

# WORKING FOR ANIMALS

HELPING ANIMALS IN INDIA



DECEMBER 2016

## Why are ABC programmes needed in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas?

In 2007 the National Development Council of the Central Government of India decided that agricultural development needed to be encouraged and supported. In the words of the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) 'States (will) draw up plans for their agriculture sector... This will involve a new scheme for Additional Central Assistance to State Plans, administered by the Union Ministry of Agriculture' (<http://rkvy.nic.in>)

The RKVY (National Agricultural Development Scheme) has had ramifications for the shelters which Jeremy Townend and I started in Kalimpong ( Kalimpong Animal Shelter; 1996) and Darjeeling (Darjeeling Animal Shelter; 2006). The Indian Charitable Trust we established bought land and built both these shelters because we had witnessed the slow and horrible deaths of street dogs poisoned by the municipalities with strychnine. Animaux Secours and One Voice (both in France) provided the funds to build these shelters.

Both Kalimpong and Darjeeling municipalities agreed to stop poisoning dogs to control the spread of rabies, because, we argued (and it has now been scientifically proven<sup>1</sup>) that if dogs were killed, new dogs, possible vectors of rabies, would move in from surrounding villages to fill the empty biological niche (most often a rubbish dump). If dogs were spayed and vaccinated they would guard their territory against intruders. So far this co-operative effort has worked very well, the street dogs in both towns are looking healthy, and peoples' attitudes towards dogs are slowly changing from terror to trust. We see less dogs with terrible burns to their backs (having had boiling water thrown at them) and less dogs with a huge gash to their head, revealing the skull, as a result of a blow from the kukuri (Nepalese axe/knife).

However, there was always a need to offer veterinary services to some of the very poor villagers who depend on livestock. The vets of KAS and DAS have been frequently called upon to vaccinate, castrate (humanely with the use of anaesthetic), or to



Readers may remember the little puppy, Beau, who was rescued from the street. He had severe rickets and his front legs were straightened by plaster casts, applied by Australian volunteer vet, Julie Tolhurst.

Today Beau has grown into a strong and vigorous dog, full of love, and always craving attention, as you can see below.



A man brought his mother cat for spaying at Darjeeling Animal Shelter and also surrendered three kittens.



Fortunately APN (Sweden) has donated a cattery to both DAS and KAS.



An army man adopted one of the kittens, but DAS still has nine kittens which will be safe at DAS until they find homes.

assist with difficult births, treat lameness, and Foot and Mouth Disease (which can be treated, although it causes much suffering to the animal).

The Central Government of India really is trying to help the most disadvantaged villagers, who may not even be connected by road, and who depend for survival on crops and livestock. Frequently in these villages, the families build houses of woven bamboo coated in mud mixed with cow dung. Water is provided from springs and carried to the rice paddies via wide, hollowed bamboo trunks. To us it seems a very beautiful lifestyle, in the foothills of the spectacular Himalayas, but to the village people it is a daily struggle, ploughing fields, harvesting rice, pickling and drying vegetables in the sun, feeding animals, and so on. Hospitals and vets are not reachable. I have seen a boy dying of rabies, carried in his mother's arms. I never want to see such a sight again.

KAS and DAS try to work alongside the government in assisting these disadvantaged people. In West Bengal, in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas, where DAS and KAS are located,

there has been a tremendous uptake of Central Government funding under the RKVY project. In every Block (sub-division of Darjeeling District) a mobile veterinary team has been appointed, consisting of a vet, driver, two veterinary assistants, a vehicle, and plenty of medical supplies. In addition, many 'camps' are organised in which free veterinary care is provided to agricultural animals. The KAS and DAS team play their part by spaying and vaccinating dogs and cats gratis, the dogs being often brought by village people who have no way of controlling the breeding of their animals. At these camps, vaccinations are provided by the government for agricultural animals – swine fever, foot and mouth disease, Hemorrhagic Septicemia, etc. and KAS and DAS provide anti-rabies vaccinations, as these often seem to be in short supply.

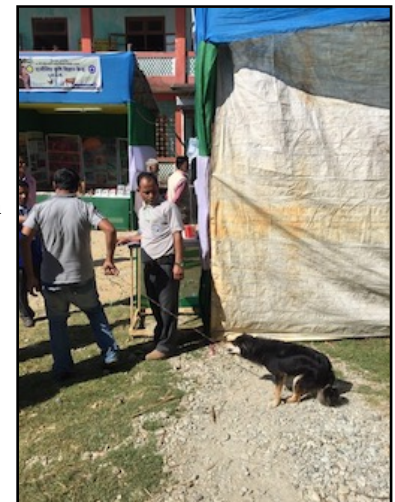
The detrimental aspect is that almost all vets go into government practice as soon as they graduate. NGO's find it difficult to compete because the salaries and side benefits are so beneficial for government vets. Fortunately at KAS and DAS we have a very senior and skilled vet who also has a private practice in town, thus supplementing his income.



