



Raewyns Cat Rescue



One woman's crusade to help the stray and abandoned cats and kittens in Auckland.
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Trip to Rarotonga by Raewyn Taylor

Instead of going to Rarotonga in July 2012 for a break, I decided to postpone it until September and combine my holiday with the annual Round Rarotonga Road Race.

What an experience! I participated in the four organized runs during my 8 day stay; I had an amazing time, met sooo many lovely people and had a holiday to be remembered forever. I ran, ran and ran and walked, walked and walked and danced the nights away – the music was awesome. The Rarotongans are just the best and so it goes on.

On my first day in Rarotonga I visited The Esther Honey Foundation (EHF) which was a 20 minute walk from the Edgewater Resort where I was staying. They are currently the only animal clinic in Rarotonga and doing an exceptional job. I quickly found out the people who work there are volunteers with the exception of Greg who manages the daily running of the Foundation. Essentially the 'staff' will take time off from their permanent place of work and volunteer whatever time they can to help out at EHF. While I was there, one vet (from Italy) had been there 6 months and was not moving on yet; another vet had been there two weeks (American) and was staying for a period of 6 weeks. Another vet (American) was just out of training had arrived two days before I left and he was going to be there for 4 weeks. Whilst volunteers meet all their personal costs there is actually accommodation onsite for the 'staff'. Other people I met at the Foundation were not trained vets, just helpers like me and one of the girls was from New Zealand.

I was onsite from 8 – 10.30 am each morning and the routine was to take the food/water dishes from all the cages/compounds. Then take out the litter trays, bedding and newspaper that lined the cages and during this time the dogs were barking as all they wanted was their breakfast. The removable trays from the cages were taken out, washed with janola solution, rinsed with clean water, dried and then put back into the cages as were all the litter trays. Clean paper and bedding was then put into all cages and the feeding started and the noise subsided. The vets gave medication and discussed various 'patients'. The dogs that had been in cages during the night were put outside on a leash, with cover available if they wanted to get out of the sun and dishes of water. Whilst all this was taking place, we were inundated with muma chooks and baby chickens and of course the daddy roosters. It appeared they weren't very welcome here, but I snuck them the leftover food out of the cages!

All the food dishes were washed, put in a janola solution and then rinsed with fresh water. Then finally there was the washing of the bedding (lots of it); it was never ending. Morning tea was after all the animals had been fed.

At any stage local people could turn up with a dog or cat. Some of these had been booked in for desexing; and some were injured. EHF does not charge for the services they offer but some people do give money, animal food or whatever they are able to give. I was very impressed with the amount of desexing done here.

There were two mature dogs up for adoption whilst I was there and a few puppies had come in that would eventually be up for adoption.

There would have been 8 x mature cats that had been desexed and were awaiting adoption. They were housed in what is called 'The Monkey Cage' which consists of a two-roomed building built up off the ground with wire mesh sides and thatched roof with lots of poles and shelving for the cats to perch on.

My two 'charges' were a beautiful little puppy called Twilight who had been hit by a car and a tortie cat who had a broken jaw and one eye and was in a very poor state as she had not been able to eat for a long time.

Twilight had already had her back leg amputated and been desexed by the time I arrived. One of her front legs was in a splint. She was very distressed, not able to stand up etc. so I spent a lot of time with her to help strengthen her remaining back leg so she could push herself up, move around and by time I left we had taken the splint off and she was able to walk short distances by herself and was much happier. I did not want to leave her!

My little tortie girl was operated on whilst I was there and had her damaged eye removed and jaw realigned. I spent many hours with her getting her to eat and giving her lots of cuddles. When I left she was eating by herself and had even tried the dry food. When she has put on weight and got over her first operation, she will be desexed and re-homed.

I was so impressed with the animal situation in Rarotonga compared to what I found 20 years ago during my last visit there. There are still a few dogs roaming around but nowhere the same numbers I had seen in the past; there were none that I was concerned about in regard to their general condition. As my mode of transport was walking and running I was not chased once by a dog nor did I meet any 'wild' or 'aggressive' dogs. There are too many three legged dogs and this is due to them being hit by cars; the majority of these accidents are caused by tourist drivers. The Rarotongans are used to the animals on the road and drive accordingly i.e. slowing down, or going around them.

I did come across a lot of goats and as in New Zealand I have a problem with them being tethered without shade or water. On my walks/runs I checked out every goat I came across. The main problem I found was that they had wound their rope around an object and were unable to move. Of course, I had to free the rope and have a pat and talk to the goat concerned. They are really cute, pretty little animals.

Fish poisoning is prevalent and EHF had numerous dogs and cats in residence due to this. One of those affected was a little puppy named Molly – I renamed her 'Molly Wobbles'. She was an owned puppy that had been brought in and trying to get her up on her long legs proved a mission. She was just beautiful and even when she was lying flat out on her side and could not stand up, she had a beautiful smile and her tail never topped wagging. She went home before I left the island as her owners were able to continue the therapy for Molly Wobbles.

There were numerous cats with the fish poisoning as well. Initially, the animal is put on a drip just to keep them hydrated. They are not interested in food and are unable to move and just lie in the cage. They seemed to be drained of all strength that they may have ever had in their little bodies. It can take up to a week before they show any positive sign of improvement. I supported each animal in a standing or sitting position whilst trying to get them interested in eating and also trickling water into their mouths.

They have a separate enclosure for pregnant and nursing muma cats. My first kittens of the season were in Rarotonga. One dear little muma had four kittens of her own, then she fostered a little orphan and then another and ended up feeding six kittens. The other muma had two dear little kittens and as I left Rarotonga, the ginger muma still had not given birth.

I also came across the SPCA compound at the base of the 'mountain' and called into their kiosk/hut down at Avarua. The ladies were telling me how that had recently formed a new 'committee' and hoped to start to raise the funds required to progress with buildings and other requirements needed to get their SPCA up and running again. I feel this is probably a very long way away. Nevertheless, in the mean time they are working with animals as they come along and take them to EHF for treatment etc. Even though the SPCA have been fundraising (I do not know for how long), there was no money in the kitty as it had mysteriously disappeared and thus a new committee had been formed.

The EHF has a [website](#) if anyone is interested in reading more about this organization. There are ways we can offer support to this Clinic. I took over packets of expired sutures and we are sending bandages over in a month's time when a work colleague goes over on holiday. I also left the volunteers with numerous copies of the SPCA Animals Voice magazine and some copies of the Womens Weekly. The EHF website [lists](#) ways people can help; so if there is anything that you can help with then please email [us](#) as we have someone going to Rarotonga in early November.

The EHF was founded in 1994 after US tourist Cathy Sue Ragan-Anunsen visited Rarotonga in 1993. ESTHER is the name her grandmother and HONEY is the name of a Rarotongan dog that she met whilst holidaying in Rarotonga.