

Report visit SPARE Cairo

12 Octobre '08

Sunday morning I leave home for a working visit to SPARE Egypt, it is 3 hours drive to the airport Paris, everywhere in the fields I see the hunters and I think of the deer, wild boards and foxes that will not make it through the winter.

The flight goes smooth and I arrive at the airport, where I am being picked up at 23:30h. The roads are crowded, Cairo lives at night.

We drive through Cairo direction Saqqara, where Amina, chairman and founder of SPARE, lives.

Monday morning, Raoef, Amina's husband and their dogs welcome me, as always the sun shines. Raoef shows me the soap factory where handmade olive soap is made (see also our webshop).

I walk around their grounds, accompanied by the donkeys that live there. About 15 donkeys have found a safe and new haven in Saqqara. The house is surrounded by the desert. After noon we unpack the suitcase with donations from AMCF and we go to the shelter.

The shelter is in town and on the way there I see how many stray dogs there are, everywhere you see them, lying, walking, sitting. But really shocking are the donkeys, hundreds, pulling too heavy and too high stacked wagons, they trudge desperately forth. Some show the years of beating and too little food, sorrow is in their eyes. When they are not needed, they are on short ropes in the heat of sun, no food, no water, no shade. It breaks your heart.

In the shelter I meet the wonderful team, there is a lot of talking and I look around. I get a tour through the shelter and see the different open air spaces where the dogs are released for a couple of hours a day in groups. The volunteers know which dogs are good with each other and which don't. Little ones together, males / females separate. Dogs that are not in the open air spaces are kept in cages. It all looks very clean and proper, the dogs look good. Of course there are scared dogs, timid dogs and fierce dogs. Some have been terrible abused and are not approachable by strangers, there are tucked away in a corner and I wonder about their quality of life, not being able to play, not being able to be caressed and always scared. It is an issue all welfare workers are familiar with.

The volunteers and personnel work really hard but lack knowledge about animal behaviour, this is not due to not wanting to learn but due to the fact that they have no resources available. The vet's are doing a tremendous job and have it very hard in Egypt. Veterinarian is a professional people laugh at, if you are not good enough to become a human doctor you become a cow doctor is the general opinion. So if you choose to become a vet because you want to help animals, you are almost ashamed of telling this because people laugh at you. The education for vets is very limited, f.e. they do not learn how to neuter.

Last year the WSPA has arranged that veterinarians came to teach the SPARE vet's how to neuter..

Behind one of the dog spaces there is the cat shelter, here you find cats missing a leg or being blind. But they look fine and the cattery is small but very clean.

Behind the SPARE building there is a new building, the purpose is that on the ground floor a dog hotel is being constructed (to make money) and on the 1st floor a very nice and big cat shelter with a little piece for cat hotel and on the 2nd floor an education room. Construction however had to stop because they lack 10.000 euro, now dogs are being put with 3- 4 in one cage, more dogs SPARE can not take, there is no more room.

This brings up the eternal questionin a city with approx 1 million stray dogs, what use is a shelter for 100 dogs, how do you convince the population that you need money to save animals when they do not have money to feed or dress their children? What a huge task is there still in Egypt.

Amina and her team work really hard to go into discussion with the population on the Islam and animals, she made a little book and speaks to people in the street about this. She explains that when people treat their donkey well, it will be stronger and last longer. She explains that when a dog is vaccinated and neutered it can not bring diseases or make puppies.

I have a huge respect for this task these people have taken upon themselves. How easy it is to speak about Animal Welfare when you are behind your computer, nice and warm with a cup of tea.

After the visit to SPARE we go to the Cairo apartment of Amina, here she feeds every day about 25 stray cats, she neutered them too. In her apartment there is a little puppy and kitten, both found and abandoned. There are too small for the shelter so they have each other to play with.

Amina has become this year the Ambassador of World Animal Day, the media picked this up and now she is being invited at a TV show. I do not join her since this will be broadcasted really late at night and I would not understand a word anyway.

In my room I think about the dilemma every welfare worker faces

- Live as a stray dog in the street, finding your own food, with a big change for being run over of abused/ mistreated however being free
- Or in a shelter with food, care, love but not free

The change that a dog gets adopted in Egypt is pretty small esp. for a stray dog.

Tuesday

I go back to Saqqara and driving through the little very old village I see how the people live, there is no running water, no sewage, there is electricity, children play on the street, the street is just sand, dogs, cats and chicken run free, you can not find a female dog who has no puppies.

In Saqqara I go to the two 6 month old puppies that Amina found, they are so glad with attention and run around. I go outside and help with washing the donkeys, the donkeys are enjoying it and start rolling in the sand the moment they are clean.

In the afternoon the volunteers from Donkey Sanctuary arrive, they come every week to take care of the donkeys, you can see that these people have a heart for animals and are very professional.

Amina and I try to find a dog I saw earlier with a huge wound; unfortunately we can not find him. We drive around and I see Egypt that tourists do not see. The garbage on the street, families on donkeys, people selling fruits and food and children, many children every where. Running across the streets in front on cars that are driving too fast and do not seem to care. As Amina says 'if people do not even care if they hit a child how can you expect them to care for an animal?'

And again everywhere donkeys some have no more strength left, heads down and it kills you to see this. Donkeys are really cheap and when they are 'finished' they are usually just left to die somewhere.

After the television show with Amina where she talked about animals in the Islam, the Bible and in Buddhism the phone does not stop ringing, she gets invited in many radio and television shows, a camera crew wants to shoot in the shelter and this kind of publicity is unique in Egypt, it is priceless.

Wednesday

I spend more time with the dogs in Saqqara they enjoy this a lot. In the afternoon a snake man comes to clear the house and surroundings of snakes. It is interesting to see him work.

At the end of the day we drive to Cairo and spend the night in the apartment, tomorrow I have to get up early to go to they airport.

Thursday

Around 7 I am in the cab, driving to Cairo airport. And 12 hours later I am back at home where 15 happy doggies wait for me.

It is good to be back home, I love Egypt despite the way they treat their animals.

So does it have any use the work the AMCF does? Sending a package a couple of times a year with medicine, toys, collars etc? Does this solve the problem?

No unfortunately not, but it does help to make the life of the animals in the shelter a bit better. In most shelters there is no money for toys for example and when you look how happy they are with it. Also it is a signal to the volunteers and people that work there, they see that we care and want to help, it gives them a bit more courage. And courage is what it takes to see the suffering every day, to defend you every time for helping animals, to engage a discussion every day.

That is why every support has use and is necessary.

That is why we care.....

If you want to help SPARE you can buy a Horus soap (handmade of pure olive oil); they are 3 euro (excl shipping) and are in two versions the Scarabee and the Eye of Horus. The profit entirely goes to SPARE.

Soekran (bedankt!)

Betty

President/founder Animal Medical Care Foundation

All photos of the visit can be found on

<http://picasaweb.google.nl/animalmedicalcarefoundation1/VisitSPAREEgyptOctobre2008#>

More information on SPARE can be found on www.amcf.nl (shelters).