

Our experience with TAWESO (Tanzania Animal Welfare Society)
October-November 2010

Tina Nurse & Kim Willoughby



**Sterilisation
theatre
under the
Baobab tree
in Dumila
Village,
Mpwapwa
District.**

Introduction

Arriving on the afternoon of October 26th, we were warmly greeted by Dr Thomas Kahema for the start of our Tanzanian veterinary experience. He had kindly invited us into his home and delightful family for the next four weeks. We promptly found ourselves 'off-roading' through the bumpy, sandy tracks surrounding Dar es Salaam; it was soon apparent there is lack of infrastructure. Pleasantly surprised by his outstanding English, we were immediately put at ease by his friendly, laid back manner; a quality we have subsequently seen throughout Tanzania.

TAWESO (Tanzania Animal Welfare Society)

TAWESO www.taweso.org is a grass-root community charity, established two years ago in April 2008. It is a non-profit, non-government organisation with a major aim of promoting animal welfare in Tanzania. It is run by a group of dedicated people (including veterinarians, teachers and members of the community) working mainly on a volunteer basis.

Rural Area Project Work: Mpwapwa District

The highlight of our trip – Tanzania at its most raw!

Mpwapwa district in the Dodoma region of Tanzania is situated 700km west of Dar es Salaam. It is easy to allow your thoughts to neglect that your host nation is one of the five poorest in the world whilst staying in the lovely and comfortable Kahema home. On quick exit from the city of Dar es Salaam, we became witness to the reality of life for 80% of Tanzanians. It is hard: the reliance on self-subsistence agriculture. The long, hot trek for water with donkey or bicycle. The houses made from sand/mud bricks. But always a smile greeted us - never a miserable face. Always a welcoming gesture. Many a lesson can be learned from these people.

We were stunned by the landscape; mountains surrounding bright red sand and native Acacia and Mbuyu trees with villages scattered throughout. There are a number of issues regarding animal welfare: the large stray dog populations and the conditions for working oxen and equids to name a few.

Our work in the rural area included deworming and treating 200 working donkeys and sterilisation of 50 dogs and cats plus deworming 100 dogs and cats.

Each morning, we set up our operating theatre under a tree and conducted surgery surrounded by scores of fascinated locals.

Not used to close human contact, the dogs resented restraint. The dog catcher (a previous donation from SNIP International charity in England) was an asset, coupled with Richard Itaba, our extremely capable and experienced Animal Field Officer. Not only did he make the work run smoothly, he was also great company. Dr Thomas is an excellent teacher; having completed hundreds of sterilisations in the name of animal welfare, he is a talented tutor, giving both direction and clinical freedom. Nowhere else, will you find a teacher as easy-going or patient. Many children walked the distance to our clinics barefoot, presenting their puppies in cradling arms for veterinary attention not usually within their reach. As word spread, the numbers slowly grew. The appreciation was obvious and the need for this kind of care more than necessary. It is not a short-fall in husbandry that prevents these pets from being in tip-top condition. Amenities are difficult to find in the Mpwapwa area. Many dogs were under-nourished and presented with various parasitic infections; especially ticks and mange. Prophylaxis is not a reality.

The donkeys are used for carrying loads on their backs, mainly water cans, charcoal and foodstuffs such as maize. Donkeys were seen carrying up to 80kg of water, harnessed across the withers by means of abrasive rope or strips of fabric. The best form of harnessing we saw was that made of hessian material, comprising two sacks joined together and draped over the withers; still very abrasive.

Donkeys were brought to us for deworming in the main, but presented with a number of concurrent complaints, all of which involved wounds across the

withers and backs from poor harnessing. All working donkeys had evidence of chronic skin changes and a significant proportion had ulcers. One particular case had a large abscess measuring ~10cm in diameter! The donkey had not been rested prior to our examination.

It is evident that time is invested in food-producing animals, where an economic return can be reaped. Whilst donkeys are a necessity to the villagers, veterinary care, attention to injuries and rest of affected animals is overlooked. TAWESO addresses this mindset through organized community meetings to educate donkey owners, not just about care of their donkeys and the provision of this care, but their perceived value and the importance of healthy, happy donkeys: "Mtunze Punda Akutunze" (Take care of the donkey and the donkey will take care of you.)

TAWESO are seeking funding to expand this aspect of their work.

Sterilisation around Dar es Salaam

Dar es Salaam has many dogs and cats including pets, guard dogs, and strays. TAWESO takes initiatives from time-to-time to address health and welfare problems including low-cost sterilisations.

Towards the end of our time in Tanzania, we were involved in this work. A total of 60 dogs and cats were sterilised. This was our final transition that sealed our new-founded surgical confidence!

Conducting Humane Education in Primary Schools

We conducted Humane Education classes with primary school pupils on animal kindness and they were happy to share and learn on the basic needs of animals especially companion animals,

Summary

We have had the ultimate African experience and have been accepted on all levels into the friendly and warmly welcoming Tanzanian communities. We have visited a wedding, gone to church, been invited into homes and accepted into the family of Dr Thomas. TAWESO is still in its infancy, with only two years under its belt and no major funding. There is wide room for expansion, to maximize the good work of the charity. Animal welfare laws have come into force only this year, but there is a long way to go; largely due to a lack of understanding and the means/materials to improve.

TAWESO have plans in place to receive a cat trap donation, which will provide them with the means to capture and sterilise the large population of feral cats around Dar. With further support and funding and the determination of Dr Thomas and the small team at TAWESO, the charity aims to become full time

and acquire the amenities and materials to dig deeper into the welfare issues of the communities it currently attends and reach further into the vast areas in desperate need of its support.

Emily & Tina



Scroll down for more photos







