

TNR succeeds in Cook Islands

The Cook Islands are unique in the South Pacific in regard to the condition of their dog and cat populations. More than 15 years of veterinary care with emphasis on making spay/neuter available to every family and every cat and dog has made a significant difference. The Esther Honey Foundation has now treated more than 30,000 dogs and cats, and has desexed more than 12,000.

The situation is definitely not perfect yet, but compared to any other South Pacific island travel destination, if the tourists who write to us and participate in on-line travel forums are right, the Cook Islands animal population is noticeably healthier, fewer in number, better cared for, and perhaps as a result, much better natured than those in competing destinations.

Before the Esther Honey foundation came to the Cook Islands, we were advised that there were 6,000 dogs and 8,000 cats on Rarotonga. In 2010, 26 Esther Honey Foundation volunteers spent 93 days going door to door island-wide counting all dogs, recording the number who were desexed, were intact, or were of indeterminate status. This census found that there are now 2,000 dogs on Rarotonga, of whom 78% are desexed.

One of the most rewarding aspects, for me, is that we have been able to get to this point without killing healthy animals.

We now plan to reach a 70% steril-

ization rate on the outer islands where this has not yet been accomplished, having already sterilized more than 80% on Mangaia. We expect to reach at least 70% on Atiu this year. Our only obstacle there is overcoming the reluctance of the men who use dogs to hunt wild pigs. They fear that sterilization will make their dogs less successful hunters.

Thanks to **ANIMAL PEOPLE** for your guidance in achieving our goals for the dogs and the Cook Islands. We hope our results will encourage other nations in the region to begin their own 70% programs. If we had not been the only agency in the country providing full veterinary services, and providing a default shelter in addition to treating animals on outer islands, we could have achieved this goal in a fraction of the time.

An advantage of staying long enough to become a member of the community is that we have been able to demonstrate day in and day out for more than 15 years a different way of regarding and treating animals, contributing toward cultural change.

— Cathy Sue Ragan-Anunsen
President & CEO

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