

Elpida 40

July 2017



GREEK ANIMAL WELFARE FUND

Over 57 years of action for animals in Greece



Striving to improve the welfare of animals in Greece

Welcome to the 40th issue of ELPIDA!

You may be aware that the title of our magazine translates from the Greek as "HOPE". World events seem just as mired in difficulty and danger now as they did back in 2001 when I first started working in the field of environmental protection. It was shortly after the attack on the twin towers in New York, and during the dark days that followed it really seemed as though we might all unite and pull together to bring hope back to the world. Sixteen years down the line and the need for hope - ELPIDA - is as great as ever, not least for the animals of Greece. The country is mired in two crises - financial and refugee - and the impact on both people and animals continues to be felt every day and in all kinds of ways.

Nevertheless, we do not despair. Even though we frequently find cases of animal neglect and suffering, our people are out there, bringing relief and improvements to the lives of animals everywhere they go. Alongside the darker situations we encounter there is much that is positive, and in this issue we have brought you some of the success stories - such as the day we provided life-saving treatment to a mare on the island of Sifnos or the time we witnessed the healing effect caring for animals can have on vulnerable children. You will also find news of some innovative approaches we are taking to the way in which we engage with Greek society.

Through these, we aim to see Greek people taking responsibility for the lives not only of their companion animals, but wild, farm and working animals too. So, you can read about the renewed determination we have to get our messages into Greek schools, and our ambition to engage with an island community to support its existing social structures in cooperating to develop really good animal welfare locally. It's not something that can successfully be imposed or even offered by any outside agency but a set of attitudes that has to grow from within - if it is to have a lasting effect.

Then, we also want to show you how important our supporters are to us, and begin to introduce some of them to you. Jill Neville shares the hope we have for a better future for animals in Greece. She is part of the solution - as you and other readers of ELPIDA are - supporting us in our work; helping us to build connections between caring individuals and the communities they live in; changing outdated attitudes and practices in ways that make a lasting difference for the animals. Do join Jill in sending us the story of your connection to GAWF - we'd love to hear from you!

Daphne



Daphne Mavrogiorgos, CEO, GAWF

Our front cover image shows working mules and donkeys in Lesvos sizing up our Equine Team.

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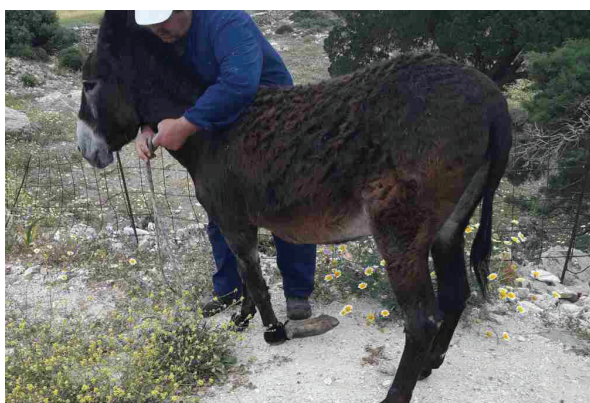
Anna Stamatou

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Equine Team

News

With half of 2017 now behind us, the Equine Project can look back with satisfaction on its record of having seen 712 working equids to date. Our team, vets Kleo and Michael and farriers Giannis, Aris and Dom, have already travelled all over Greece, aiming to revisit as many locations as possible so that once animals have been treated, their improved level of welfare can be maintained. It's a busy schedule that nevertheless always includes one or two new areas, constantly increasing our reach.



The length of the left forehoof on this donkey shows how long it has been since the poor animal was able to put it to the ground

So far, we have been back to: Crete, Paros, Naxos, Serifos, Poligiros, Stavros, Chalkidiki, Soufli, and Andros. New to us this year have been the island of Sifnos and the Mount Athos. In Sifnos we were surprised to see how young many of the owners were, while the members of the religious communities of Mount Athos had never received a visit from an animal welfare organisation before, and the monks seemed very keen to grasp every scrap of knowledge, advice and treatment that our team could offer.

Alongside two of the visits we have planned for the rest of the year we will be running seminars, one for veterinary students and the other suitable for people with varying levels of experience. We will be providing training in farriery, dentistry and veterinary care, helping those that attend to build on their existing knowledge and skills.

