

Give disabled pets a second chance too!



ANIMAL CARE: Borris and, below, Pirate

I'M something of a serial volunteer; for as long as I can remember I've been involved with organisations across the globe doing something or other for someone or other in my spare time.

Much of this 'work' has been related to disability; be it assisting disabled students in Toronto, guiding a blind athlete in Tokyo or organising an exhibition in London to mark the UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Yet in all my years as a volunteer I have never considered working with animals, perhaps because the mantra 'people are more important than animals' rang in my ears from a

By SARAH CLARKE

young age.

This focus on people held true until I arrived in Bahrain where I saw at first hand incidences of animal neglect.

There were encounters with scrawny cats scavenging in the garbage and confrontations with abandoned dogs trying to eek out a meagre existence in the desert.

Not that the situation in Bahrain is any worse or better in the cruelty stakes than anywhere else. It's just that I noticed it more. Before long I did my bit and adopted two abandoned dogs.

However, for some reason, despite working

all these years in the disability field, it never occurred to me that animals could be disabled – or if it had it didn't feature significantly on my radar screen.

Until, that is, a call came from the Dogfather: "Sarah, I need your help. A badly injured dog has been left with me. She needs her leg amputated and I don't have the money to pay for the operation ..."

And the rest, as they say, is history. That dog, Pirate, became something of a poster girl

for the Dogfather not only helping to raise the funds for her operation and ongoing care but also raising money for several other dogs and cats at the Dogfather's refuge which were in need of treatment and care.

For unfortunately she's not alone: there's Boris the six month old kitten with smashed legs who happily gets around on his knees; the Five Musketeers, five sickly kittens (now sadly four) hand-raised since birth after their mother died; BD, the grossly overweight bulldog (as wide as he is long), who seems only to have been fed during his short life (and has recently been adopted and put on a strict diet and fitness regime); Necklace, the brain damaged kitten, who is gaining strength and agility by the day through good nutrition and lots of love and care; Sugar, the blind dog, who gets around just fine as long as the furniture isn't moved; and Transy, the hermaphroditic cat, who has 'plumbing' problems and requires an operation to correct it.

All these animals have been disabled through neglect, cruelty, accident, old age or genetics.

And all have been abandoned perhaps because of ignorance but more likely because a lot of time, money and effort are needed to care for a disabled pet.

Should we be devoting our energies to these

animals or could limited resources be more effectively spent on healthier pets?

This is a tough question with no easy answer; there are vociferous arguments for and against.

Since watching the devotion of the Dogfather, my position is wavering; if we are unable to feel compassion for these unfortunate disabled animals, what chance do we have of meeting the needs of the fit ones? Indeed, research has shown that teaching children how

to care for animals at a young age engenders qualities of compassion, cooperation and respect that extend beyond the animal kingdom and set them up to be well-rounded members of society, able to respond with empathy to the needs of those less fortunate than themselves.

Certainly the Dogfather doesn't feel he is wasting his time. And, if he is able to care for these animals without adversely

affecting the other animals at his refuge, then we should respect and applaud his devotion. Indeed, he is not alone; Google 'disabled pets' and be as surprised as I was at the number of websites devoted to the subject. Surely all these individuals and organisations can't be misguided as well?

If you would like to support the Dogfather's work, please call 39629889.

● Shortly after the story was written, Necklace died in Tony's arms and Transy had internal bleeding during her operation and didn't make it either.

● In the UK, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' (RSPCA) figures for 2007 expose a 34 per cent increase in convictions for cruelty to dogs (1,197 in 2007), a 15 per cent increase in convictions for cruelty to cats (277 in 2007) and a 12 per cent increase in RSPCA cruelty investigations (137,245 in 2007).



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