

Animals in the Heartlands

A kind, gracious, harmonious neighbourhood for all



Home is where the heart is.

There is no denying Singaporeans' growing fascination with animals. They adopt them as pets, they reach out to the homeless strays, they invigorate a growing industry in pet products and pet care and they play an active role in promoting animal welfare.

But let's face it, animals in the heartlands is a complex issue. This is partly because of the dense urban environment we live in where people of all cultural backgrounds and attitudes live together in close proximity.

While there are many people who love animals, there are also those who have no affection for them. This can lead to difficult relationships and sticky situations.

All the more, it takes a community to resolve a community issue.

This Guide aims to navigate the facts and myths surrounding the animals in our community. It also shares good practices vital to the welfare of the animals and positive relationships with our neighbours.



Let's put some heart in the choices we make that impact our community.

From our first thought of getting a pet to the decisions we make when we bring the pet home, we need to remember that they do not only impact us. They also impact the people around us.

For those amongst us who do not like animals, it is also important to remember that these are sentient lives with the ability to feel.

We deserve a pleasant living environment as much as the animals deserve a chance at life.



- 3 Being a considerate pet owner**
- 4 Caring for our pets**
- 7 Animals in our community**
- 9 But I really don't like animals!**
- 11 Stop animal abuse**
- 12 Sterilise, sterilise, sterilise**
- 13 Active citizenry**
- 14 We are neighbours, let's talk**

Are you a considerate pet owner?

Check the list to find out.

Dos

- Are your pets kept strictly indoors?
- Are they sterilised?
- Are they properly house/toilet trained?

Don'ts

- Do you keep your pet outside your home?
- Do you let them roam on corridors and staircases?
- Have you ever abandoned your unwanted litters in a public place for other people to find and deal with the problem?

Common complaints from neighbours



Incessant barking
Droppings not picked up
and disposed off properly

Roaming, defecating &
urinating on corridors and
other people's properties.

No one likes to live in these conditions. Our neighbours deserve our kindness and consideration too!



Then	Now
❖ It is cute	❖ I have no time to look after it
❖ All my friends have one	❖ I have financial difficulties
❖ I want companionship	❖ I am tired of it

Getting a pet is a big decision that involves the whole family. Take your time to make a decision as it is a life-long one!

Caring for our pets



Dogs have different temperaments and it is important to find out which dog is more suitable for you and your lifestyle before getting one as a pet. It is important to invest in obedience training as the ability to understand basic commands and good toilet habits will strengthen your bond with your dog.

What you may not know

- ❖ Dogs require companionship in order to develop healthy behavior. Isolation from contact with humans such as keeping them in a cage and tying them up for prolonged periods can lead to fear and/or aggression.
- ❖ Dogs left on their own for long hours may exhibit signs of separation anxiety such as barking or whining. This can affect the peacefulness of the neighbourhood.
- ❖ Microchipping, licensing, keeping dogs on a leash and picking up its poo when walked are all mandatory by law.



For advice on dog behavioural issues, contact Action for Singapore Dogs at info@asdsingapore.com.

Caring for our pets

Rabbits are vulnerable animals in the wild and have the inherited tendency to be cautious, shy and timid. As such, they are not the most suitable pets for curious young children.



It is a misconception that rabbits must always be confined in a cage. They should be let out frequently and regularly in the safe confines of your home for human interaction and exercise.

What you may not know

- ❖ Rabbits enjoy the presence of humans but do not like to be frequently held and carried.

Cats do perfectly well in a confined environment so long as all their basic needs are provided, such as food and water, shelter and a comfortable living environment. This is quite contrary to the popular belief that cats can only be happy and contented if they are free to wander outdoors. Besides, confining a cat keeps it safe.



Cats spend 80% of their time resting and are one of the easiest animals to litter or toilet train. They do have a curious nature and a natural agility so you do have to ensure they are safe by securing your windows with mesh.

What you may not know

- ❖ Cats have a social nature and can be socialised to seek out the company of humans and other animals.
- ❖ They prefer to defecate and urinate where they can cover their droppings.

