



Niki Foka  
Mavrikiano  
Elounda 72053  
CRETE  
Greece

Mob: 00 30 6944 807727  
Email: [vswain@miaow.info](mailto:vswain@miaow.info)  
Website: [www.miaow.info](http://www.miaow.info)  
Registered Number: 126/2009

## **Report on the activities of VOCAL during 2009**

### **General**

2009 has been a challenging year for most non-profit making organisations. As the global economic crisis affected everyone, so it reduced the income for all of us working to promote the wellbeing of animals in Crete. However VOCAL has attempted to find new ways to bring in income and to increase our support base. We have continued to work hard throughout the year to neuter, rescue and care for cats in and around the area of Elounda, NE Crete.

As the name of VOCAL becomes more widely known, we receive more calls for help, assistance and advice – either for free living cats, or for owned cats.

### **Registration of Organisation**

The good news is that Voice of the Cats Alliance (VOCAL) became registered in Greek law in June 2009.

**Neutering** During 2009, with help from a grant from Greek Animal Welfare Fund, our neutering programme of free living cats has continued to concentrate on colonies in the large town of Agios Nikolaos and in several villages on the periphery of both Elounda and Agios Nikolaos. We have also started to assist one particular village some distance from our base, towards Neapoli, where two large colonies of cats were found, in very poor health due to poor nutrition and inbreeding. We supply food and parasite treatments to a feeder, we have taken in many sick kittens that would otherwise have died, and have begun a neutering programme to stabilise the population.

With help from a grant in March from The Jeanne Marchig Fund for the Animals of Greece, VOCAL has been running a subsidised scheme to help individuals neuter their pet cats. This has been very successful and demand has outstripped funds. We hope to be able to offer this subsidised scheme again. The scheme was taken up by Greeks and residents of other nationalities.

During early December VOCAL's lawyer and I met up with staff from the Mayor's office of Agios Nikolaos to discuss the needs of the area for a municipality supported cat neutering scheme. We highlighted the problems with dumping and poisoning and informed him that individuals are regularly approaching VOCAL to help them find a solution in their area. We explained that it is not possible for organisations or interested individuals to afford the fees asked by private practising vets in the area, and that private vets are not willing to give large enough subsidies to enable neutering of free living cats. We provided the office with a copy of the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals, which also sets out definition and responsibility for strays. The Deputy Mayor is to talk with the local government veterinary office about possible assistance, and we shall meet again in the new year. We shall also be lobbying for support to obtain premises suitable for veterinary work. This would enable vets from overseas to apply to the Hellenic Veterinary Association for a permit to come here for short periods for neutering of stray animals. An update will be sent as new information becomes available.

Despite the problems in finding a local vet who is affordable, our sterilization programme is ongoing throughout the year. We continue to work in specific colonies to prevent further breeding and to discourage use of poison and dumping to deal with over-population. Ongoing neutering work is vital to make an effective impact on a colony. We appreciate and acknowledge our partnership with Arche Noah Kreta and Nine Lives Athens, who like VOCAL are committed to advancing the role of neutering as the most important initiative in any animal welfare programme.

### **Rescue and Care**

VOCAL continues to offer help and support to cats and kittens that are found with sickness or injury, including small kittens that have been dumped or otherwise become separated from their mother. The summer months are always busy with tourists wanting help and this year has been particularly difficult. VOCAL received many calls for assistance from people staying in hotels and resorts over 50k away from Elounda, towards Heraklion, where previously another organisation had assisted with animal rescue, but which during 2009 stated that it had withdrawn cat rescue from its activities. VOCAL has tried to assist wherever possible but it has put great strain on the resources of volunteers to cover such a wide area.

During 2009 we have regularly needed a skilled vet for many types of illness or injury. As we do not have a local private vet with a theatre or x-ray equipment, almost all cats must be taken to a vet in Heraklion. This has also put a lot of strain on a few volunteers to make the return journey of 160k, especially when volunteers are themselves working 7 days a week during summer months.

VOCAL does not have a shelter so all care of cats is done within the homes of volunteers. Fungal and respiratory infections are common and this year we have taken in a lot of cats and kittens with feline viruses which would otherwise have died. We have experienced many problems, with foster carers being under pressure to take in more cats than is desirable, and lack of facilities to isolate and quarantine the sick. However, the benefits are that cats are given round the clock care and kittens become used to a home environment, before moving on to permanent homes. Although we do not have plans to develop a shelter, it would be desirable to have somewhere available for isolation purposes or for occasions when more afraid, feral adult cats are in need of care, as they do not cope well with being kept in close proximity to people.

VOCAL finds homes for hand reared kittens, and for cats which are particularly vulnerable and which cannot support themselves as free living. Sometimes they are found homes within Crete but the majority are homed in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Holland. VOCAL works with a network of people in these countries who take cats and kittens into foster homes until permanent homes can be found. All cats are given the greatest consideration in finding homes that are suitable to their needs, contracts are drawn, and in many cases follow up contact is maintained over several years.

