



Devoted to the cause of cats

Committed to improving their welfare and treatment

Newsletter

Winter 2008

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**We are a small group of
committed individuals
working for cat welfare
in Elounda/Agios
Nikolaos, Crete**



How we spend our time

2008 has been a busy year for VOCAL. Each year sees us dealing with more problems on the street with injuries, sickness, and lost, orphaned or dumped kittens. More and more people, from further afield, approach VOCAL for help in many different situations. Our time is also spent fundraising and networking, so that we can raise money for all we do.

Every day of the week, whatever the weather, Hannelore visits areas all over Elounda and Agios Nikolaos putting out food. We use over 30 kilos per week. She locates cats that are in need of medical treatment or neutering and builds up their trust by visiting regularly. Here she is on a very rare occasion that she is sitting still!



Sometimes people in the community want us to rehome cats and kittens around them because there are just too many. Our resources are often stretched because we are frequently asked to take cats to be sterilized, pay the fees, and make trips to the vets or loan out our equipment.

Holiday visitors ask us to help cats throughout the summer, and especially when the season is ending, as hotels and apartments close for the winter. We are asked for advice about travel regulations, including the legal process for taking a cat back to Europe or the UK.

Local people call us when there is a sick, poisoned or injured cat in the area, and ask us to go and deal with the problem. Others want to know about good vets, vaccinations, health issues, medications and general well being issues affecting their own cat. The calls needing assistance are many and varied.



We try to respond to all calls for help, but it is not always possible. Some people think we are paid for the work we do, this isn't the case and we are all volunteers. It may seem like an easy task to raise money, and therefore we have lots of cash to

spend helping others on what is after all, a community problem. This is also not the case. Every euro we raise is a difficult and a very time consuming business. It is also perceived that this is our duty, our responsibility, and that we should never say no. This is a misconception. It is our choice to help. We commit our lives, our free time, our homes, and often our own money to help. Sometimes we have to say no, though these occasions are rare.

Some days we may receive twenty calls for help. For the first time caller, unaware of our limited funds, time and volunteers, they expect instant results but try as we may, we can't perform miracles!

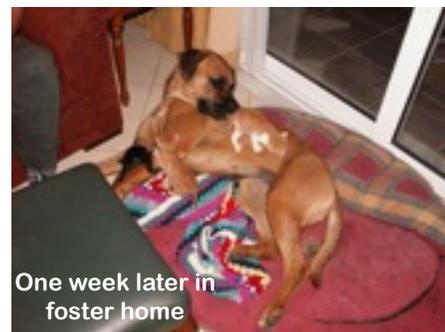
We cannot fix all the problems for all the people, for all the cats on Crete – or even in this area of Crete, though we try very hard. Please help us and support us to improve the lives of cats on Crete. If you are a visitor or a resident and you have a concern about cats; if the wellbeing of animals matters to you, please consider not only what VOCAL can do to help you, but what you can do to help VOCAL. Only then will VOCAL truly become a force to be reckoned with in its work to help stray, feral and owned cats on this island that we love.

Rescue Stories



We were called to a rubbish bin in Agios Nikolaos, after reports of

kittens crying in a dustbin. Investigation found a plastic bag with 3 kittens inside, half drowned, limp and cold. Fortunately one of the kittens was still strong enough to make a noise, alerting a passer-by. Quick action saved their life, and now they are living in Germany.



Unfortunately sometimes the work of VOCAL involves helping cats to be relieved from their suffering, through euthanasia. Thankfully this is not a regular occurrence. The cat pictured below was reported to us by many people who visited Mochlos during the summer. Cancer of the nose was eating his face away. Although Mochlos is a long drive from Elounda, we monitored the



situation with a local taverna owner and visited regularly to try to help. He was very wary of people and it took many visits before we were able to relieve the suffering of this poor cat.

Good news tails!

VOCAL has lots of tails(!) to tell about rearing kittens and sending them on to wonderful new homes, but it isn't always about the cute and the young, as the following story illustrates.

