disturbing telephone call from the manager of a hotel on the Island. He wanted our help to kill the dogs around his hotel. I explained we were here to help dogs, not kill them, and the problem of our vet being a Buddhist and his dislike of putting fit dogs to sleep. The hotel manager then asked me to move the dogs to another beach. Possibly he doesn't realise that that would just add to the problems of another beach/hotel. His next idea was to move the dogs to a beach with no tourists or residents. That would mean a long, lingering death for the dogs as there would be nobody around to feed them. Unfortunately, we do not have enough money to take away all the dogs that annoy some hotel managers.

JULY

This month our new vet started. Dr Chirapong Kanvatchana (Dr Joe) is 28 years old and studied at the Mahanakon University in Bangkok, thereafter working at a clinic in Bangkok for three years. He started with us on 13 July and, because of his experience and expertise, he performs between five and six castrations every day as well as treating the animals for the usual range of complaints. We have never had a better vet for the Center; we now perform three times the number of castrations at much lower costs. Because Dr Joe was carrying out so many operations, we had to order more single kennels.

We were fortunate in that an article was published in "Best Friends", which is the most popular animal magazine in America, and this has resulted in much more interest in the Center and more sponsors for our animals. We also had whole-page advertisements in the most popular animal magazines in Germany, Switzerland and Austria: "Ein Herz für Tiere" (A heart for animals), "Geliebte Katze" (Beloved cat) and "Partner Hund" (Partner dog); this too meant more sponsors for our animals.

The sad news this month was that Hanna finished her six-month placement at the Center and returned to Sweden. Hanna was a great person to have around and tackled every job efficiently and with enthusiasm. I hope we get more students from Sweden – this costs nothing for the Center as the Swedish Government pays the salary.

AUGUST

Dr Joe carried out nearly 100 castrations in his first month here. Sometimes we have problems catching the five dogs for him to castrate the next day! DRCS offers free castration for all stray cats and dogs, male or female. We will also give each animal a free rabies vaccination. We also provide this service for people who cannot afford the vet fees. I wrote to all the hotels on Koh Samui offering to castrate the local stray dogs and cats. Only six hotels took me up on this offer and it makes me sad to think so few people want to help and sort the dog problem on Koh Samui. However, the local Thai people have been taking advantage of our service and that is very encouraging (Dr Somsak charges 1,500 Baht for the neutering of a female dog). When we have progressed with our neutering service, and have controlled significantly the dog problem, we will then have a problem with the cats! We do try to neuter as many cats as possible.

Construction of the latest set of single boxes was completed and we now have 24. We have also organised the building of a new storeroom at the shelter as the current one will be used for the cats.

Pong decided that he no longer wanted to work with us but we found a good replacement very quickly. Sanoe lives in Bahn Taling Ngam and he works from 7 am until 4 pm helping Olivia. As Sanoe is an older man, he cannot go out to catch the dogs or drive a motorbike with sidecar; so he works only in the big shelter. He works very hard and in only one week, he weeded all the compounds and tidied them up. We always have loads of work with the dogs as they must be treated for ticks and fleas so Sanoe helps out with this too.

SEPTEMBER

We had a volunteer vet from Germany; Claire was with us for a month and assisted Joe every day. Another helper started - Bin is 17 and he assists the vet and also goes out to catch dogs.

Claire, and a volunteer from Germany (Sonja) participated in 'Cat Castration Day' this month when 16 cats were castrated in the one day. All these cats had been collected from the local temple and have now been returned. They will have a much better life as the females will not have to have two litters of kittens a year. Sonja works for an animal rescue organisation in Spain and she is saving them a lot of money as she can now carry out the male cat castrations on her own.

We continue to have a big success with our sponsorship programme and also help to rehome dogs to Europe, Canada and America (about 50 per year) and it is good to hear from their new owners that the dog or cat has settled in and is happy. Check out our web page, under 'dog transport', to find out about the cost.

OCTOBER

My husband, Werner, returned to Germany for three months for health reasons which meant I was alone at the shelter. The biggest problem was that I had to fight alone with the computer (Werner normally fixes all the computer problems). Thanks to Buddha, many volunteers turned up and the time has passed by so quickly.

This month, the number of volunteer vets increased to three: Julie and Suzie (from Scotland) joined Claire. All three volunteers had recently graduated and I was quite disappointed that they had so little practical experience. I expected that, coming from Europe, they would have more than a recently graduated Thai vet but now I know they are all the same. The girls worked extremely hard and, when not operating, went round all the 250 dogs, vaccinated and de-wormed them, and attended to any of their medical needs. Dr Joe was extremely patient and generous with his time as he had to supervise any surgical work they carried out. I think after four weeks of supervising the volunteer vets, Dr Joe was glad to see them go!

After this experience, I cannot recommend anyone to go to a newly-graduate vet who has just opened a practice. These vets have little or no practical experience but can still open up a surgery. In a private practice, an animal owner wants his much loved pet treated by the vet and not a vet student. Where does a vet get that experience? Only animal shelters seem to provide this but there are not enough shelters or similar facilities to

provide this service. When you visit a new vet, please ask him how much experience he has and how many operations he has carried out.

Khun Shompunute, Khun Goya and Khun Tanagon, the owners of the Tongsai Bay Hotel, made an extremely generous donation to the DRCS and, after consulting with Dr Joe, decided to buy a blood analyzer which cost about 400,000 Baht (8900 Euro). This has now been installed at the big shelter and is proving invaluable in the diagnosis of some of the conditions our dogs and cats have. Thank you very much Tongsai Bay, once again, for helping the dogs and cats on the Island. This kind donation is over and above the 5,800 Baht (130 Euro) they raised last year for us at a cocktail party to celebrate HM The King's birthday.

