

Stray cats in Bulgaria and the experience of FOUR PAWS

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The reason for the presence of stray animals is the irresponsible attitude towards companion animals and the lack of control over their reproduction. Once they get on the streets, unneutered animals can reproduce unhindered and the survival of their offspring is influenced by the availability of food resources (mainly food waste, and not so much food given to them by citizens) and shelter in abandoned properties. The lower number of stray dogs in Bulgaria in the last years and the availability of suitable environmental conditions led to an increase of the stray cats population. Most of the big cities are facing the problem with the constantly growing number of cats but only a few have programs for population control. The absence of adequate actions is due to the lack of understanding of the problem on one hand and, on the other, the lack of specific legal obligations. The Bulgarian Law on Animal Protection includes only one article related to cats which says that in the case of increased population of ownerless cats the provisions for stray dogs shall apply. The law does not provide regulations for mandatory identification and registration of cats and the national database for animals does not include cats at all. The municipality administrations prefer often to ignore the cats issue as it is hard for them to assess whether the population is increased and when exactly is the right moment to take action. Despite the unclear legislation on the issue, there are still municipalities in Bulgaria with good practices for control over the stray cats population in a humane manner.

FOUR PAWS is the biggest animal welfare NGO in Bulgaria and is leader in all matters related to stray animals. Our experienced team works with both dogs and cats and implements capture-neuter-release projects on the territory of the whole country. In 2011 FOUR PAWS launched the first of its kind mass neutering campaign for stray cats in the Bulgarian capital Sofia. There have always been stray cats in Sofia and now with the reduction of the number of stray dogs, their population is rising. Most of the citizens are used to feed the cats but do not have the habit and the resources to sterilize them. There is no funding provided by the municipality for stray cat neutering programs and this is why FOUR PAWS decided to help. Everyone willing to neuter a stray cat can take a special coupon from the office of FOUR PAWS and take the animal to one of our partner veterinary clinics. The main goal of this program is to stimulate a more responsible attitude towards stray cats and to convince people that taking care of them means much more than just feeding them. Although this was a totally new project for the city, the initiative quickly gained popularity. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our team, partners as well as to the active cooperation of local animal lovers, the results are way above the expected: more than 4000 neutered cats in the period April 2011 – September 2014.

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