



Creating Balance and Fostering Coexistence in the Galapagos Islands

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From Creating Balance to Fostering Coexistence on the Galapagos Islands:

A 20-year international & local
Governmental and NGO
collaboration to protect the
biodiversity & biosecurity of the
unique archipelago, with direct
community support for Cat Colony
Management.



ANIMAL BALANCE



Agencia de Regulación y Control de la
Bioseguridad y Cuarentena para
Galápagos



Thank you!



PROJECT V.E.T.S.
healing THE PLANET ONE ANIMAL AT A TIME.









Our three-component model - veterinary Services - Education, and Legal Advice - keeps dogs and cats under control. Our results have strengthened community wellbeing and advanced conservation on the Galapagos Islands

Vet Services: Sterilization, vaccination, microchipping and fast response to roaming.

Education: Ongoing outreach that makes responsible ownership the norm

Legal Advice: Draft and implement ordinances that set clear rules (ID/sterilization requirements and roaming controls)

Results: November 2024 Census: 80% sterilization rate for cats and 70% for dogs on Isabela and San Cristobal Island.



2004 first mission on Isabela

Animal Balance launches its first mission in the Galápagos Islands, beginning on Isabela with the support of local authorities and volunteers.

2005 – 2009

expansion & first multi-island campaigns

In partnership with CIMEI, Animal Balance carries out the first large-scale sterilization campaigns across multiple islands. This period also marks the beginning of free dog training classes and humane education workshops for community members



2009 institutionalization & vaccination begins

The Galápagos Biosecurity Agency (ABG) is established and takes over from CIMEI. A formal collaboration agreement is signed with Animal Balance. ABG launches the first island-wide DHPP vaccination program for dogs





2010–2020 decade of commitment

Animal Balance maintains annual clinics, expands humane education in schools and neighborhoods, and continues to offer free dog training sessions. For cat management, we added Megestrol Acetate to the program, MA, a short term contraceptive.



2020 – first permanent clinic in Isabela

With support from the Provincial Government (CGREG) and ABG, Animal Balance opens its first permanent veterinary clinic in Puerto Villamil offering free sterilization, wellness services, and serving as the hub for future programs.



2021 post-COVID alliance

Animal Balance invites [World Vets](#) to join the effort in San Cristóbal after the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding regional capacity and solidarity in animal welfare.





2024 – first full pet census completed

In partnership with local authorities, Animal Balance completes the first territory-wide census of dogs and cats on Isabela Island, revealing that 80% of dogs are already sterilized—a major milestone in humane animal control.



2025 spay it forward launch

Building the future. In memory of local champion Dr Diego Barrera, AB creates Spay It Forward scholarships and on the job training for Ecuadorian vets. Barrera's protégé, Dr Eddie Llambo, founds VetAID Ecuador, spreading the Galápagos model to the mainland.





High-Quality, High-Volume Desexing Program



Collaboration Works!

None of us have the resources to do it alone. We need positive communication in order to achieve our goals. We find crossovers of interest with the local agencies and invite them to help.







The Power of Language

We called it a **community- based sterilization program** and no one questioned the program. If we had called it a TNR program (TDR) it would not have been approved. We now have trained trappers from each Galapaganian agency who join forces with the Animal Balance team to go trap. We get to know the cat caretakers and ensure they are clear to our motives and stop feeding before we trap. It takes everyone for this to work in a place like the Galapagos Islands.





CAT-TRACEPTION PROGRAM



"Temporary contraception, permanent progress."

Weekly MA holds estrus and drops births while we mobilize definitive sterilization

Megestrol Acetate (MA) can be used to safely contracept cats for a short period of time.

Hypothesis: Using MA to suppress estrus in cats for a short period of time will mean fewer births of kittens, and the cats in the colony will remain healthy.

Depopulation Strategy: Short term use of MA in an area without access to a veterinarian, until the veterinary MASH unit can be deployed to surgically sterilize the population, is the most effective use of resources and an appropriate humane animal management strategy.

Currently: Animal Balance is offering microdoses of MA to the feeders of cats on Isabela Island, Galapagos Islands.

Cost: MA costs \$20 to produce 100 tablets at a compounder. 1.1 mg is put into the cats food once a week.

Timing: We do not recommend doing this for longer than 6 months. It is a stop gap measure until the vet team can be on site.

Scientific Papers: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23499239/> and <https://www.acc-d.org/products/megestrol-acetate>



Contraceptive Use: Micro-dose of Megestrol Acetate (MA)

ABG approved the use of a contraceptive, that is species specific, for temporary use until a vet team can surgically desex the cats.

The caretakers who are feeding cat colonies are given MA powder by Animal Balance. They came up with the idea of mixing it with powder baby milk as it is cheap, available and the cats like it.

Each week they put the specific amount in the cats food. They know their cats so can ensure each gets their own.

