

Dog Rescue Center Samui

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Dear Animal Lovers

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Welcome to the first 'international' newsletter of 2004 from the Dog Rescue Center Samui (DRCS). As usual, we have been extremely busy and it just seems like last week since we posted the last newsletter to everyone (around 800 of you). Wish us a happy birthday because on 1 April 2004 we were five years old. Also, exactly one year ago, we opened the big shelter at Bahn Taling Ngam so it is a double celebration for us. Before April 1999, there was no vet on the island and it was DRCS which brought Dr Somsak, and now Dr Joe, to Koh Samui. I dread to think how many dogs and cats would have died long and lingering deaths if it hadn't been for DRCS. It is all thanks to you for supporting us and making this possible. Without your help, we could never have undertaken such a huge task.



Left to Right: Bird, Rid, Wit, Bin, Dr Joe, Don, Sakda, Brigitte, Somkrit, Srong

On our return from Germany in mid-January 2004 (I had been away for three weeks and Werner for three months), we were delighted to find that the Shelter had been running smoothly and efficiently in our absence. One of the volunteers (Allison from Scotland) had stayed in our house and managed the place very well, despite the abrupt departure of our manager, Don. The day I was due to leave for Germany, Don telephoned our President to state that he was not coming in for work ever again! I was so disappointed about this as I thought we had a very good working relationship. We knew Don was looking for a bank job again, but he had promised several times that he would give us at least one month's notice of his departure. This did not happen.

After Olivia went home to Switzerland in December, **Dr Joe** moved to the big shelter and settled down very well there. That means the poor man is on site when there is an emergency during the

night! Luckily for us, he takes this extremely well and treats the dogs and cats, regardless of the time of day or night. This was the best solution for the dogs and cats. We are very satisfied with his work. DRCS has never had a better vet and hopefully, he will stay a long time with us.

Our new manager, **Wit**, started in February and is an extremely hardworking colleague. He came from Surat Thani, speaks English and is able to drive a car. I do hope he will be happy and want to stay with us. Other new-starts include **Don, Somkrit** and **Bird** (brother of Bin). After the new-starts have been working in Chaweng for a while, they are sent to 'school' with Dr Joe where they learn how to set up an infusion, give injections, shave the fur prior to operation, and tattoo the animal's ear after the operation. All the helpers are extremely keen to help out Dr Joe primarily, no doubt, because of the useful skills they are learning, the secondary factors being that the operating room has air-conditioning and Dr Joe likes more of a disco atmosphere while he works! Sometimes I think we must increase the strength of the anaesthetic to prevent the dogs from waking up because of the noise of Dr Joe's music. However, when I watch 'Chicago Hope' on TV, I see there that loud music in the operating room is the norm so what's good enough for the patients in 'Chicago Hope' is good enough for our dogs. Sometimes, when I hear the Thai pop music, for me it sounds like frog croaking; however, the dogs think it's OK!

Daeng, our number one vet nurse, decided that, after nearly four years, he wanted a change. Thai style dictates that employees do not inform the employer directly that they are leaving! Oh no, the employer is left to gain the information from the remaining employees. Maybe they think I will hit them! Sano, one of the helpers at Bahn Taling Ngam, also resigned. This was after I asked him to fill in the holes dug by our ever-busy dogs. Sano claimed that the dogs liked the holes and possibly they do; however, I didn't fancy the idea of one of the helpers or volunteers breaking an ankle. When I asked Sano again to fill in the holes, he refused, then turned and went home, never to be seen again. It was difficult to work with Sano as he always had his own ideas and wanted to work on his own. Unfortunately, his ideas were not my ideas (sleeping in the store room, etc). Thereafter, we decided to employ more helpers from the Chaweng area and every day we send two of them to help at the big shelter.

Bin is only 17 years old and seems to have the same talent for handling the animals as Daeng. He is a young boy and sometimes needs a little bit of guidance (the naughty boy has started smoking!) but he's good at his work. **Sakda** is now our most senior employee, having been with us for four years. He continues to be reliable and helpful and now, thank goodness, has grown in confidence and no longer is frightened of dogs (always a good thing with a dog handler!). I hope he will stay with us for ever. **Rit** is still working only at the shelter in Bahn Taling Ngam because he lives next door there. He is a lovely gardener but forgets sometimes that I employ him not as a gardener but as a helper for the whole shelter. So, I have to remind him frequently of his duties but I have to do that with all the staff.