A Bad Day and A Good Day

Sometimes there is nothing we can do for an animal beyond giving it a gentle ending. On Paros, we were asked to see a donkey that had at some point clearly suffered a serious fracture to one of its forelegs. The poor animal was trying to support itself on the joint instead of the hoof, which must have been agonising. In consequence, it had developed deformities and pain on its uninjured side in its attempts to carry as much weight on it as possible. Persuading owners that the best thing they can do for their animal is to let it go, is a delicate task that never gets any easier. Thankfully, as there was no hope of recovery, this owner took the decision to allow us to euthanise his donkey, so we returned the following morning and carried out the procedure, quietly and respectfully. No matter how smoothly things go, putting an animal down always leaves us feeling utterly wretched but we take comfort in knowing that we are acting to prevent a great deal of suffering.

On the first day of our visit to Sifnos, a young boy brought us his mare. She had had a fall the previous evening and become trapped under a pile of planks. Although we were able to clean and dress her relatively superficial wounds, it was immediately clear that she was heavily pregnant and also in the throes of an attack of colic severe enough to put her life - and that of her unborn foal - in danger. It was pure luck that we happened to be on the island. The mare needed emergency treatment and, to everyone's relief seemed to respond quickly. Nevertheless, she had to be closely monitored and our team saw her three times more before leaving the island. By the time we left it was clear that both mare and foal were going to pull through and there were some very happy owners wishing us a safe journey home (and a very happy team that knew it had just saved two lives).



Kleo administers emergency colic treatment to a pregnant mare on Sifnos

Neutering Project

Neutering Programme

We have found that the success of our neutering outreach visits is highly dependent on the support we receive from local groups. They are the ones with crucial local knowledge and who will carry on caring for the animals after we have left. This year we have returned to Astypalaia island, Kalambaka, and Litochoro, and in addition have twice been to a location that was new to us - Syros island - in response to repeated pleas from welfare group, "Syros Cats", which, as it turns out, runs an excellent shelter with a team of committed volunteers. There is also vital support from the local vet and the municipality, both of which have warmly embraced our programme.

So far this year, we have neutered/spayed a total of 427 animals (264 through the Outreach Programme, 83 through the Friendship Programme in the Athens area, and 80 as a result of our response to Emergencies & Appeals).



GAWF's neutering team with local volunteers at Litochoro

Healing through caring

"SOS Children's Villages" is a non-governmental organization that provides for children in need. The children are looked after in small, family-style groups, usually composed of an SOS 'parent' and between four and ten children living together in a house. AA responded to a call from an SOS Village outside Athens, for help to control its cat population and give its members longer, healthier lives. When we arrived, we found a very pet-friendly community in which the

children have become deeply attached to the colony of semi-stray cats that wander around the site. It was enormously satisfying for our team to hear the children calling each cat by name and watch the cats magically appear from under cars, over walls and round corners! The bond between the children and the cats they so clearly want to look after is heart-warming to witness, and it is certainly encouraged by the Village's house parents since they can see the beneficial effect it has on the children in their care.

A close shave for the siblings

The area of Litochoro is located at the foot of Mt. Olympus, tallest mountain in Greece and home to the ancient gods of myth and legend. It is a beautiful place but perhaps due to the dense forest and wild countryside that surrounds it, it seems also to have become thought of as a convenient place for people to abandon a dog they no longer want! One consequence of this terrible betrayal of trust is the high number of stray dogs wandering the streets of the town. Despite the efforts of the active local welfare group, some townspeople resort to acts of mass poisoning in a cruel response to the problems caused by the overpopulation. During our most recent Neutering Outreach visit, the local welfare volunteers brought us a pair of sisters to be spayed. As soon as the first one, known as "Smaragda" (Emerald), was on the table, our vets could tell that there was something seriously wrong. She was haemorrhaging badly and it looked as though we might lose her. When she vomited under sedation we could see she had eaten raw intestines and the penny dropped: she had been poisoned! The vets immediately administered an antidote and put her on a drip. Their quick reaction helped Smaragda to pull through. On the following day, she was given a life-saving blood transfusion as well, and now both she and her sister (who, as it turned out, had also taken poisoned bait and also needed treatment) are healthy, and being cared for by the wonderful volunteers of Litochoro. Had we not been in town that day, the outcome for the sisters would have been very different.

Education Project

Spreading our welfare messages through schools

At GAWF we understand the importance of taking our messages to young people, and this continues to be one of the main areas we focus on. We know that influencing attitudes in Greek society will lead to better lives for animals and it is the young - whose values and identity are still being formed - that represent our best hope for future change. Whether through asking kids to write about their own pet, make a drawing of their favourite animal or move like a snake, getting them imaginatively to place themselves "in an animal's shoes" is an important first step. Each of the approaches we have used has been greeted with enthusiasm but for our team in Athens it's a challenge to reach children that live outside the capital even though hundreds have enjoyed our Animals' Lawsuit programme during a visit to the Hellenic Cosmos Cultural Centre. We are ambitious to make every child in Greece think about how animals should be treated, and that means being in schools.