The cats do not reproduce when on MA

It is very easy to use, we have SOPs and a data sheet that the caretaker fills out on their phone and then shares with Animal Balance.

The only point to note is that if someone is not checking in with the caretaker on a regular basis and encouraging them, they forget to give it.



Population Census

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/daefa4d21cf04c3fb750811df6c8479d>

79.92% of the cats are desexed in the municipal areas of Isabela Island

<https://convivegalapagos.org/censo>

72% of the cats are desexed in the municipal areas of San Cristobal

68% of the cats are sterilized on Santa Cruz Island

Dr. John Boone, PhD, wildlife biologist and conservation ecologist, to create an app using ARCGIS technology which would facilitate the collection of data in the form of a house-to-house survey.

The census provides evidence-based data enabling key action while keeping every stakeholder accountable for real, measurable results.

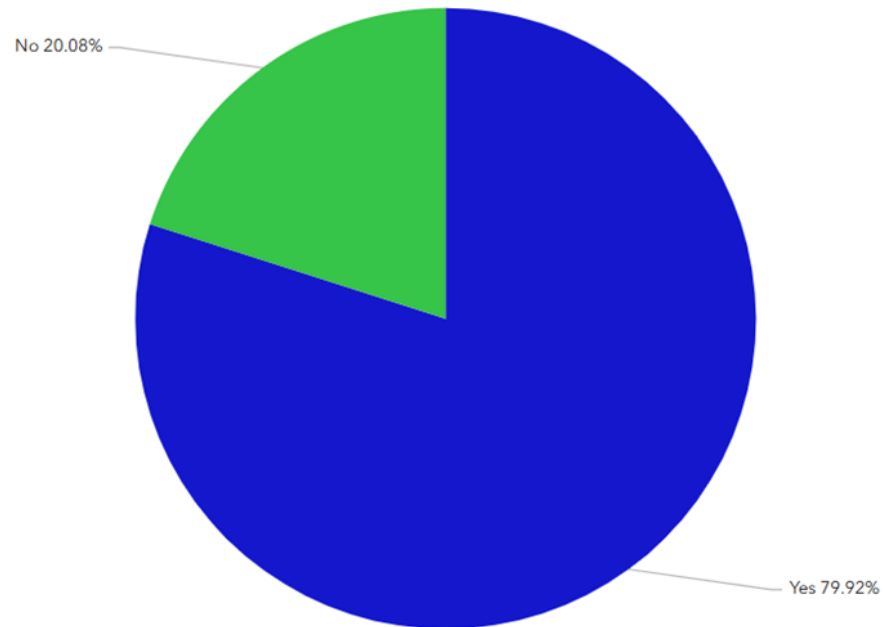
Knowing exactly how many dogs and cats live in each neighborhood, how they are distributed among households, and how these numbers evolve over time indicating where/ when/how to schedule sterilization campaigns, allocate veterinary teams efficiently, and spot emerging problem areas before they escalate. The census also provides a robust baseline for evaluating the impact of our educational campaigns, giving local authorities, funders, and the community clear proof of progress—or early warnings when strategies need adjustment.



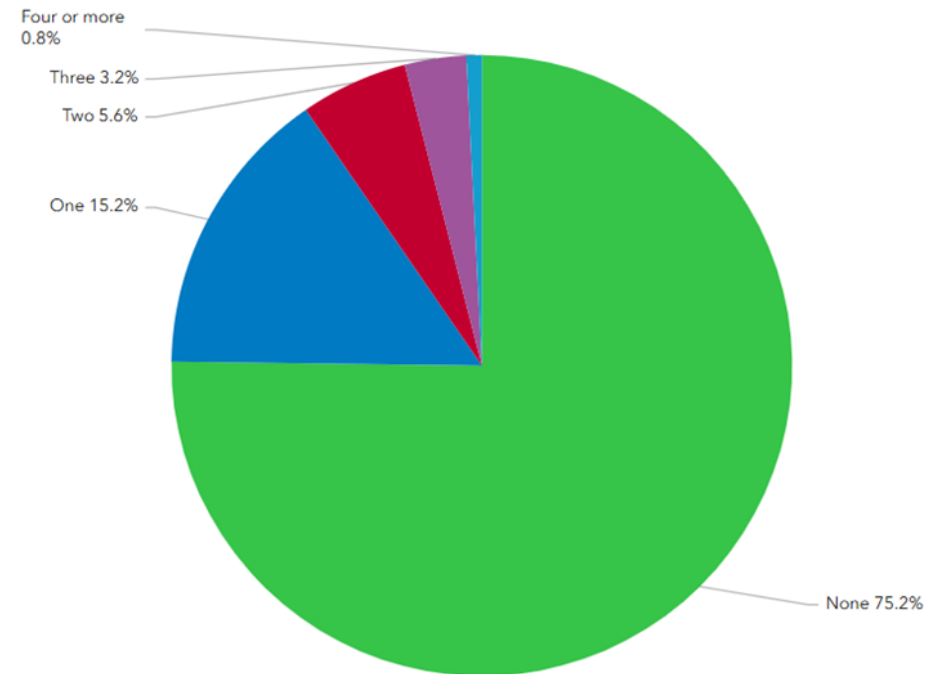


Nearly 80% of cats were sterilized. Among cats that have bred, relatively few have had more than two litters.