We now have nine staff: Dr Joe, Wit, Sakda, Don, Bin, Srong, Birt, Somkrit and Rit. You may wonder why we have so many helpers but, at any one time, we have two out on a dog hunt and returning dogs after operation, one assisting Dr Joe, two doing the hard graft at the big shelter, one is at the home-base in Chaweng, where the dogs and cats are who need every day medical treatment and the rest fill in as required. However, there is hardly a day which goes by when we do not have at least one absentee. There is usually no prior warning about the absenteeism, eg a wedding invitation, and I now have to fine staff (100 Baht/2 Euro) to ensure they telephone me to let me know they are not turning up for work (we don't pay them on the days they don't turn up either). I think I will put out the flags for the first week when we have full attendance.

As usual, we have had a lot of volunteers and, without the help of these volunteers, we couldn't handle the never-ending story of dog ticks and fleas. One of our long-term volunteers (Tina from Denmark) has been with us since January and works three full days a week. She has been experimenting and has decided that using flea and tick powder on the dogs is more effective than spraying them with Baiticol or Amitraz. The dogs much prefer this as they get a massage at the

same time! Frontline would be ideal but we cannot afford that. Please ask your vet if he can spare us some Frontline, even if it's gone out of date.

At **Chaweng Beach** we have been so successful with our neutering program that it is difficult to find a dog which is not castrated. When I am on Chaweng Beach Road at night, I only see big, fat dogs and am pleasantly surprised when we get tourist volunteers and sponsors from this area.

With the help of some volunteers, we caught all the dogs in **Chaweng Noi** (First Bungalow, Fairhouse and New Star area) and castrated, vaccinated and dewormed them. After a week, we returned them to that area and we hope that they will not be poisoned. However, the very same day as we returned those dogs to Chaweng Noi, three young puppies, which were too young for castration, were poisoned. None of the local hotel managers knew who had poisoned the puppies and suggested, again, that it was the tourists who had done it. Do you really think that tourists make a point of returning to the same area every three months to poison the dogs?

The puppies were owned by a restaurant the end of the beach whose owner would not allow us to castrate the bitch as she feared the bitch would suffer pain. Does the owner not think that the puppies will have suffered much pain because of the poison? We were allowed in the end to give the bitch an injection to prevent her going into heat but, unfortunately, the bitch refused to be caught. We will try again next week.

At **Choeng Mon Beach**, all looks fine but the one bitch we did not castrate now has a litter. They live under the terrace of a restaurant and we only can hear their noise. We will castrate the bitch when the pups are old enough. Hopefully, no new uncastrated bitches will move on to this beach. In **Meanam** and **Bophut**, we now have a lot of help from the hotels there and slowly we are controlling the dog problem. In **Lamai**, we always have the same problem: no volunteers. Without volunteers, we have no chance of rounding up the strays. In **Nathon**, we have received a lot of support from one of the market stallholders (a very nice Thai lady) and she is proving to be a valuable resource. All the strays make their way to her for feeding and they now get castrated as well as fed!

There are also many temples on the island which have lots of sick animals. It is the tradition here that unwanted dogs and cats are dumped at the temple for Buddha to take care. Because there are so few animal shelters in Thailand, the temples are the places of last resort of old, unwanted and sick animals. In the last few weeks, we have made a concerted effort and targeted many temples. The secret of treating animals in specific temples is to gain the support of the Head Monk; if he doesn't want to help us or protect the animals from the 'poisoning brigade', the animals will be poisoned when there are too many of them.

Since the building of the new shelter, many people think we have unlimited space and money for dogs and cats and we are constantly finding bundles of dumped puppies and kittens. Of course, we take the animals in and do our best for them. I suppose that's better than dumping the animals far away where no-one can help them. Many of the puppies and kittens are too young to have been separated from their mother and die after a while because we haven't got the mother's milk for them. We feed the puppies and kittens every three hours but know that, when they stop being interested in food, they will die. No amount of love or medical help will save them.

