

Caring for stray animals, the right way

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According to a study conducted by the Humane Society in 2016, the streets of Dhaka are home to some forty-thousand stray dogs and countless stray cats. Most of them spend their days roaming around the innumerable alleyways of the city, scavenging nutrition from the discarded food in the dumpsters they come across.

The mere presence of these animals is seen as a nuisance, an opinion that echoes everywhere, from the residents to even the government. Consequently, these animals live in deplorable conditions. However, in recent times, an increasing number of young people are taking up the task of caring for these creatures.



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Azmain Fiaz Mansib, a student of 11th grade, spoke about his recently developed habit of caring for strays. He said, “Spending time with these dogs makes me feel connected to nature itself, a rare thing in this city. I love how they are loyal, how they fully accept you and become protective of you.”

S.K. Abdullah Fariz, another high-school student, echoed these sentiments. He further added, “Seeing the disparity between the animals’ affectionate behaviour and the cruel mistreatments they suffer, I started feeding the strays around my neighbourhood out of pity.”

The sentiments motivating their actions are not only valid, they are admirable. However, what many of these young people don’t realise is that there is a right way to go about caring for these animals.

“The majority of people who care for stray animals are animal lovers. Yet unlike love, the knowledge and expertise required to properly care for these animals is frequently insufficient,” says Dr Md. Luthfor Rahman, a veterinary doctor and public health officer at Dhaka North City Corporation.

It’s vital that one conducts research before actively involving themselves in taking care of strays. People should realise that when they choose to take care of these animals, you owe it to them to make sure they receive appropriate care.

While research can be quite helpful, young people need to be careful not to substitute quick google searches for professional advice. To make this process easier, it’s useful to keep important contacts handy, such as a veterinarian or the local animal hospital.

All of the information and opinions voiced below have been cross-checked by a veterinary doctor.

First things first, even though many strays are welcoming, they still might be uncomfortable being approached by a human. Thus, it’s necessary to proceed slowly and ensure that they aren’t startled or injured.

Before bonding with the animal, it must be ensured that the animal doesn’t belong to anyone. If it is difficult to determine whether the stray has a mother or not, it’s a good idea to not bring them home. The mother often goes out in search of food and

can take a day or longer to be back. It isn’t a great idea to cuddle them either, as a human smell on them can sometimes cause their mothers to abandon them. The best way to approach this is to wait for a couple of days, and then bring them home.

If the animal has a collar, looks well-fed and groomed, chances are it’s an abandoned or lost pet. In this case, putting up flyers and posts on social media to try and return it to its original home is the way to go. It’s the responsibility of the person who has rescued an animal and is fostering it temporarily to hand the animal over to a loving home. Ensuring that the person taking care of the animal is capable and loving is vital. Giving it away to a stranger just because they asked for it is a big no-no.

Feeding stray cats and dogs is the most conventional way of caring for them. However, the choices of food must be made responsibly. For instance, chocolate is poisonous for dogs and cow milk is indigestible for cats. Salt, oil, and turmeric are hazardous for both. Dogs can be given meat and rice, but boiled protein is more ideal for them than fried. It needs to be ensured that they’re fed in a place safe from contamination, far from playgrounds.

Besides feeding, there are other ways to care for them. Finding abandoned houses in the locality or a deserted corner of the neighbourhood and setting up a temporary home for these animals means that they won’t constantly have to be out in adverse weather conditions. If that isn’t possible, a tent made of cardboard boxes can be enough to shelter them. Providing them with blankets to make sure they are warm during the winter can be helpful as well.

There are some rookie mistakes that may turn out to be fatal, such as medicating street animals without getting the help of

an expert.

When speaking of offering treatment to strays, Rahman adds, “Do not treat animals the same way we treat humans. Many believe that paracetamol will treat cat fevers, but this results in death from paracetamol poisoning.”

There are certain measures one can take to treat common diseases with over the counter medications. However, it’s necessary to consult a vet to verify appropriate treatment, especially if the animal isn’t eating well.

At-home treatments can be used to treat minor bruises. However, caution is advised when addressing major injuries on strays, because they might be hurt further in the process. Mishandling a stray must be avoided if it isn’t eating and has swelling on one of its limbs. For transportation to a vet, they need to be coaxed into a crate.

Living on the streets is no easy feat and getting into fights is not uncommon for street animals. It is, therefore, necessary to check that an animal hasn’t suffered any harm. Their fur and ears need to be checked to write off injuries.

A lot of injuries they have are from vehicular accidents, some of which can prove fatal in the long run. To prevent this, street animals should be given reflective collars so that they’re visible to drivers at night. Drivers need to check under their vehicle to move any animals that may be resting underneath, especially during colder months.

If the stray animal has a swollen belly and darkened nipples, chances are they are pregnant. Pregnant animals generally have a greater appetite. Providing soft, easily digestible food that is safe for that specific animal is important in this case. It also needs a safe, isolated place to give birth.

If someone is going to start looking after a stray animal, they need to make sure that the animal is properly vaccinated to protect both the human and the animal. Organisations such as Obhoyaronno can be contacted for this.

It is also a good idea to get the animal neutered. Neutering strays allows us to humanely maintain the animal population. A smaller population means that these animals don’t have to compete as much.

If the animal that is being cared for keeps suffering injuries, or if they are being harmed by any of the people in the locality, an animal rescue should be contacted.

Afzal Khan, the founder and CEO of RobinHood, an animal rescue organisation, said, “Our society has a very negative perception of stray animals and if young people associate themselves with these animals, they are criticised. Instead of rescuing these animals independently, it would be better if they sought help and volunteered together.”

If an animal is seen suffering on the streets, it’s likely that our compassion will make us want to rescue the animal ourselves. However, it is important to not make this decision hastily.

It should be considered whether one can financially, logistically, and emotionally foster an animal at their residence, and ultimately make a decision that is best for all parties involved. It is absolutely necessary to be sure of that, or at least have a back-up foster home before one picks up a stray.

Joining a rescue organisation can help interested individuals to put their inclination to good use. Besides, animal care shelters could also help put the animals up for adoption if someone is unable to do so themselves.

Caring for an animal is not solely about fulfilling its material needs. It is equally necessary to cater to their emotional needs and to not abandon them once someone has started to care for them.

When they’re abandoned, they will often be fearful and confused about being left behind. In addition to being emotionally distressed, they experience severe health impacts, such as malnutrition and risk of death from

abandonment.

If it isn’t possible for someone to care for these creatures directly, raising awareness about their problems and encouraging others to help them can go a long way in bettering their conditions.

References:

- Humane Society International (October 16, 2016). *Humane dog population management program launched in Dhaka North*.
- The Daily Star (June 4, 2020). *The dos and don’ts of feeding a stray*.

Shanum and Adrita look at cute animal memes all day. Send them pictures of your doggos and cattsos at shanumsarkar18@gmail.com and zaima2004adrita@gmail.com

