



## Every Dog Has its Day

By Trista di Genova

Special to The China Post

Reprinted by Animals Taiwan with permission of author

“Everybody wants a perfect dog,” said Animals Taiwan founder Sean McCormack in an interview at the organization’s rescue shelter in Shilin last week. “But if the dog doesn’t fit in with an owner’s perfect life and becomes a less-than-perfect dog, people tend to think they have no options. That’s it, you’re in trouble!”

At this point, McCormack stands up to discipline “Chanel,” the newest dog on the block, and the only one barking; the other 54 have apparently learned this lesson. He rolls Chanel over onto her back, points and tells her firmly: “Stop it.”

However, this doesn’t work – yet -- and she starts barking again. The third time he puts her in a “down-time” room for a while, and she falls silent. “If she doesn’t learn to listen, if I let her carry on whenever she wants, she’ll never get adopted,” he explains.

A few dogs like Elvis or Yangmeimei only have three legs, or have paralyzed hindlegs; they rest on rugs so they don’t chafe their skin as they move around. But pity is the last thing they need, he stressed. They just need to be rewarded for their good behavior.

McCormack learned these “tricks” from experience, from books, watching public TV programs and videos, of which they have many at home in England, he says. “But it’s all based on the same thing: teaching them to know their place. And I mean that in a good way,” he said.

McCormack never owned a dog before coming to Taiwan, but now he’s got a huge pack of them, and five felines in the “cathouse” in the back -- cats are easier to find homes for because they fit in with the city lifestyle.

Animals Taiwan only responds to emergency situations, such as car accidents or similar desperate situations, and don’t take abandoned pets. “People rationalize if they bring the dog to a shelter, it has a chance of finding a home,” but they are usually “put to sleep,” “euthanized;” in truth, killed on “doggy death row.” Every year in Taiwan, around 700,000 strays are put to death, 10,000 in Taipei City alone.

McCormack says it’s promising how the adoption rate here (mostly strays off the street) is three times higher than in the “convenience culture” of the U.S., where the kill rate is still 2-3 million a year. A few years ago, it was 5 million.

In fact, he compares pounds to “using a bucket to fix a leaky pipe,” because pounds

are mandated to take in abandoned pets. “If you spend all your money on building and expanding shelters, it’s like a buying a bucket for a leaky pipe; eventually it will fill up and overflow, and you’ll have exactly the same problem as before. The problem continues while resources are taken up in pounds.”

Over the past three years, the foreign and Taiwanese volunteer-run organization has saved over 300 animals, serving as a model for other rescue operations starting up around Taiwan. Animals Taiwan draws on a network of veterinarians, and raises money for medical bills through fundraisers like a Pub Quiz at Capone’s, or through parties hosted by private individuals. MTI Global empowers them with “the computer stuff,” and Enspyre helps by phonebanking for events.

“As we expand, we’ll focus more on education, promoting neutering of animals and responsible pet ownership,” McCormack said. “But we’ll never stop helping the needy ones, the less than perfect ones, because that’s why we started -- to end suffering.”

Aided by volunteer PAMIR lawyers, they plan to secure non-profit status within the next few months, which will allow greater corporate and government sponsorship. “With more money, more credibility, we can have a more far-reaching effect” in implementing CNR, he says.

Taiwan recently phased out the catch-and-kill policy for cats, but they still use it for dogs. The CNR policy is the “most humane, the most effective and the only thing that works,” he argues.

“This is why catch-and-kill doesn’t work. If I catch all the dogs in Tienmu and kill them, all I’ve done is open up those resources. Dogs from other neighborhoods will move into that area, take advantage of those resources, and there will be a population explosion -- dogs can produce a litter of six puppies, twice a year. A couple of dogs can create 300 offspring in a few years. And you won’t be able to catch the smartest, most aggressive ones who breed and spread disease.”

“But if you catch them, neuter and vaccinate them and put them back,” he continued, “other dogs can’t move in, and the ones there can’t breed, and aren’t as aggressive. Now you have control of the population.”

“People think the reason there are fewer stray dogs now is because of the catch-and-kill policy,” he said. “But at the same time, people stopped leaving garbage on street corners. There was less food for dogs to eat; food was more scarce.”

Animals Taiwan aims for 100 percent neutering of strays through the CNR policy, “but even if it’s 5 percent it would start making a difference,” he said.

“Taiwan has enormous potential to become a role model in animal welfare policy. It’s not a cruel place, it’s just had very little experience with animal welfare. Like England, it’s an island, so you can quickly isolate the problem and have a profound effect

on the population. If two-thirds of the stray dog population is neutered, 67 percent to be exact, the population levels off and we're stopping the problem at its source. We'll have fixed the leaky pipe."