

Spreading happiness AMONG STREET MONGRELS

Strubel – he is the hero around Boudha. Many of you might not know him yet but he is the reason and inspiration for a cause that has helped rescue and rehabilitate many like him.

Strubel was once infected with CTVT (Canine Transmissible Venereal Tumor), a sexually transmitted disease, as a result of which he had to be castrated. Now, while he lazes around the grand white stupa enjoying the sunny Saturday morning, without a care in the world, his human friends are out catching his dog friends. Saturdays at Boudha is a day of health and hygiene treatments for the dogs; and a day of gratifying service for the volunteers of the Street Dog Care (SDC) Camp.

According to the Kathmandu Animal Treatment (KAT) Centre, there are over 35,000 stray dogs wandering the streets of Kathmandu Valley, and most live in miserable conditions, suffering from abuse, malnutrition and diseases. Strubel was one such dog, till he got lucky once he caught attention of Andrea Bringmann, founder of SDC.

"We Help Dogs" reads a sign at the mobile booth of Street Dog Care camp set right in front of the main entrance to the Boudha Stupa. Bringmann, the cheering founder, is busy with her volunteers managing records with pictures and case files of different dogs. All the while, Strupie, an anxious looking dog strolls around the booth whereas an adorable dog named Brownbear rests at its foot.

The day's program is to give rabies vaccinations and necessary treatments.

"We normally treat 10 dogs on average but the program is really about trying to give some happiness to the dogs," shares Bringmann, patting



volunteerism
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Strupie who looks amused. While some volunteers spread out looking for street dogs, some gather around a dog named Sally and prepare her for a bath.

Sally seems dejected and ailing. She is infected with mange, a skin disease caused by parasitic mites that causes hair loss and the formation of scabs and lesions.

"Because stray dogs are in constant contact, it's really hard to prevent the disease unless we seclude and cure them," informs Parisha Thapa, a local veterinarian who recently got involved in SDC.

As Parisha and the team lather up Sally with antibacterial shampoo, she gathers a huge audience. Sally, on her part, seems to be enjoying her open bath and being the centre of attraction for once without any looks of contempt.

The special shampoos and lotions they use have been donated from Switzerland. It relieves dogs from itching and helps their fur to grow back.

"Once we had this lotion used over Tashi who had lost all fur due to mange, and then the fur grew back so beautifully, it was like a magic lotion," shares Franziska Oertle, a Swiss volunteer working closely with Andrea. She also writes an autobiographical newsletter from Strubel's perspective in their website www.streetdogcare.org. Oertle adds shaking Strubel's paws. "It's really fun working with dogs and we do it for no other reason than that we just love dogs."

Since the camps are held in public areas, they attract a lot of attention and help build community awareness and support. Often, people approach Andrea on the spot and offer to help out.

Pat Friesel was one of those people. He came across the camp last September when he was strolling around the stupa, and has been working with SDC since then. Andrea introduces Pat and shares how he'd wake up early in the morning to look for infected dogs and carry them over to the treatment center at Maharajgunj in taxi.

A small black puppy, badly infected with mange, is brought at the camp by one of the volunteers. While people gathered around the booth comment that the puppy is not likely to survive, Andrea is still hopeful and decides to take it to their newly opened center at Paika for special treatment.

The puppy is named after Pat, both of them being so skinny.

"Yes, Pat looks really fragile, but we've had some amazing success stories," he says with a smile. "Strupie was run over by a bike and couldn't walk. But now he's all happy and fun loving. Another dog's mouth was all blown up with tumor but he recovered wonderfully after some treatments."

He bends to pat Yemi, another dog that will be taken to the center, and adds, "Tough dogs in Kathmandu, eh!"

Andrea has been running the camp with help from her friends and volunteers and says it has not been too expensive or too hard.

"Anyone is welcome to volunteer for us and even stay at the center. But they have to love dogs," she says.

It's 11 in the morning, and as they start wrapping up for the day, most of the volunteers sit behind playing with the dogs. Ultimately, it did seem that the program was not about giving vaccinations or baths or sterilizing the street dogs, but really was just about making them happy. Strubel is happy!