



# GLOBAL WILDLIFE RESOURCES INC.

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## **Turks and Caicos Feral Dog Project Improving the Lives of People and Animals**

Island nations throughout the Caribbean are facing significant problems with an overpopulation of feral animals. This includes dogs, cats, pigs, and horses.

One island nation is the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), an independent British colony near the south end of the Bahamas and about 600 miles southeast of Miami. Of the 30 islands, eight are inhabited. Providenciales (Provo) is the most developed island with an area of 38 square miles and a population of over 6,000 people. The estimated dog population is between 2-3,000.

Originally the typical dog, or potcake as it is called, was about 35lbs, short haired of mixed color and often with airplane ears and a curly tail. Although still common, there is almost no typical appearance any longer especially with interbreeding with imported fighting breeds. Almost all dogs are in excellent condition. Average life span is currently limited to 3-4 years due to the prevalence of heartworm and general absence of veterinary care.



On TCI, dogs have threatened and attacked tourists causing significant compensation paid by resorts and harm to the local tourism industry. Dogs also travel on the international airstrip potentially threatening planes and preventing them from landing.

To address this problem several years ago, the government hired an employee to shoot as many dogs as possible. This approach was not only unsuccessful at controlling the large population, with females breeding four times a year, it also raised concerns from the international animal welfare community due to the pain and suffering of the animals.

With dog populations still high and increased pressure from the resort industries, the TCI government proposed to introduce canine distemper to control the problem and were just a vote from doing so. Fortunately, there was international outcry and Global Wildlife Resources (GWR), in collaboration with the Turks and Caicos Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Against Animals (TCSPSA), submitted a proposal for capture and control as part of a broader spay and neuter and program. This proposal was eventually accepted.

From Nov. 15 to Dec. 15, 2001, a team of GWR professionals was contracted by the TCSPCA to conduct a kickstart program capturing free-ranging dogs on the island of Provo. This field capture program was part of a broader campaign to produce long-term and humane solutions. The multi-faceted program integrated public education, collaring of "community dogs", capturing of free-ranging animals, spaying and neutering of

collared dogs, euthanasia of feral dogs, and training of local personnel. Long-term solutions for Providenciales can only be achieved with this multi-faceted approach.

Our six-person team included the staff of the Wildlife Science Center near Forest Lake, Minnesota. Jerry Cade of the Wildlife Science Center not only worked two weeks on Provo, he invented the drop gate mechanism for this capture pen. Dave Pauli, Regional Director for the Humane Society of the United States worked for two weeks and was incredible with box traps. Jane Fink, a veterinary technician, also worked tirelessly throughout the project. Everyone averaged over 12 hours/day.

This project has truly made a difference. As a team, the TCSPCA, HSI, GWR, and a myriad of volunteers initiated cultural change that is still improving the lives of both



people and animals. Our work was diverse, creative, and thoughtful. Before captures were initiated, GWR provided public education on spay/neutering and animal stewardship to elementary schools, through radio, and with interactions on the street.

We empowered people with ownership of their dogs by passing out 1,100 free collars thus allowing them to proudly identify their claimed animals. This was an extremely significant step in developing animal stewardship, since it was the

first time people scrutinized which free-roaming dogs belonged to them and which did not. And as we shuttled each collared animal to and from the veterinary clinics for neutering, it was the first time the people witnessed their government acknowledging and caring for their dogs.

We designed an entirely new capture method, the colony capture pen. These portable pens consisted of 8-foot by 8-foot chainlink panels assembled into a 16' square with two sliding guillotine kennel gates. Each of three portable pens were first pre-baited with food scraps for 3-4 days, then at sunrise or at sunset when dogs traveled most, the gates could be remotely closed when enough dogs were in the pen. The feral dogs responded remarkably well to the capture pens, casually walking in and out as the pens lay idle, and often responding to their capture by eating the table scraps which had baited them in. In addition, 40 Tomahawk and Tru-Catch collapsible boxtraps were used.

At all times, we conducted our animal handling and euthanasia with calmness, care, and respect for each animal. Our methods and actions were embraced by both children and adults.

In less than three weeks, we captured 370 free-ranging dogs. Seventy of these dogs were collared and transported to and from the veterinary clinic for neutering. Children would applaud us as we arrived to return their animals. During this period, an additional 113 collared dogs were gathered (with the owner's permission and gratitude), neutered at a

clinic, and returned . In our last week, we began capturing collared dogs which were already neutered, much to our excitement, and immediately released them onsite, much to the dog's excitement!

Three hundred of our captured free-ranging dogs were uncollared, a remarkable number, and were euthanized. Although I acknowledge the sadness of this experience, I came to understand its importance during my month on the island. The international community hears of feral dog attacks against resort visitors yet we do not hear how thousands of dogs compromise the lives of local people. It is hard for us to imagine living in a neighborhood where packs threaten children and we are afraid to walk at night for fear of being attacked ourselves. It is hard to comprehend having dozens of dogs barking and fighting outside your window all night, every night. Dogs also transmit skin diseases to the children, cause property damage, and kill family dogs. Euthanasia is an important tool on Providenciales for providing immediate relief to people's pain and suffering.

Our euthanasia technique involved two steps, which is unique for animal control. We first anesthetized each animal with an intramuscular injection, usually using a syringe pole. Once anesthetized, the dog was then euthanized with an intravascular injection. It was not uncommon for us to be surrounded by children and adults as each person witnessed and embraced the respect given to each animal. I recall one boy ridiculing an anesthetized uncollared dog, ready to poke it, knowing we were going to put it to sleep. I kindly stopped him and taught him how we were treating every animal with respect just as we should treat every person with respect and the boy's eyebrow rose as he realized the truth he already knew.

This cultural change in animal stewardship and improved human life continues well after we have left. The TCSPCA, with local people we have trained, continue to capture free-ranging dogs and provide outreach for continued neutering. One trained gentleman is Oliver Ferguson, a pastor, striving to improve the lives of both islanders and Haitian immigrants. Oliver instantly recognized the importance of this project and volunteered to learn with a reverent approach

We returned in 2004 to see that persistence and collective support from so many people and organizations have created the beginning of a long term solution for the Turks and Caicos Islands. The local SPCA is stronger than ever and the TCI government has increased their activities and support. GWR has a long term commitment for this project and will continue to offer whatever support we can.

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