While in Germany, I thought a lot about improvements we could make to the running of the Shelter. This included the re-design of some of our single boxes. At that point, we had 24 single boxes for pre- and post-operative dogs and we need at least 35 as most of the dogs stay with us for a week until their stitches have been removed. Also, we have no specially designed kennels for the many litters of puppies which are 'donated' to us. So, we have now six new single boxes and four double-sized boxes (180 cm x 120 cm each). We are endeavouring to keep the different litters of puppies apart to prevent cross-infection. Each single box now has two parts, one for the dog on which to lie (they tended to eat their bamboo beds) and the other one for the food and water. Furthermore, the

bamboo beds tended to harbour germs which were not good for the dogs' healing wounds. Now we have lovely tiled boxes which are sparkling clean.

All the ten new boxes (and the old ones too) have been tiled which makes for much easier cleaning. As that new load of boxes was completed, I realised that we needed more boxes! The boxes were originally designed for the pre- and post-operative dogs but we have many dogs with wounds or mange which need to be kept separate for several weeks so they don't spread the infection. It will take time to gather more funds and, with your help, I'm sure we can do this. Last year, we had problems fundraising locally because of the Iraqi War and SARS, and this year the Avian Flu problem has not helped. However, now that the Avian Flu seems to have gone away, we hope tourism will increase, as well as our local donations.

Other building work at the big shelter included splitting Compound 1 into two with a 2-metre wall. If you would like to sponsor another metre of wall, this is still possible.

Sponsorship of one metre of wall = 25 Euro

Genevieve from USA is now our resident artist and is painting pictures of our cats and dogs on the walls. When she has finished that, she will paint the names of the sponsors on the walls. At the moment, we have only a few of our wall sponsors painted because the work with the dogs has been more important. However, as soon as you arrive in Koh Samui, come straight from the Airport and paint your name on the wall! That will be a great help.

We have also built an enclosure for our cats so they can play outside and not fear the dogs. The enclosure for the cats is super and it is lovely to let them run free. Up until this time, when a cat became fit enough, we brought it up to our house. At the moment, we have some 20 cats and 11 kittens in our house. Going to the toilet in the middle of the night, without turning on the light, was an extremely difficult task and I was always frightened I might stand on one of them! I didn't.

This being Thailand, we continue to have problems which, in another country, would be fixed within hours. Here, however, our telephone line wouldn't operate for many days so we couldn't receive or send e-mails. We occasionally get power cuts, particularly during the early evening when everyone puts on their air-conditioning and the local electricity supply becomes overloaded. Not surprisingly, during the last large outage, Werner discovered that our generator wasn't working and he spent ages fixing it. Just as he had finished, the power came back on. Oh well, next time the generator will work for us (I hope). The electricity outages will continue to increase because of the new houses and hotels being built with no accompanying increase in electricity generation and water supply. Currently, this is the dry season on Koh Samui and this means the island will run out of water. This happens every year, despite the very heavy rainfalls we get in November and December. In an effort to cope with the water shortage at the big shelter, we installed guttering around the roof and any rain is collected and used. At our house in Chaweng, we have a well which keeps us well supplied with water.

We received a particularly nasty virus on our computer last month and ended up having to get a new computer. (Of course this happened just when I was working on this letter)

Because of the increase in castrations/neuterings (jumped from two a day last year to six a day), we were having problems transporting the dogs to and from the big shelter. This was compounded when we had extra animals that had been injured and needed collected – we have about 12 dogs a day which have to be transported around and, as our big shelter is in the middle of nowhere, there is no alternative but to use a car. We had to end up buying a new car; it's the same as the one we already have, so now the older one is for the dogs to be transported about the island and we can use the new one for dog catching and on other business, for example, emptying our donation boxes, buying dog food, going to the bank – the list is endless. After Don our ex-manager left in December, **Srong**

became our only driver until February, unfortunately, he has a tendency to crash the car. It seems that the palm trees and doors jump out and hit the car rather than him crashing into them. He had four accidents in the one day! He confessed to two of them but, when I inspected the car, I noticed that there were four different sets of dents! Thank goodness for full insurance, although we can never get a reduction in our premiums because we have to make frequent claims. Now, four of our helpers can drive so they share the driving (and crashing).

We did a review of the amount of kilometres our cars and motorbikes have done in the last 5 years and it comes to more than 200,000 kilometres. That is equal to 5 times around the World or 4,000 times around Koh Samui (the ring road is about 50 km long).