 For advice on rabbit and cat behavioural issues, contact House Rabbit Society of Singapore at information@hrss.net and Cat Welfare Society at info@catwelfare.org.



How to prevent your pet from roaming

Many pets are reported missing every year. These animals often do not fend well on their own as they lack the skills to survive. They may starve or get knocked down by cars as they frantically try to find their way home. They are also vulnerable to abuse. Therefore, it is vital to secure your home to prevent them from wandering.



Dogs tend to be too large to fit through normal door grills. Putting a plastic panel on your gate however, can prevent your dog from charging at passer-bys. Rabbits can easily be prevented from escaping using a mid-height barrier at the door. Being agile climbers, cats need to be confined with the use of narrow grills or mesh.

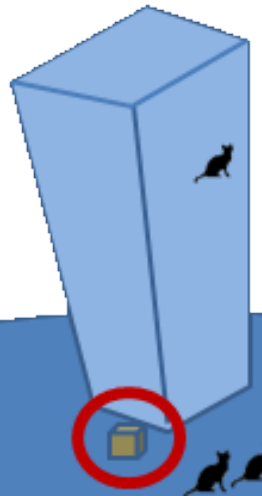


Dogs, cats and rabbits have the same natural curiosity and can all be trained to respect boundaries. Given the same unrestrained freedoms in the beginning, any animal would similarly be just as hard to discipline and confine afterwards. No one would leave their pet dog or rabbit to roam unattended, this should be the same for the cat.

So where do stray animals come from?

Stray animals did not come out of the forest, they are not wild. They or their parents are abandoned or lost from homes like yours and mine!

Pet abandonment is the biggest contributor to the stray population.



Under the Animals and Birds Act, anyone who is found guilty of pet abandonment can be imprisoned for up to 12 months, fined up to \$10,000, or both.



Abandoned



Animals in our community

Pet abandonment, and the resulting breeding, is the biggest contributor to the stray population. Owners who do not sterilise their pets and let them roam also contribute to the problem.

By not taking responsibility for their pets, not only do these residents bring problems to their community, they cause much suffering for the animals.

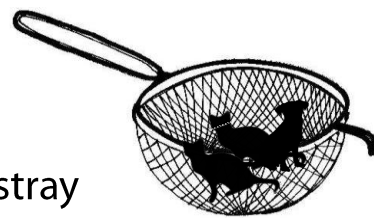
Why not just remove them?

Before Singapore adopted sterilisation as a means of stray population control in the 1990s, an average of **13,000 cats** were trapped and destroyed every year.

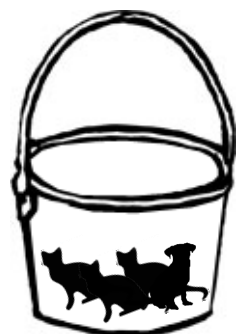
Culling alone did not have much of an impact on the number of strays. The stray cats that were removed were quickly replaced due to abandonment and prolific breeding.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) started a sterilisation programme in Singapore for stray cats in 1991. This good practice of sterilisation continues to the present day with the support of the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA). It has stabilised the stray population in many estates and resulted in falling culling rates.

It is also up to us to arrest the issue at the source – pet abandonment and irresponsible pet ownership!



Sterilised



Culled



If you know of someone who abandoned their pet or let them roam unattended, contact the Cat Welfare Society at info@catwelfare.org.

Sterilised cats spot a tipped ear



Part of the community

There is a more effective and humane way to control the stray cat population and that is through sterilisation.

The average life span of a community cat is five years. When they no longer breed and are responsibly managed, the stray population stabilises and reduces over time.

A case study of a central estate showed that a population of 20 in a 6-block area in 2001 was **reduced by 60%** by 2008. This is observable in many estates where there is a sterilisation programme in progress.

Did you know?

- ❖ Sterilised cats can no longer breed.
- ❖ Sterilised cats do not caterwaul (cat mating call).
- ❖ Sterilised cats defend their territory from new cats, stabilising the population.
- ❖ Sterilised cats are generally tame because of the hormonal changes.

There are many stories of community bonding over the care of community cats. They bring a smile to tired faces after a long day's work and old folks in their solitude.