Mojo



In March this year I was contacted by a Greek lady living in Ierapetra. She had found a very sick and injured cat outside on the street, taken it into her home, but now she was out of her depth and didn't know what to do. She couldn't bear the thought of putting the cat to sleep as he seemed so determined to live, but he needed very intensive care. I agreed to take the cat and assess his condition. When the cat arrived it was obvious that he was old, at least greater than 6! It was also obvious he had many problems. The vet confirmed that he was blind and probably 8-10 years old. His jaw had also been broken and was now out of place, making it difficult for him to eat. When he did, it was a very messy business and with each mouth

full of food, half of it ended up on the floor. The condition of his teeth was poor and his legs were weak. However, this cat purred and purred and purred. The slightest bit of attention was enough to set up more purring. He loved to sleep on any soft place and if the emotion of gratitude were possible in the feline species, this cat exuded it from every pore! I named him Mojo and decided that I owed it to him, to try to find a home. I did what I always do when I'm in a sticky situation; I called on my network of foster carers and rehomers in Germany. It was not long before Judith made herself known. She already had a blind, elderly cat, called Stevie (Wonder). Another elderly cat in her family had recently died. She thought she could offer Mojo the love and care he needed for his geriatric years. After further correspondence and house checks, Mojo went to his new home. Judith took him immediately to her own vet and he had to have one eye removed, due to a tumour growth and gun shot pellet removed from one of his ears. Since then life has been one big party. Mojo and Stevie have established a friendship, despite Mojo, on his arrival, taking a liking to Stevie's favourite bed, causing Stevie to be a little upset. Although blind, Mojo quickly became accustomed to the practice of accosting Judith and her husband on their return from the supermarket, because inside their bags there is fresh meat for them, rather than commercial cat food. Every few months VOCAL receives new pictures from Mojo's family which show that he is truly adored.



Mojo and Stevie

When people tell me it is wrong to send cats to Germany, I think of all the individual cats who would have died without our intervention, and who needed someone else out there to help VOCAL to help them. Cats just like Mojo. I wonder, am I wrong, is what we did for him and other cats wrong? I don't think so, do you?

I would like to reassure those who fear that cats end up being killed for the fur trade or used in experiments. VOCAL only works with individuals and groups in other countries who are equally committed to finding suitable, loving and permanent homes for our cats. Also I have not sent cats into shelters in Europe, which some argue are already full. All homes are pre-checked for suitability; contracts are drawn up and follow up visits made. I have thousands of wonderful photographs spanning the rehoming programme of VOCAL over the last three years.

VOCAL'S Challenges

VOCAL desperately needs a permanent and easily accessible place to store all the goods, so generously donated by supporters, which we sell in our bazaars.

VOCAL needs an office and support/advice centre. If you know of any premises, at a reasonable rent, in a good location, in Elounda or Agios Nikolaos, please let us know.

VOCAL needs helpers and supporters. Regular, intermittent or seasonal, every little helps!

VOCAL needs funds! In Crete you can help with fund raising events locally. Do you have good ideas for ways to raise funds? Are you living outside Crete? Can you help us? Join an organization that supports VOCAL, (see the list of our supporters at the end of the newsletter), 'adopt' a cat, spread the word, pledge money, or ask friends and family to pledge something. Every euro matters, every euro adds up. Are all those Christmas cards that we send and receive really appreciated? Would it make more sense to donate the proceeds to a welfare group that matters to you, whatever group that may be? Help the environment, and help your cause!



Moment of release after sterilisation

A day in the life of an animal welfare volunteer – and more about Mojo!

26 March 2008 - my diary entry for the day. I am fostering an old street cat found by a Greek lady, starving hungry and wandering the streets of Ierapetra. I have called him Mojo and

he is about 8-10 years old. He is blind and has an old broken jaw, which has healed badly, so he has a sort of permanent skewed smile to his face. He is a dear sweet boy who lives for food and cuddles. He is also very lucky, because thanks to Dorle Heaton and other welfare workers in Germany, he has a wonderful new family waiting to adopt him.