During 2009 VOCAL has also been asked for assistance by cat owners and has found new homes overseas for 'pet' cats where the animals have been under threat of poisoning by neighbours, or where individuals are wanting to return to their home country, often but not exclusively the UK, and do not wish to take their cats with them.

We are grateful to all those travellers who offered their services as flight-escorts to carry cats and kittens onto new homes during the year.

In 2009 VOCAL is pleased to have formed an agreement with 'Pawprints' a French based organisation. This organisation is prepared to foster cats and kittens, which have final homes waiting in the UK, but which must wait for the quarantine period to pass after rabies vaccination and blood test analysis. Two UK families are waiting for their kittens to be ready to join them in the spring of 2010.

We appreciate the help of Arche Noah in our homing programme, both in assisting with booking a passage for animals and payment of flights into Germany.

VOCAL is also grateful for the help and support of Mirtos Animal Project for their financial support and provision of foster homes in Holland, and to all our friends and associates in Austria, France, Germany and Switzerland for their support and assistance throughout the year.

### **Feeding/Monitoring/Health care**

40 feeding areas are visited each day to check for new cats that need neutering and to monitor for health problems. VOCAL also supports many individuals who are feeding large numbers of strays in their neighbourhood with food and parasite treatments and rescue/vet care when necessary.

VOCAL uses a considerable amount of wet and dry food for our feeding areas. In recent years our cats have benefited from regular donations from Arche Noah Kriti of wet-food, brought over by lorry from Germany. Sadly this has now ended as Arche Noah can no longer use the lorry and driver.

### **Website**

VOCAL has a website in the German and English [www.miaow.info](http://www.miaow.info) to promote our work, inform people about regulations regarding transportation of animals to other European countries, to advertise cats needing a home and to promote our merchandise. As time allows we shall add pages in Greek to the website. We are also trying to keep up with modern trends by spreading news of our work through networking sites like Facebook! <http://www.facebook.com/pages/VOCAL-Voice-of-the-Cats-Alliance/78926749323>

### **Fundraising**

We regularly hold local events to raise money and to disseminate information about our work or to seek out further helpers. Our monthly events were only halted for 2 months during the summer season, and have become popular events. The monthly sales boost our income and provide an opportunity for people to network and to discuss problems and solutions. Parasite treatments are donated to people who are caring for free living cats and areas needing help with neutering are identified.

During 2009 VOCAL has added a range of merchandise – t-shirts, calendars, keyrings, pens, notepads etc, which are sold through the website and through our local sales.

### **Events and Supporters**

In February Arche Noah Kreta brought the final lorry into Heraklio containing many pallets of food for animal welfare groups all over Crete, and to return travel boxes.

In June the court approved the application for VOCAL to become a not for profit organisation.

In November Dierenhulp Kreta, from Holland working in cooperation with the Dutch armed forces delivered a consignment of gifts by sea to many organisations on Crete. VOCAL was one of many groups who received food, blankets etc.

Throughout 2009 individuals such as Annette Baumann's team in Switzerland, Silke Becker's team in Germany, and organisations such as Animal Medical Care Foundation, Arche Noah Kreta, Dierenhulp Kreta, Friends of the Strays in Greece, SNIP International, Worldwide Veterinary Society, have kindly donated, treatments for parasites, health care and equipment.

### **Statistics**

Please see accompanying sheet or contact me for more information.

### **2010**

In 2008 I reported that VOCAL was planning to open an office/advice centre and shop. Unfortunately this has not been realised, although we have suitable premises, it is currently used only as a store. This is largely through lack of volunteers to set it up and run it. VOCAL volunteers continue to be stretched in day to day work. This project is still on the agenda to be achieved when funds/personnel become available.

Contact has been made with two local hotel managers who are in support of our work and who are sympathetic to caring for cats, throughout the year. VOCAL is currently helping to support the cats on the sites and it is hoped that we can set up our first purpose built cat cafes on their resorts ready for the 2010 season.

I do not anticipate that there will be a quick solution provided by the local municipality, for a neutering campaign of free living cats. However discussions are underway and I hope to be able to report further progress as the year continues. In the meantime VOCAL will continue to work in areas of need as funds permit.

VOCAL acknowledges help and support during 2009 from all the following organisations:

Animal Medical Care Foundation  
Arche Noah Kreta

Cretan Catalist  
Dierenhulp Holland  
Friends of the Strays in Greece  
Greek Animal Welfare Group  
Mirtos Animal Project  
Nine Lives Athens  
Prince Maurice Book Club  
SNIP International  
The Jeanne Marchig Fund for the Animals of Greece

I would also like to acknowledge the support of VOCAL volunteers locally, and to all those individuals, too numerous to name, who live both in Crete and throughout the world, who have worked tirelessly throughout the year to support and sustain this organisation. VOCAL would not exist without you all.

Finally, on behalf of VOCAL I wish all of our supporters a very happy Christmas and peace, prosperity and good health for the coming year.

Virginia Swain-Dixon  
President & Founder  
Voice of the Cats Alliance (VOCAL)  
Elounda, Crete.