To find out more or join the sterilisation effort in your estate, contact the Cat Welfare Society at info@catwelfare.org.

But I really don't like animals!

Fur, tongue, teeth and claws. These are what some people first think of when they think of animals. This and what they hear about animal instincts to hunt, mate and attack. Not to mention the health risks!

Animals possess awareness, emotions and intelligence. They are capable of communication, play and affection. Furthermore, domesticated animals like rabbits, cats and dogs rarely attack. Unless cornered, their first instinct is to flee.

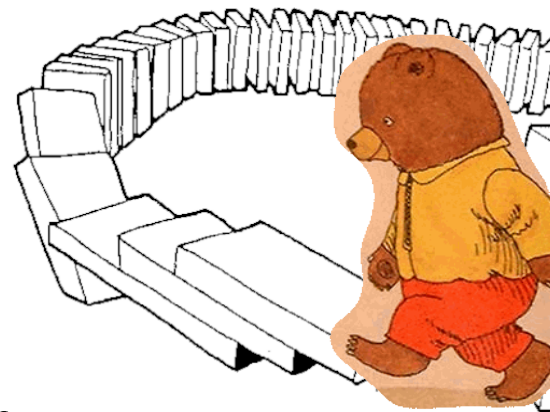
The risk of zoonotic diseases from animals in Singapore is less than 1 in 100,000*.

When faced with an animal-related issue, there is the quick-draw way of calling for their removal. This almost certainly means that the animal will be **caught and destroyed**. The results however are only temporary because most problems are a direct result of irresponsible human behaviour.

Problems persist when these behaviors aren't addressed.



* Based on statistics on *Leptospirosis*, a zoonotic disease monitored by the Ministry of Health since 2002. It is commonly associated with rats.



Do it for our children.

Animals are never far from our children's imagination. It is no wonder that they feature heavily in children's books and programmes, always with a life lesson.

What if our actions are flipping all those positive associations around? If there are better ways to manage our fears and concerns rather than acting harshly towards a stray cat or complaining so that it is captured and culled, would we consider them?

Issues faced	Solutions
❖ I am scared.	❖ They can be easily scared away by loud clapping.
❖ They enter my house.	❖ Put up a temporary barrier and/or spray water so that the cat unlearns its behaviour.
❖ They defecated on my plant/rug/slippers.	❖ White vinegar, lemon pulp, peppers, crushed mothballs are common cat repellents. Satay sticks in your plants deter the cat.
❖ They are loud and noisy.	❖ Arrange for them to be sterilised.
❖ They may hurt my children.	❖ Animals do not attack unless provoked. Teach children to appreciate but don't touch.
❖ They sleep on my car or bike and may scratch it.	❖ Use a cover or apply lemon or eucalyptus scents on areas.

Under the Animals and Birds Act, anyone who is found guilty of animal cruelty can be imprisoned for up to 12 months, fined up to \$10,000, or both.



Stop animal abuse.

If we take the view that it is only an animal is suffering, think again.

Violence is violence. People are recognising that acts of animal cruelty may be the tip of the iceberg. There is mounting evidence linking such acts and other crimes of violence. Even minor acts of animal cruelty like kicking or striking an animal have adverse effects on people.

Minor acts may escalate to more serious acts if not stopped.

Studies have also found that children who witness cruelty may be driven to suppress their own feelings of kindness and tenderness because they can't bear the pain caused by their own empathy for the animal. Over time, they can be desensitised to distress and suffering in others.

What to do when you see abuse



Take photos or videos. Note down as much facts and details as possible.



Call the police, AVA or SPCA. If the animal is dead, a post mortem, carried out by the AVA, may be requested.



If the animal is alive, take it to a vet immediately. Ask for a vet report.



Contact the Town Council and Residents' Committee for help in creating awareness in the neighbourhood. e.g. putting up flyers on notice boards and featuring the case on their newsletter.



Sterilise, sterilise, sterilise



Also known as neutering, spaying and fixing, sterilising your pets or community animals is a widely accepted means of preventing the overpopulation of animals.