We are now working with professional educationalist, Ioanna Kontozisi, on the design of an educational pack that will be approved for use in the Greek state school system and be available to teachers to explore with their class within the normal school day and not as an additional activity that would mean extra work for them. To start with, the series of lesson plans, which will be supported by a range of complementary materials and resources, will be aimed at primary school pupils. (We have not forgotten the older age group; we plan to get to them at a later stage)!

Although the Ministry of Education keeps moving the goal posts, at primary level the national curriculum currently has a two-hour slot in the weekly timetable that teachers must fill from a list of ministry-approved lesson packages. The teachers choose, and getting onto that list is our target! If there is a package suitable for each year group available, there is a good chance that every pupil will have engaged with our material at some point by the time he or she leaves primary school.

As Ioanna plans our project, she will be keeping in mind that Greece is still desperately struggling with not only an economic crisis but also a refugee one. It is now harder than ever to make a case for choosing an animal-focused programme over, say, a humanitarian one, so ours will have to be as imaginative, innovative and user-friendly as we can possibly make it. Ioanna has started working with teachers to identify exactly what their dream package would look like... our next step will be to make sure we design and supply it - aiming all the while to develop a generation of Greeks that takes a thoughtful, compassionate and ethical approach to animals and the lives they lead. Our ambition is to see the children that have enjoyed our series of lessons emerge as the responsible owners of the future.



Almost a giraffe from Marlena

Model Island

Creating a Model Island for Greece

We have started working on an ambitious vision we have of creating a "Model Island", which is an innovative approach to the promotion of animal welfare, and one that makes a lot of sense to us. The idea is that we will engage over approximately two years at every level of a carefully selected island community in Greece and, working with the authorities (municipality, police) and the other existing social structures (schools; teachers; parents' association; animal welfare association; environmental group; cultural association etc.) will introduce and establish the idea that through adopting high standards of animal welfare the islanders can take a new pride in their community, strengthen their island's identity (or - whisper it - their "brand") and promote it to visitors in ways that will bring all kinds of benefits - not only to the island's animals but also to the islanders themselves in terms of business opportunities and economic development.

For us, it's a way of putting ourselves out of business. That's what we want to become... redundant! Because once a society adopts the welfare message at every level, and sees the benefits of having done so, it will wish to manage and maintain those standards on its own - without the need for pressure from GAWF or any other organisation. Better still, it will become an example of success and best practice that other communities in Greece will wish to adopt!

So... we're sending Madeleine Theochari our new Project Manager to kick things off at a location that is still under wraps, as the process requires sensitive handling in the initial stages. Magdalini is experienced in the field, as she has been working on other public participation and community engagement projects for a number of years. She is excited at the prospect of beginning this one which, she says, has a "solid, methodological framework" and follows the kind of public participation principles that have been tried and tested elsewhere by IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare), who are providing us with guidance based on their own experience with this innovative, holistic approach.

Madeleine explains that through using local resources and encouraging the whole community to participate and take responsibility, better and more appropriate solutions to local problems can be identified. The methodology she will be employing is highly flexible and can be adapted to take account of the particular circumstances, traditions, issues and concerns of each community, as well as the human resources it has available. Not everyone will want to participate; not everyone will devote the same amount of time and energy. If it is successful, we will see the emergence of a sustainable set of solutions to welfare issues and the control of stray populations on the island. We know it will be a long road but we have an ambitious vision and we are determined to make it work.



Madeleine Theochari, Model Island Project Manager

The Domestic Cat...Hero or Villain?

GAWF argues for the control of the stray cat population through neutering principally from the welfare viewpoint, and we often encounter opposition to it from people who regard it as “unnatural”. Philippos Katsiyiannis is a naturalist, nature photographer, and secondary school teacher. He lives in Patras, Greece, and argues for the control of cat populations from the perspective of one who is concerned about their impact on wildlife. His article first appeared in Greek on a Facebook page dedicated to the reptiles and amphibians of Greece and Cyprus, and we reproduce this extract with his permission.