I have spent much time trying to carry out a comprehensive survey of our dogs to enable me to keep the web page up to date. This has been almost impossible! It used to be that all dogs came to live at the shelter outside our house and I would get to know them. Now, we have the big shelter, some dogs are taken directly there so there is no photograph taken or name given to the dogs. We have set up a new system whereby we try to have a card for every dog with its photo, name and history (ie where we picked it up, etc). Each dog's medical history is stored on this card which makes life so much easier when it comes to reviewing its medical and surgical treatment. The card also contains information on the dog's sponsor so we know who to inform if something happens with the dog. This, as usual, is an on-going project and helpers are always very welcome to identify, photograph and name the new dogs. The dogs are now in ten different compounds and the task of identifying each dog can be a huge problem.

It only costs 15 Euro a month to sponsor a dog

Many people contact me and say things like 'I left a brown dog with you about six months ago. How is it?' I try my best to answer these questions but life gets difficult when I look round at the shelter and try and identify a specific brown dog in a group of 30 other brown dogs.

With many helpers, we spent nearly a whole day in one compound trying to identify the dogs with the photos we have. The dogs loved this as they think it's a great game to jump on top of us and try and eat the photos and kiss us. As we identified each dog, we put a collar (pleated raffia) on it and took a photo of it. We returned the next day to finish the task and were dismayed to find that most of the collars had been removed so we didn't know who had been identified and who hadn't. After this disheartening experience, I realised it was not possible to identify all our dogs individually. However, it is only a few dogs (who have sponsors) which we cannot identify. For those people whose dog I can't identify, I will contact you directly to let you know.

Castrations/operations mid-July 2003 to March 2004

	Dog (f)	Dog (m)	Cat (f)	Cat (m)	Others	Total
July 2003 (from 15 th)	32	19	13	1	0	65
August 2003	65	16	12	4	1	98
September 03	66	21	23	16	7	133
October 2003	58	16	29	7	4	114
November 2003	49	8	26	10	3	96
December 2003	59	17	26	5	6	113
January 2004	77	16	15	2	2	112
February 2004	73	22	9	4	6	114
March 2004	65	36	26	8	1	136

	544	171	179	57	30	981
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This table shows the number of castrations/operations which Dr Joe has carried out since he started with us in mid-July 2003. Possibly, in the future, our biggest problem will be the catching of six dogs (or cats) for castration every day to keep up with this schedule. Our staff, however, are old hands at the dog-catching business! Dog catching sounds easy but it's not; if a dog realises it has been sedated, it will try to escape and, tired or not, these dogs can move quickly. Also, they still have big teeth, regardless of the anaesthetic and many of them don't mind using these big teeth to try and stop us putting them in the cage. An added problem which has arisen in our task to neuter as many animals as possible is the attitude of some Thai people. Some Thai men think that, if we castrate the male dogs, they (the men) will not be able to father any more children, or the women think they will not be able to have any more babies. Cultural differences are interesting!

I long for the day when the helpers come back and say consistently that they cannot find any dogs or cats for castration. Ah, that will be a good day. Of course, our work will never end, even if that happened. Mange will continue to be a major problem, dogs will continue to get run over by cars and, unfortunately, dogs will continue to be poisoned by bad people. When Thai have problems with their neighbour, it is the norm to poison that neighbour's dog, cat or chicken, rather than tackle the problem face to face. That's Thai style.

In December 2003, we started a free service whereby Dr Joe provides free consultations, medications and vaccinations to all dogs and cats on the island. This is on top of the free castration/neutering service we have always provided. This service is aimed particularly at the local Thai population, many of whom cannot afford to visit Dr Somsak. I am glad to say that this service is being used by the target population and there is always a queue of people and their animals to see Dr Joe in Chaweng on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons.

Khun Goya from the Tongsai Bay is organising a programme about us on the local cable TV network so we hope that, after that, more of the local people will know of our work and help us catch more dogs. At the same time, we will print new flyers (in Thai) which can be handed out around the island. Our new manager will contact the local radio and ask for its support.

Our thanks as ever go to all of you who have helped us so much. I can't name all of you because there have been so many who have helped. However, my particular thanks goes to our President (Khun Theerasud Chaichalremwong) for his unfailing support of our work. Without him, there would be no Dog Rescue Center Samui as we purchase everything in his name. Farangs (foreigners) have no power in this land (among others we cannot buy property) so I am grateful to our President for his wonderful help.

It costs about 4,000 Euro to run DRCS every month (the dog and cat food costs 1,700 Euro per month) and we hope we can count on your continued support so that we may make even more progress in the future. 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.**

Best wishes

Brigitte

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