Even if you have only one pet in your household, sterilising it can reduce the risk of uterine, ovarian and testicular tumours and cancers, and losing your pets when they run away to answer a mating call.

Isn't it cruel?

The procedure is done under anesthesia by a veterinarian.

Many religions including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam permit the sterilisation of animals on the basis of general good in maintaining the health and welfare of both the animals and the community.

It is also permitted as the lesser of two evils. This is in light of the reality that unwanted animals often face the risk of abandonment, abuse or being destroyed as a means of animal control.



To sterilise your pet, contact a veterinarian. For advice, contact SPCA at enquiries@spca.org.sg or the Cat Welfare Society at info@catwelfare.org.

Repeat littering offenders and first-time offenders who throw larger items such as plastic bags will be sent to court, where they may be imposed with a Corrective Work Order (CWO) for a maximum duration of 12 hours and/or a fine not exceeding \$1,000.

Active citizenry.

We all have a common goal – less strays on our streets.

Culling has not been effective in reducing the numbers. We need to stop pet abandonment and the multiplying of animals on our streets.

There are many volunteers who work towards this goal as caregivers in their estates. They sterilise the community cats and dogs with assistance from the various schemes provided by the SPCA, Action for Singapore Dogs (ASD) and Cat Welfare Society.

They also volunteer their time to help the Town Council resolve animal-related issues in their estates.

This includes educating errant pet owners and feeders on responsible pet ownership practices, responsible feeding practices and effective management of animals in the community.

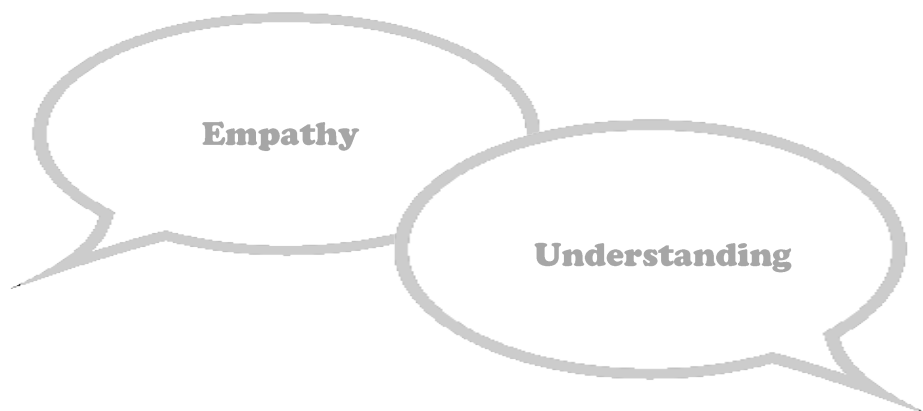


Feeding of community animals is not illegal, but littering is! So clean up after you feed!

We're neighbours, let's talk.

When there is an issue with a neighbour, it is the practice for some Singaporeans to escalate it to the authorities or on forum pages.

Differences can be better resolved through talk and consultation. It just takes that first step and a sincere desire to find a mutually agreeable solution.



The SPCA and Cat Welfare Society can help in resolving animal-related issues in your community in a non-confrontational, mutually beneficial manner.

Our choices, our words and our actions bear consequences on our family, our neighbours and the community we call home. If home is where the heart is, let's not forget to put some heart into the way we relate to the people and animals around us.



For assistance, contact SPCA at enquiries@spca.org.sg or the Cat Welfare Society at info@catwelfare.org.

Quick guide to relevant contacts

Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore

ava_cawc@ava.gov.sg

Action for Singapore Dogs **info@asdsingapore.com**

Cat Welfare Society **info@catwelfare.org**

Community Mediation Centre **mlaw_hq_cmc@mlaw.gov.sg**

House Rabbit Society of Singapore **information@hrss.net**

National Environment Agency **contact_nea@nea.gov.sg**

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

enquiries@spca.org.sg

Animal abuse/Emergency

Police **999**

SPCA **62875355 ext 9**

AVA **6471 9996 / 6471 7198** (office hours)

Neighbourhood Contact

