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THIS EPISODE

How Holland became free of Stray dogs

BY

DOGRESEARCH

Isabelle Sternheim

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Introduction

A unique alliance made up of the 'Honden-bescherming' (Dutch Dog Protection Agency), the Animal Foundation Platform, HAS Den Bosch and Dog Research have held an investigation into the factors that contributed to The Netherlands being all but free of stray dogs.

The Netherlands was able to minimize the number of stray dogs during the last 200 years. Through extensive research from archives, literature and interviews the period from 1800 until now has been investigated.

Description 1800 till now

Around the year 1800 almost all households in The Netherlands owned dogs, which was the cause of the existence of many stray dogs. There are various paintings from this period which illustrate this.



Painting by Joseph Stevens from 1846

During this period the élite usually owned pedigree dogs for sporting or as pets. These dogs were mostly well fed and groomed. They were their masters' status symbols to show off well-being and wealth. The poorer masses had mongrels that were used as guard dogs and working dogs.

At the beginning of the 19th century there were few official arrangements for dog keeping. Dogs usually walked around freely, they bred undisturbed and

when the owners had enough of them they were put on the street.

From these dogs stray populations arose.

Outbreaks of rabies caused massive action to be taken for the first time. For fear of contamination large groups of strays were culled and both leash and muzzle laws were established. Also when there was no threat of rabies stray and un-muzzled dogs were caught and put down. The dog catcher profession was common during this period.

In the 19th century many Dutch municipalities raised dog taxes whose aim was to regulate the number of dogs but this proved counterproductive. In 'dog tax' municipalities the number of strays turned out to be higher than in untaxed municipalities. An explanation for this is that many people were unable or unwilling to pay and consequently abandoned their dogs. Poverty thus played an important part in the growing number of stray dogs.

Slowly but surely, following the élite's perspective, the dog's well-being became an indicator for their owner's well-being. This caused the perception towards animal welfare and its importance to change. Dogs well fed and groomed became symbols of wealth and this idea caused pets to be treated better and better. This showed through legislation and the foundation of organisations and societies.

The first agency for animal protection was established in 1864 in the Dutch capital The Hague, the first asylum followed in 1877. In addition animal abuse was penalised in 1886.

In those days dogs were still used a lot as draught animals to draw carts. In 1912 a society was established that pleaded the case for draught dogs. Its main objective was to improve the draught dogs' well-being and eventually abolish them altogether. Inspectors sent by the society started out to check on law enforcement. But they also informed animal keepers about the importance of taking good care of their animals. The abolishment of all draught dogs was not achieved until 1962.

After that, the society went on to defend chain dogs because this group was often maltreated. Again inspection and education were paramount to achieve a change in attitude on the side of animal keepers. Also in 1962 the animal protection act was introduced. At the end of the 20th century the animals' health and welfare law was passed. This is the most important law for the well-being of animals in The Netherlands. It states it is forbidden for an owner to abuse an animal or deny it proper care. Violation is considered a criminal offence punishable with a maximum prison sentence of up to three years and a fine of €16,750.

Regrettably there is no EU animal welfare legislation yet. There is much disagreement amongst various member states concerning the importance of animal welfare as well as the assumptions as to what constitutes proper animal welfare. Also citizens' welfare in member states other than The Netherlands is below Dutch standards which leads to citizens' rather than animals' welfare being the priority. This is clearly one of the reasons there are fewer stray dogs in The Netherlands than elsewhere in Europe. Obviously rules and regulations influence the prevention of stray dog populations.



Draught dog with cart

Man-dog relationship

Over the years the man-dog relationship has changed. Hens describes four different man-dog types of relationship.

- Master - slave
- Employer - employee
- Parent - child
- Friend - friend

In The Netherlands one can discern a clear shift in the relationship between man and dog. Around 1800 people considered dogs to be either slave or employee. Now in the 21st century, people view their dog more as a friend and many owners even look on them as their child. This too obviously influences the number of stray dogs. People just do not turn out a child or friend that easily, something much less of a problem when it concerns an underachieving employee.

Without doubt welfare growth plays a large role in this. When living standards are low, family takes precedence over (pet) animals. As GDP per capita increased, so did the interest in animal well-being.

