

Mission Rabies

SOCIETY Stray dog menace could be reduced if the canines were vaccinated and people had a better attitude towards the animals, says founder of Humane Animal Society, Mini Vasudevan

One morning, the villagers near Vadavalli woke up to an unusual sight. Two Boleros zipped past them and came to a grinding halt near a narrow alley. A few men, with nets and syringes, stepped out of the vehicle. They circled a pack of dogs there in the hope of catching at least one. All the dogs managed to escape but for one. Three of the volunteers came forward and trapped it with a net. As they held the dog's legs, the vet in the team gave it an injection. After rubbing the injected area with cotton, he set the dog free.

The 15 dog catchers and five vets belong to the animal welfare group Humane Animal Society (HAS) and Worldwide Veterinary Services (WVS), a U.K based charity group that assists animal welfare societies all over the world with volunteers, drugs and equipment. As a part of the Mission Rabies programme, organised by WVS, they visit different areas of the city where there is a high concentration of stray dogs and vaccinate them. The drive aims to vaccinate at least 50,000 dogs all over India, says Mini Vasudevan, the founder of HAS, which collaborates with WVS in Coimbatore. "They work with NGOs all over India. Tamil Nadu was registered as one of the states with highest number of incidents of canine and human rabies."

The 10-day drive, from July 10 to 20, has seen at least 4000 dogs being vaccinated. "We have covered nearly 75 wards in the city including Sowripalayam, Veerakeralam, Kovaipudur, Podanur and Singanallur. We started from the outskirts and then gradually moved to the city," says Mini.

The mission also aims to increase awareness about



To vaccinate street dogs in your neighbourhood or provide them with shelter and medication, contact HAS at 93661-27215

rabies. Many people get alarmed when they see a frisky dog and wrongly assume it has rabies. "We receive such panic calls, at our shelter every day. But, once we reach the site we realise that the dog is perfectly normal. It might be just frightened, disturbed or in sheer pain."

Human rabies is mostly passed through pet dogs that are bitten by the rabies-affected stray dogs, explains Mini. "We rush to the hospital once we are bitten by a dog to get a post-exposure vaccine. Instead, we could prevent this from happening by vaccinating the dogs in our neighbourhood. The vaccine for a stray dog costs just Rs.25 where as a post-exposure vaccine for a human costs at least Rs.1500."

The menace of rabies can be checked by managing the stray dog population. The solution is not to kill them,

but reduce the garbage dumps.

"They breed on rubbish, because of the food availability. Just take a walk around your neighbourhoods and you will find puppies thriving near garbage bins on the road side."

It is also the responsibility of the corporation and the civil society to prevent rabies, she says. "We were funded by the four Rotary Clubs and so we could buy enough vaccines. The corporation could provide the welfare societies with more funds and dog catchers. With more dog catchers, we could conduct the vaccination through humane ways and not cause pain to the animals." The people of an area could alert HAS if they want to know whether a dog is rabies-affected. They have the volunteers, vets and vehicles to reach any part of the city. "The most important and primary step to controlling rabies is to develop an empathetic approach towards these animals," concludes Mini.

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