



Trap, Neuter, and Return & Sterilization Clinic Report ARUBA April, 2016



Aruba is an island located in the Caribbean Sea, 18-miles North of Venezuela. At one time, this small island was one of four constituent countries that formed the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Due to the influence of the Netherlands, the island has two official languages, both Dutch, the predominant national language, Papiamentu is spoken throughout the island. In 2014, the population was estimated at 103,400 people. For an island measuring only 20-miles long, and 6-miles wide, this dense population of people accommodate large populations of free-roaming dogs and cats. Tourism is the largest contributor to the Aruban economy with over 1.5 million tourists visiting the island annually.



In 2014, Emma Clifford was contacted by U.S. non-profit organization, Animal Relief Foundation – Aruba. The organization was seeking out assistance for the rapidly growing population of free-roaming dogs and cats on the island. They had finally realized that shipping puppies to other countries for adoption was not going to solve the root problem.

In July of 2015, Animal Balance conducted a feasibility study on Aruba. This is when we assess the island's resources and ascertain if our intervention will be effective and if the program can become sustainable. At this time, we discovered that approximately 8,500 dogs and cats were being euthanized annually. In the 1980's, the Aruban government implemented overnight drop-off kennels in response to the increasing population of free-roaming dogs and cats on the island. Every morning, the animals remaining in these kennels are euthanized. This draconian practice has not changed from the time it was implemented.

During the feasibility study, Animal Balance identified several rescue organizations interested in learning more about high-quality, high-volume sterilization campaigns. Although, these organizations had varying levels of experience, one organization, United Dogs of Aruba expressed that they would like to continue hosting future sterilization campaigns on Aruba.



The director and founder, Mercedes de Bruyn, travels to Aruba regularly from the Netherlands and has been building a list of volunteer technicians and veterinarians interested in helping with her work. Upon learning about Mercedes's organization, Animal Balance identified the

campaign in Aruba as a training opportunity to enable United Dogs of Aruba to continue with the critical work.

Although, there are large populations of free-roaming dogs throughout the island, the Animal Relief Foundation – Aruba (ARF-Aruba) identified two target areas in which Animal Balance should focus their efforts. The first, the local garbage dump in Oranjestad, was home to approximately 200 free-roaming dogs that had limited social ability with people and needed to be trapped. The other target zone, San Nicholas, was selected due to the high density population of free-roaming community dogs and the fact that there is no affordable or accessible veterinary care in the area.



Animal Balance partnered with Gina Potter and Shelley Chadwick, two local rescuers and ARF-Aruba to host “Operation Cunucu” in April 2016. ARF – Aruba provided funding for supplies and Gina and Shelley organized the local logistics, government permissions and volunteers for the campaign, while Animal Balance provided guidance and volunteers for the medical and trapping teams.



Animal Balance recruited a team of trappers led by expert, Consie Von Gontard. Consie has experience working with and trapping free-roaming dogs and cats internationally and following disasters within the United States. Following the trapping orientation and training on Monday, April 25th, Consie took her team of fearless trappers, compiled of both Animal Balance and local volunteers, to the garbage dump to begin trapping dogs. ARF – Aruba provided the trapping team with 20 dog traps, which were filled each night with dogs. Following their surgical procedure, and with approval from a veterinarian, the trapping team returned each patient to their trapping location. The dogs would be welcomed back by the rest of the pack upon arrival back to the site.



Mercedes de Bruyn was appointed to lead registration for the team transporting dogs to the clinic from San Nicholas. The team arrived every morning at six o'clock to begin registration and then loaded 25-40 dogs into kennels to be transported to our clinic in Dakota. A local resident of San Nicholas, Angelo, also assisted our registration team in San Nicholas. With his local connections, Angelo, proved to be extremely helpful when doing outreach throughout the community.



On our first day of surgery, the registration team admitted over 130 dogs to the clinic. Due to this high demand, our first two days of surgery were very long days for the volunteers. We then had to limit the amount of public surgeries for the remainder of the campaign to accommodate the trapped dogs and transport program from our target zones. Our clinic volunteers tirelessly worked long hours each day, providing exemplary care for each and every patient.



At the end of the week, the team successfully completed 312 canine surgeries. Of those, 58 dogs were trapped at the garbage dump, and 105 were transported from San Nicholas. The Animal Balance team provided training to local organizations on the best practices of TNR, as well as the process of setting up a high-volume sterilization center.

Operation Cunucu was a very successful project for Aruba. Throughout the week, the clinic received lots of media attention and visitors from the government. In particular, Senator Donny Rasmijn, spent many days volunteering his time at the clinic. Also, members from the Department of Health and the Department of Tourism were given tours of the clinic and expressed interest in maintaining the program and asked for Animal Balance's recommendations moving forward.

The enthusiastic organizations in Aruba will continue the crucial, life-saving work that has already started. Discussion of another Operation Cunucu has already begun and with the help of the government, a sustainable program for population management for dogs and cats will be achieved.

