

## A WORD WITH BRIGITTE AND WERNER RESCUE CENTRE KOH SAMUI – DRCS



If you had the pleasure of visiting the island of Koh Samui 15 to 20 years ago, you probably were very aware that the primary wild animal living on this tropical oasis was of the canine persuasion. Brought here by travellers from Southeast Asia and beyond as protection, companion and sometimes even for food, Thai dogs populated the island without restraint. In the early 1970's, as backpackers broke the trail for what today has the possibilities of becoming a 5-Star holiday resort sanctuary, there was freedom beyond measure for the packs of dogs that patrolled the lands.

However, as man sports a fickle affinity for the love of nature and wildlife, the dog population became somewhat of a burden to both guests and residents on this island in the midst of the Gulf of Siam.



BEFORE



AFTER

Hotels and resorts were virtually surrounded by the wandering hunter-gatherers that swarmed, seeking the attraction of friendship and lured by the aromas of 5-Star provisions. Options of eradication became impending. Poison and traps were set as safeguards. Man's best friend was facing a promising disharmony in their historic place at the right hand side of their master.

Brigitte and Werner Gomm were here when the discussions began of paradise preservation, but instead of joining the forces that abolished these despicable four-legged fleabags, they embraced them. Utilising their own resources, time and money.

**- Give us a good picture of what the island was like when you first came to visit. Was there a true harmony between the budding resorts and the free dogs that ran on the beaches of Samui? Or was there more than just a feeling that they were a nuisance from the start?**

"When we first came to Koh Samui about 20 years ago, the island was covered with homeless dogs and cats, and it was often dangerous to walk the beach at night. These hungry packs of dogs attacked everything that moved. It was always heartbreaking, for us as holidaymakers, to know that the day we had to leave the island was most likely the last day we would ever see the dogs we had been feeding over the course of our vacation. Hardly any dog had the chance to escape the killing.

The Government had no choice but to get rid of them. They poisoned thousands of dogs and cats, usually twice a year during the low season. The locals were informed via loudspeakers the night before."

**- On the 1st of April, the DRCS celebrates their 11th Anniversary. What have been the challenges over the years for the Rescue Centre?**

"It's been a huge challenge to neuter as many dogs and cats as possible, so that the government has no more reason to poison all of these innocent animals. And of course convincing the locals and residents on the island to support the DRCS and "Help Us Help."

"I think we are drawn to dogs because they are the uninhibited creatures we might be if we weren't certain we knew better. They fight for honour at the first challenge, make love with no moral restraint, and they do not for all their marvellous instincts appear to know about death. Being such wonderfully uncomplicated beings, they need us to do their worrying."

by GLENN R. WALLIS



We would like to mention that we have given about 40,000 rabies vaccines for the safety of the people and the animals in the last 10 years. In 2001, the Minister of Public Health visited our shelter, and was very proud to declare Koh Samui as the only rabies free zone at the time."

**- Who are your main sponsors? What support do you get from the local Government on Samui?**

"We receive no financial support from the government, BUT due to our intervention into the issues they also don't disturb us in any way, gracefully allowing us to do what benefits us all. The DRCS is an inclusive Thai organisation with a Thai President, Manager and Employees. All the foreigners involved are on a volunteer basis and receive no money for their work and time.

Silvana from Switzerland, has been collecting considerable amounts of donations in Switzerland and areas over the last few years, which makes her one of our main sponsors. Everyone who helps us is a hero in our eyes!



We also receive assistance from a few animal foundations in Europe where we apply for funds.

And an immediate source of sponsorship comes from the animal loving Tourists of course....."

**- What is your role in changing the possible future for the free dogs of Samui?**

"It is now a pleasure for the tourists to spend their holiday on the beaches of Samui and very rarely have to watch any suffering or dying animals. And if they do, they have now a number to call for help. In most other parts of Thailand this is not possible, and I am reminded daily how much has changed for the tourists, and how much more relaxed they can now spend their holiday."

**- Tell us about the Volunteer Program that helps you help.**

"We always welcome animal friends who want to help. Unfortunately, we are not in the position to pay for any work, accommodation or food. The volunteers are free to work when and wherever they want. Most volunteers quickly find out what they want, or what they are able to do. For most, it's quite a challenge to enter one of our big outside compounds at the shelter, since all the dogs come running at once 'asking' for attention. Of course, it is also possible to get educated at the DRCS by becoming a long-term volunteer. 'Learn to Help' is our motto! If we don't help, nobody will. Our present long-term volunteers have over the last 5 and more years, learned how to deal with an animal in need of help, and operate now in the name of the DRCS at the shelter and all around the island."

**There are tragedies surrounding Samui in regards to the issues with dog problems. Koh Phangan for example, had an unfortunate fire at their Rescue Centre followed by a complete purge of any free dogs on the island. Has Samui ever faced such challenges?**

"Thankfully, we have never experienced such a tragedy in the history of the DRCS. It could have a lot to do with the fact that the entirety of the DRCS is owned by Thai's, including our land, cars motorbikes and so on. We do want to stress that still countless dogs are poisoned or shot, if planned or not, we don't know. We have experienced that many dogs have disappeared from building sites, after the workers left. We have now started to put up signs in Thai and Burmese, to inform people that the dogs were vaccinated and treated against mange..., and therefore the dog meat will be inedible and may be poisonous for them."

**- How can visitors help?**

"Have a look around the place where you stay and keep an eye open for dogs and cats that have not been neutered. Every neutered dog has a green tattoo in the ear. Help us help by reporting injured dogs and cats to the DRCS! You call – we help! Feed the dogs and cats on the island, but please, no stolen food from the hotel/buffet, as you can imagine that will only cause trouble."

We celebrate our 11th anniversary on the 1st April and everyone is welcome to visit our Dog and Cat Rescue shelter in Baan Taling Ngam. Come have a snack and a drink with us and learn how the DRCS really works. Our 4-legged friends will be happy to greet you!"