The domestic Cat - A Naturalist's View by Philippos Katsiyiannis

Mankind first domesticated the cat in order to take advantage of its impressive ability to catch all kinds of small animals: from insects and rodents through to venomous snakes. However, we humans now support a vast population of cats through providing them with food. If we were to allow them to exist within the natural food chain, cat populations would be far, far smaller than those seen in Greek villages today, since they would consume the easy prey and their numbers would decline until they were in balance with the available food. This is what happens with wildcats in nature. Wherever we provide food to a large population of cats, we are maintaining an artificially high density of predators.

Researchers in the UK and elsewhere asked owners to keep a record of all the species delivered to them by their cats over the course of a year. Tens of millions of victims were counted. These were caught by well-fed animals responding to an instinctive urge to hunt. It is beyond question that cats do an enormous amount of damage to small, wild animals - after all that's why we domesticated them in the first place. So, are the cats to blame? Of course not. No cat can be blamed for simply obeying its instincts. So, when discussing the environmental effect of cats, it makes no sense to demonise them since we are considering an essentially man-made problem. Nevertheless, a problem is exactly what this is. Geckos and lizards, insects, rodents and snakes are equally blameless. If we are looking for a guilty party we must turn our gaze on ourselves. Having formed emotional bonds with them, our natural reaction is to defend cats. It is hard for us to come to terms with our own responsibility for the needless destruction they cause to so many innocent wild creatures.

So, where does our personal responsibility lie? Well, when I keep an animal that instinctively hunts and kills wild animals, it is my responsibility to prevent it from doing so. If I resort to the position that “it's just its nature to do it” I am being deliberately blind, because my cat is neither part of the natural environment nor would its numbers ever be so great in nature. In any case it's my animal and I am responsible for its actions, just as I would be responsible if my dog attacked someone or killed a chicken. Clearly responsibility lies with humanity, which created the problem in the first place.



So, what should we do? Well, in rural areas it would be better not to keep a cat at all. In built-up areas, the problem isn't as acute, since there just aren't so many wild creatures around for cats to kill. Next best thing to not keeping a cat at all would be to keep yours indoors as much as possible, and certainly at night. Keeping it well fed may also help. Finally, you may want to consider putting a bell on its collar - this will help warn birds and rodents of its approach but it won't really protect other species.

Whatever you decide, please, don't let me hear people arguing that lizards are a good source of protein and that we should therefore allow cats to prey upon them naturally because among other things it's good for the cat's mental health! It just shows we haven't understood the mechanisms that are at work, and how much our human priorities have disrupted the balance of nature.

Introducing GAWF's Chair

Phyllis Dunipace joined the GAWF board in March 2015 and became Chair a year later. She has substantial experience of work as a trustee over many years, especially supporting children and young people. She was awarded an OBE in 2011 for services to children and families arising from her role as Director of Education and Children's Services in a London borough.

Phyllis has a strong personal commitment to animal welfare and has been involved in cat and dog rescue for over twenty years.

Involvement in GAWF brings together her professional expertise and personal interests.



Phyllis

Meet our Donors

Jill Neville writes...

I have always been an animal-lover. As a child, I rejected dolls in favour of stuffed animals and amused myself for hours teaching my toy animals spelling and arithmetic in my bedroom 'school'. I particularly like dogs and later in life I was able to adopt a canine companion.

I first visited Greece when I was in my twenties (I am now 72) and like so many others, I fell under the spell of this lovely land. I've lost count of the number of times that I've enjoyed summer holidays on the mainland, the Peloponnese and in the islands. Greece has never lost its fascination for me.

So, many years ago, when I heard about the Greek Animal Welfare Fund, it seemed an obvious choice for me to support animals in a country that has given me so much pleasure.

Fifteen years ago I moved from Britain to live in Australia and although the journey to Greece is longer, I still go island-hopping regularly. This year I will visit Folegandros and Amorgos, Of course, I still support GAWF too.

Regarding animals in need in Greece, I can remember many years ago being upset to be told that some of the stray dogs roaming the beaches near Athens were pets

left behind by their owners. Why anyone would leave a pet to fend for itself is beyond me. I would go without food myself rather than abandon my dog.

It is always important to support charities that help animals - they are so often the innocent victims of human failure. In these difficult economic times in Greece, it is vital that GAWF has the resources to help as many animals (and their owners) as possible. People already living in poverty need assistance for their pets and the animals that are their livelihood.

Let's all do whatever we can to help the animals and people of Greece.



Jill Neville

Your gift can make a difference, with only £30 we can safely neuter a stray cat, improving its life and controlling the local population humanely. Please, make a donation today.

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