The many tent displays encouraged the best agricultural practices in this remote area of the Eastern Himalayan foothills



Using sterile instruments, Dr. Deo Pandey, assisted by Lil Thapa, operates at the government camp. Below: A man brings a reluctant street dog from his village for spaying by the KAS team



In all, the Indian Central Government has provided over INR.236 crore (Approximately \$A46.5 million) to the West Bengal State Government in 2015-6 (See <http://rkvy.nic.in>)

You can help DAS and KAS control the spread of rabies among humans and animals, and thus limiting the terrible suffering it causes, by donating at: <http://www.workingforanimals.org.au/donation/> or filling out the form on the back of this newsletter.

Dr. Christine Townend (Founder, KAS and DAS)  
Christine Townend's book, *A life for Animals*, will be published by Sydney University Press early next year.

Footnote: Andrew J. Yoak, John R. Reece, Stanley D. Gehrt, Ian M. Hamilton, 'Optimising free-roaming dog control programs using agent-based models', in *Ecological Modelling*, Vol 341, 10 December 2016, Pages 53–61.



The people who live in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas often struggle to make a living. The photo on the right shows a woman who has threshed the rice from her fields and is feeding some to her hens. Left: Villagers frequently grow their own vegetables.



# Happy Places to Work despite Animal Suffering



I feel happy when I visit either Kalimpong or Darjeeling Animal Shelter. Maybe it is due to Nepali/Lepcha/Tibetan/Mawari hospitality or maybe it is just the trust and affection that the 20 staff feel for each other. Both shelters work in close co-operation, and have regular meetings to plan strategies, even though it takes 3 1/2 hours to drive from Darjeeling to Kalimpong. It's a beautiful drive, along a ridge through tea gardens and small villages, with views into Sikkim and the vast Himalayas suspended, as if on a tray, in the sky for mist, clouds and ridges hide the place where they meet the earth.

Dr. Sameer Chhetri, who was previously the vet at DAS, now works as a government vet, but still frequently returns to help as a volunteer in his spare time. Here he can be seen with Blackie, the dog who, back in March was rescued by DAS staff after someone threw boiling water at her, causing an extensive and painful wound. Now she is almost fully recovered.

Another volunteer vet, Cellina Gurung, also comes to DAS from time to time to help with the keyhole flank spay, a tiny incision from which the female dog rapidly recovers. However, DAS and KAS do not return dogs to the place they were caught until they have fully recovered. Only if an owner is going to watch over the animal, do the vets allow the animal to go home after waking from the operation.

If you are a vet who would like to work at DAS or KAS as a volunteer, you would be greatly welcomed. There is a comfortable room with attached bathroom, and veg. meals are provided.



# A Beautiful New Operating Theatre in need of Equipment



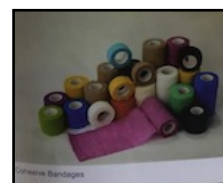
KAS is fortunate to have been donated the most beautiful Operating Theatre, its building designed by Dr. Julie Tolhurst, and Dr. Deo Pandey in consultation with French volunteer builder, Alain Dupont. The Operating Theatre was donated by Animaux Secours, France. Now KAS is desperately in need of operating equipment, at present using an old table constructed by a local metal worker. The new table will cost about INR1.75 lakh (about \$A3,450) and the new operating light will cost a similar amount. There is also a need for elastic, self-adhesive bandages which cost from about \$A1, depending on their length (see photo). In the last year alone KAS has carried out over 750 spays. Dr. Deo Pandey is now so skilled at key-hole flank spaying that he can do the operation in about 12 minutes, thus meaning the dog recovers quickly. (In France this operation can take well over 30 minutes).

**Above Left:** View of the OT from the front

**Below left:** Dr. Deo Pandey inside the OT

**Below right:** the self-adhesive, stretchable bandages so much needed, and far right, the operating table and operating light, also greatly needed, not only for Kalimpong Animal Shelter, but also for Darjeeling Animal Shelter.

Better equipment ensures the very best outcome for the animals which are being assisted.



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