We received the welcome news that our application for a grant from the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) had been successful. The grant (US\$5,000) will go a long way towards the building of the single kennels at the big shelter. I think one of the reasons why we secured this grant was because our application was prepared by Allison, a native English speaker, who has much experience preparing these. Allison came to help out for a couple of hours a day for a month and has now been with us for six months! It would be very difficult for me to deal with all the English e-mails without Allison.

NOVEMBER

We wrote again to all the hotels on Koh Samui and five have agreed to take one of our donation boxes and leaflets. This month, we received some strange news from Dr Somsak who has decided he no longer wishes to have one of our collecting boxes in his surgery. We cannot understand what prompted this action; when we asked him, Dr Somsak said that we had enough money and that he would only have a collecting box for 'poor owners on Koh Phangan and other parts of Thailand' and not just those on Koh Samui.

With the help of Allison, we did a lot of work on our web page and have more dogs and cats on it, along with their stories. This can be a time-consuming job but it is worth it and the web page is our 'window to the world'. Slowly and surely, we are putting in ALL the dogs' stories and their pictures so you can show your friends your sponsored dog.

PLEASE SPONSOR A DOG OR CAT – ONLY 15 EURO A MONTH WHAT A LOVELY CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR YOUR LOVED ONE

Olivia decided this month that she wanted to return to Switzerland so moved out of the accommodation at the big shelter and she flies to Switzerland forever. We wish Olivia the best of luck and would like to thank her sincerely for all the work she carried out for DRCS. Dr Joe, our vet, has decided that he would like to move to the shelter so, about a week after Olivia moved out, Dr Joe moved in. Up until now, Joe lived in Chaweng and checked out the dogs at our house both in the morning and the evening. He will now come up to Chaweng three afternoons a week: Monday, Wednesday and Friday and as required.

We employed another helper to work permanently at the big shelter (Rid) and he will work with Sanoe. We also employed Suong who will be based permanently in Chaweng. When he learns to drive a motorbike with sidecar, he too can go out on the dog catching exercises. He will also be trained up as a vet nurse.

We have another trainee vet with us for a month. Rob is from Australia and has just completed his fourth year at vet school in Melbourne, Australia. He is with us until just before Christmas. His first day was spent introducing himself to the dogs and cats at my house in Chaweng.

Daeng, our most experienced dog handler, is on a 'sabbatical' for a couple of months. Daeng must go back to his mother as her house was flooded by the recent rains. So, for a month our No 1 vet nurse will be a No 1 housebuilder.

DECEMBER

I am going home to Germany for three weeks over Christmas and New Year. I am looking forward to seeing Werner and my parents. From 20 December to 10 January, you will be able to contact me in Berlin on 030 342 63 74. I will enjoy every phone call!

While I am gone, Allison will stay at the house to oversee things and greet the visitors. When the computer isn't breaking down, she will respond to all the English e-mails. I'm not worried about the 25 cats in the house and 45 dogs around the house as she will manage them all well. When she is bored, she can have fun de-ticking the dogs – that task never ends. Dr Joe and Don will oversee the big animal shelter and Sud too will keep an eye on them! I am sure that, in my absence, all the animals will receive the usual good service and many castrations will be carried out.

CASTRATIONS / OPERATIONS (JULY – NOVEMBER 2003)

	Dog (f)	Dog (m)	Cat (f)	Cat (m)	Others	Totals
July (from 15th)	32	19	13	1	0	65
August	65	16	12	4	1	98
September	66	21	23	16	7	133
October	58	16	29	7	4	114
November	49	8	26	10	3	96
Totals	268	81	103	38	15	506

We would like to thank everyone who has helped us out at the shelter – we have a constant stream of volunteers from all over the world who carry out a variety of jobs. Most of them spend their time fighting the 2 million ticks. Our sincere thanks go to: Nick, Kirsche, Maria, Tracey, Katy, Emma, Zoe, Nita, Sonja, Claire, Suzie, Julie, Rob (from Australia), Hanna, Andreas, Marcus, Eva, Kathrin, Frank, Allison, Andrea, Earladeen, Lisa, Fleming, Debbie, Donald, Rob (from Ireland), Angela, Marianne, Steffan, Andy, Gardy, Manny, Päivikki, Anjane, Tom, Dr.Yanni, Keum, Brigitte, Peter, Monika and Sascha and the many others who gave up their holiday time. I am sorry if I have missed someone out – I have problems remembering all the dogs names and it's more difficult with humans! The work the volunteers have carried out has been much appreciated, especially as a lot of it has been arduous (dipping dogs in Amitraz) and under the scorching sun. We appreciate them and, in particular, our four-pawed friends appreciate them. Maybe the ticks didn't appreciate them!

I would also like to thank all my Thai helpers for their work in the last year. They are: Dr Joe, Don, Daeng, Sakda, Suong, Rit, Sanoe and Bin. When I remind them about their daily duties, they are very busy!

It costs about 4,000 Euro to run DRCS every month and we hope we can count on your continued support so that we may make even more progress in the future. We believe that our efforts to make Koh Samui more animal-friendly has made it a happier and safer place for tourists and the tourists are thankful. Our four-legged friends (and some three-legged friends) are most grateful for your contribution. **Thank you very much for all your help.**

Have a merry Christmas and an extremely prosperous New Year.

Brigitte

Further information for sponsors you'll find on page "How to help" of our homepage