Cultural factors

Dutch culture definitely plays a role in the reduction of stray animals in The Netherlands. The country is one of few to have a political party in its parliament, whose core purpose is to improve animal welfare.

A hallmark of Dutch society is that people think in terms of personal liberties rather than universalism. This leads to people adhering to a subjective world view who are aware of other people's

'peculiarities' and cultures and who will want to explore them.

This need not surprise anyone. The Netherlands has always been a small country that had to get by through interaction with other cultures.

Observation and empathy for others was a mechanism aimed at survival. The ability to empathise also has an impact on people's thinking of animals and animal well-being. Animals suffering affects us personally and this empathy causes us to look for solutions. Dutch culture is (along with Swedish culture) one with many feminine elements. This means properties such as caring, collectiveness, separation of work and private life are highly valued. Consideration, discussion and finding common ground are essential in Dutch business. These are also aspects that make the Dutch want to take care of their (pet) animals and not see them roam the streets.

Social factors

One assumption is that birth reduction has influenced the way people think of dogs. Around 1800 families were still very large with many mouths to feed. Fathers and mothers were fully occupied by the worries for their children and having to feed all. Birth control and the pill lead to smaller families in the 1960s. This may have influenced the fact that dogs were more and more regarded as family members or children. If there are fewer children to care for and more time to spend, dogs often take the place of the children. Of course appliances doing household chores create more time for hobbies and leisure. (Hens, 2008)

Synchronous to entry of human contraception is the use of contraceptives for animals. Sterilization is one of the most successful methods proven to reduce stray animal populations. The fact that birth control has become debatable since 1960 and because of all the developments in this field, the number of sterilization surgeries for dogs and cats has increased significantly.

Groups involved

Over the years various groups, foundations and coalitions have been established that have defended the rights and welfare of animals.

- Dutch animal protection agency (Dierenbescherming)
- Dutch dog protection agency (Hondenbescherming)
- Sophia association (Sophia vereniging)
- Asylums
- Dutch political 'party for the animals' (Partij voor de dieren)
- Animal ambulance (Dierenambulance)
- Many associations and animal welfare organisations

All these initiatives, as mentioned here above, have spread the word about taking care of and taking responsibility for animals. It is difficult to say if it was the organisations that came about because the realisation took root animals need proper care, or rather if the organisations were responsible for this notion coming into being.

These groups have in any case contributed largely to the decrease in the number of stray dogs. Through co-operation, giving shelter, educating and protecting the rights of animals a society has been created in which the stray dog of a previous era no longer exists. If somebody encounters a stray, a simple phone call will see to it the animal is accommodated. People's mentality has changed over the years and animals are regarded as living creatures who can feel and suffer. It is therefore very important to teach young children to interact responsibly and respectfully with all animals with which live together, after all; what is learned in the cradle is carried to the tomb. Immigrants coming from other cultures could be taught the same lesson.

One very important measure that could be taken in order to achieve a decline in, or the disappearance of stray dogs, is of course sterilisation.

Recommendations to countries with stray dogs

In many countries an increasing number of free roaming dogs are present in mainly urban areas. This may pose a threat to public health and animal welfare. It has been scientifically proven that human interference causes overpopulation of dogs. Without food, water and shelter populations of dogs go extinct. Water and shelter are always present and the dogs survive because they are fed by humans, find edible wastes or attack flock. Dogs are thus dependent on humans and cannot maintain themselves as cats do. In sparsely populated areas there are indeed hardly any stray dogs.

As man creates plenty of food and hence the conditions for dog populations to grow, these populations will have to be downsized some other way. Because this description shows that a high level of prosperity is closely related to the reduction of the number of stray dogs, some people may come to the conclusion that the situation in their countries is hopeless. Scientific studies however show that CNVR is feasible at all times and helps reduce stray populations. CNVR is short for **C**ollect **N**euter **V**accinate and **R**eturn which means free roaming dogs and dogs who do have owners are collected, sterilised, vaccinated labelled and taken back to where they had come from.



