

More Help for Animals in Need

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THERE are now nearly twice the number of animal welfare groups in Singapore, compared to five years ago – a figure that is rising in tandem with the number of stray animals and abandoned pets.

A MyPaper check with the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority found that there are 11 registered animal welfare groups across the island now, up from seven just five years ago.

New entrants include Save Our Street Dogs and the Humane Society Singapore, both set up in 2011, and the Agency for Animal Welfare in 2012.

This number does not include registered charities for animals, such as Three Legs Good – set up in 2012 – and volunteer organisations like Hope Dog Rescue, set up in 2011.

According to Mr Ricky Yeo, president of animal welfare group Action for Singapore Dogs, the trend is because the number of stray and abandoned dogs has been increasing by 20 to 30 per cent each year.

The same can be said of other animals, including smaller domestic ones like cats and rabbits, said those familiar with the animal welfare landscape.

The House Rabbit Society of Singapore (HRSS), for instance, attends to two to three cases of abandoned rabbits a week. Its president, Ms Betty Tan, has noticed a 10 per cent increase in such cases every year for the past four years.

Ms Corinne Fong, executive director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), said it has been taking in more smaller domestic animals such as cats, rabbits and hamsters, but could not give figures.

The Cat Welfare Society has received about 150 to 250 abandoned cats annually since it was set up in 1999. Although it has not seen much of an increase over the years, its president, Ms Veron Lau, said that the numbers are still worrying.

The number of stray animals and abandoned pets is going up because of the increasing affluence of Singaporeans, said rescue groups.

“(It’s) a sad reality that many people living in a modern society like Singapore’s are less tolerant of stray animals, or treat their pets as a disposable item that can be tossed out when the novelty wears off,” said Ms Tan.

However, the rise in the number of animal welfare groups has also led to challenges, such as increased competition for resources.

The founder of non-profit organisation Exclusively Mongrels, Mr Kevin Neo, said its biggest challenge is in finding “dedicated and responsible fosterers” to look after “fresh rescues”, as it does not run a physical shelter.

He added that other animal welfare groups with shelters have to “constantly appeal for food and funds” to maintain the shelters and animals.

Running a shelter is a costly affair. Not only do the animals have to be fed, but there are also veterinary bills – which can easily run into the thousands as stray and abandoned animals are often not in good health when rescued – and other operating costs such as those of electricity and water.

HRSS said it spends about \$20,000 a year. It currently houses 132 rabbits.

SPCA’s operating expenditure can come up to \$2 million, according to its annual report for 2012-2013.

Appeals for donations are usually done through social media and self-initiated activities such as flag days.

Sociologist Tan Ern Ser said that the increase in animal welfare groups is a good thing.

“(This) means that more people are giving voice to the voiceless, which includes animals,” said Associate Professor Tan.

With more of such groups, animal-rights activism can be expected to be stronger in future, he added.

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SAD STATISTIC: The number of stray and abandoned dogs has been rising by 20 to 30 per cent each year, says Mr Ricky Yeo, president of Action for Singapore Dogs.