He had to go to the vet today, but as it's a 180 kilometre round trip, I wanted to make best use of my time so I took some others along too. I took Angel, a cat from Jayne Butler who runs Catalist, Rethymnon, she is being fostered in one of VOCAL's foster homes. Angel is slowly recovering from paralysis of the rear legs. I also took 3 young kittens which were found in a dustbin. I had planned to meet Jayne at the vet office as she wanted to see the progress Angel had made. She was also bringing me a canary that I have offered to rehome. An English lady in Rethymnon rescued the canary from a taverna four years ago. Unfortunately she has recently returned to England and couldn't take the canary with her. I have offered to help rehome it with a lady I know, who has a beautiful aviary.

The drive is normally a pleasant one, as I follow the coastline all the way to the capital. On this occasion however, it was not very enjoyable as

the weather was bad and one of the cats went to the toilet in their box. Why is it that when a cat has an accident in their travel box, it always happens in the first five minutes of the journey, and not the last five minutes? It was pouring with rain, so I couldn't open a window. I turned the radio up and tried not to inhale too deeply. My car smelled pretty dreadful for 55 minutes of the 60 minute journey!



Five cats, a canary and three people squashed into the vet office, with the vet and her two assistants – thank goodness the vet is used to me turning up with a car load of animals. Mojo had some tests and was prepared for travel, Angel was vaccinated and the 3 kittens were all checked. Finally the canary was examined to try to find a reason for the persistent baldness on his head. Prescriptions were made, the bill was paid and we left. As we departed I noticed a queue of not so patient patients waiting for their appointments! Jayne, Sissel (Jayne's co-worker), and I, reconvened at a snack bar for coffee and sandwiches. We had a good chat and caught up with news in the cat welfare world. After swapping 'Tweetie Pie', and his very large and exotic pink cage and accessories into my car, Jayne and Sissel left for Rethymno, I made a quick dash round the supermarket for some shopping and also set off for my return drive to Elounda. Thankfully

the car remained sweet smelling – as much as it can with 5 cats and a canary in it – all the way home.

I returned to the town-square in Elounda, and parked the car so I could pass Angel back to her foster parents. Whilst I was waiting a British lady who knows of my work walked by, and noticing my car full of boxes covered by sheets, enquired, ‘oh what do you have in there, can I see?’ I said, ‘Of course, I have 3 four week old kittens, an old blind boy with a broken jaw, a lovely girl with paralyzed back legs and a canary with respiratory problems and a bald head, which would you like to see first?’ A strange expression crossed her face and her smile suddenly seemed a little stiff and frozen in time, I’m not sure why, but she didn’t stop to look, but said, ‘oh ok, don’t worry, I’m a little short of time anyway, I must go now’. She hurried away leaving me wondering what I’d said to disturb her. Do you think it sounded too extraordinary to be true? Not in the world of animal welfare on Crete, NOT extraordinary at all! It was just an average day in the life of a VOCAL worker!



VOCAL'S Wish list

5 euros	to feed a cat on the street every week
50 euros	towards a female sterilization
30 euros	towards a male sterilization
25 euros	for a cat travel box
2 euros	for a worm tablet
5 euros	for a flea treatment
15 euros	for a bag of good quality kitten food
8 euros	for powdered kitten milk
15 euros	for a vaccination
50 euros	for a passport and microchip

Remember every euro helps! Every minute of your time helps!

Our Grateful thanks to:

Arche Noah Kreta
Cretan Catalist
Dierenhulp Kreta
Friends of the Strays in Greece
Greek Animal Rescue
Greek Animal Welfare Fund
Local Veterinarians on Crete
Marchig Animal Welfare Trust
MDC Exports
Myrtos Project
Nine Lives, Athens
Prince Maurice Book Club
Shelley & Manolis Pet Shop, Agios Nik.
SNIP International
Worldwide Veterinary Service

For all individuals far and wide who support the work of VOCAL with their time, energy, encouragement and financial support.

My thanks and love to all of you who make VOCAL what it is.

Wishing you a very happy Christmas, and good health and contentment for the year ahead.

Virginia