Studies show that, when sterile populations are created, the number of dogs will diminish. But this only works in combination with educations and registration. In 1990 the World Health Organisation

and the WSPA released a report that stated the most effective method is combination of:

- Sterilisation (at least 70% of the she-dogs).
- Education (responsible dog ownership, breeding, dumping).
- Registration (identification of both animal and owner).

CNVR is meant to create sterile populations. If dogs are not returned their places will be taken by new fertile dogs from the neighbourhood. Every animal that has been returned thus takes the place of a 'new' unsterilized animal. The population will then increase less rapidly (or even decrease) because the sterilised animals cannot reproduce.

The size of a population is determined by the **Carrying Capacity**. This is the maximal number of members of a particular species an area can hold. This capacity is determined by the available resources such as food, water and shelter. If there are sufficient resources, populations will always grow to reach this maximum number of members. For every animal that is removed another will take its place through migration or birth.

If a she-dog has, on average, four pups every six months, and with enough food she can produce more than 5,000 descendants within five years. As long as there sufficient resources, within the foreseeable future, every dead animal's place will be taken by another animal and the population will increase to its maximum Carrying Capacity. Culling (as is often the case in Eastern Europe), or collection and placing in asylums, only works for a very limited time and is useless as a measure for a long term reduction of populations. So also the adopting of dogs abroad does not help diminish the problem in the country origin. There will be new dogs to take their places which will then also have to fend for themselves in pitiful circumstances. What happens a lot is that a pack produces new offspring to secure their strength. More pups are born, but because of a lack of sufficient resources many weak dogs eventually die very unpleasantly, through malnourishment or dehydration.

When the number of dogs remains stable yet sterile, suffering diminishes visibly.

CNVR is a proven method which can help every country worldwide to reduce the number of strays in a very friendly manner.

Because in the Netherlands voluntary organizations played a very important role in the reduction of stray dog populations and the reduction of animal suffering, it is advisable to include animal welfare organizations in other countries and give them an active role.

Unlike the situation in the Netherlands in the 19th century stray animals volunteers from other countries are active in many countries with large populations now a days. These groups are often highly motivated, they bring resources and expertise and have extensive networks and experience with the matter.

In short, with the right combination of CNVR, international cooperation, commitment of animal welfare organizations and education it will be possible to diminish the number of stray dogs in many countries.

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Background Dog Research & Animal Foundation Platform

DOG RESEARCH

Dog is a research initiative that aims to investigate human - dog relationship in Western and non-Western countries.

In our Western world, the dog has a special place. In the west, the dog has a function as a pet, a friend and sometimes as a status symbol or fashion accessory. In non-western cultures, the dog used primarily for hunting, defense and security. In many non-western countries, there are often large stray dog populations, there are religious rules how to approach dogs, there are cultural biases, etc. The dog is in these countries are not always seen as man's best friend.

Dog research investigates human - dog relationship from an anthropological perspective. By talking to people and listen to them Dog Research tries to get a picture of the various human - dog relationship. The ultimate goal is a world where people and dogs approach each other with respect and tolerance.

ANIMAL FOUNDATION PLATFORM

AFP is an independent platform for all organizations in countries which are active for animal welfare and which are committed to help stray dogs and cats in their country. We started the platform in The Netherlands and we want to roll the concept out worldwide.

The concept of the platform is:

1. Collect all information in a country to be available in a database. Information from organizations working for and with stray-animals, education projects, spay/neuter projects persons willing to help, volunteers, shelters, everything that could be worth connecting to.
2. Start projects with others. Working together expands result.
3. Focus on education projects and spay/neuter projects (CNVR).
4. Joint initiatives between countries. For example in the Netherlands and in Germany and some other countries lots of people and foundations are working for stray animals abroad. For example in your country! One of the goals of the platform is connect Turkish people/projects/ organizations to people/ projects/organizations in The Netherlands or Germany to join forces.
5. Animal Foundation Platform Netherlands wants to help you! By connecting you to more and helpful organizations worldwide, by raising money for executing education- and sterilization projects in your country. But also by helping set up bigger projects, with more impact and publicity all over the world.

For more information please contact:

info@dogresearch.nl or
info@animalfoundationplatform.nl