Is the cat sterilized?



How many litters has the cat had?



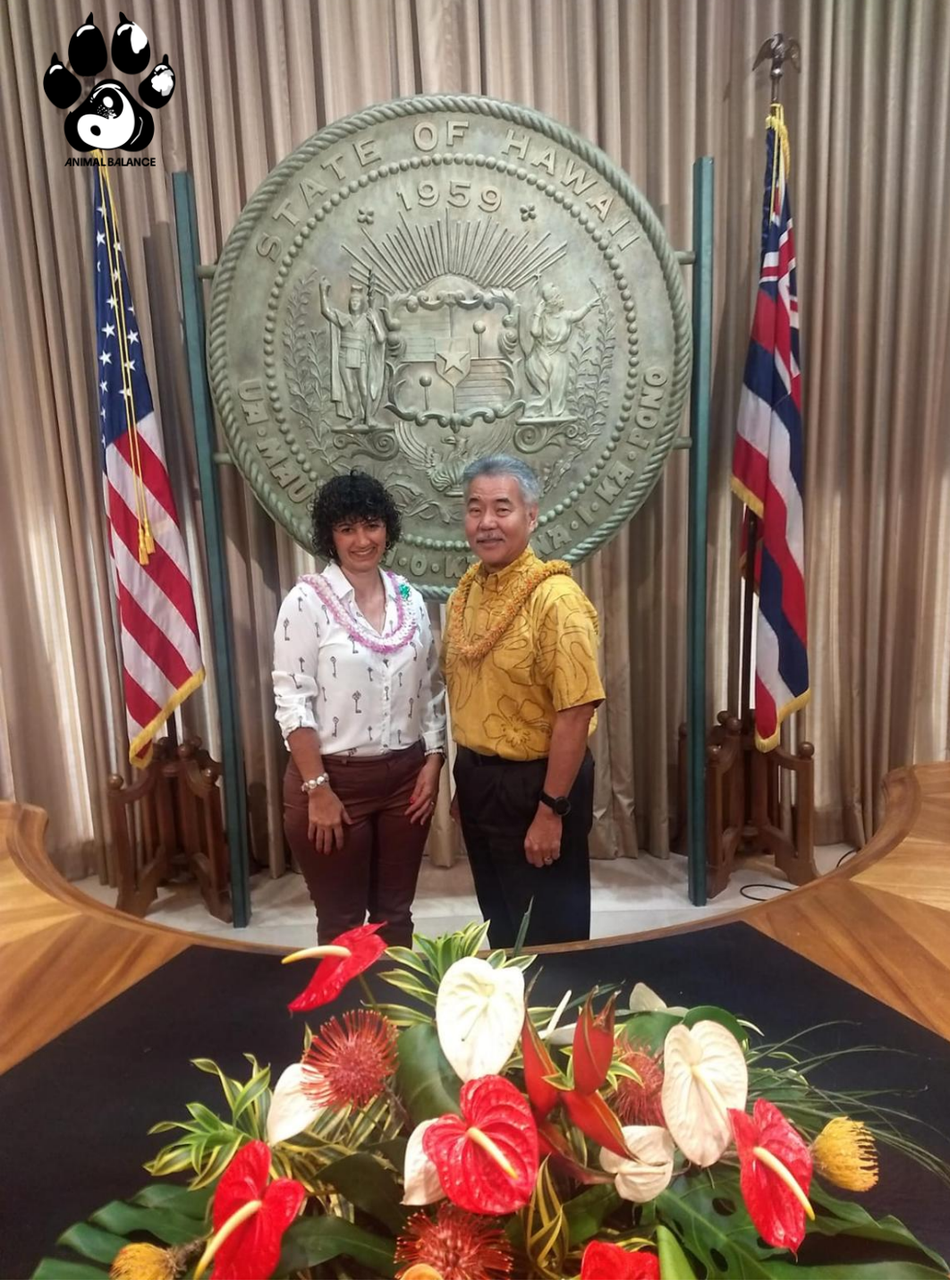
Conservation Minded Ordinances

According to the local municipal ordinance, all dogs and cats in the municipal areas must be sterilized.

We used the Census as a way to help educate people about the ordinance changes so they can be in compliance with local laws.

We begin with a core framework of essential regulations: mandatory sterilization, universal microchip identification, a ban on pet commerce, and clear rules for walking and keeping companion animals—and collaborate with local representatives to adapt it within the reality of each community.





Animal Balance brings together the Galapagos authorities to Hawaii as a practical example for conservation

Another example of a habitat that is shared by native and non-native species which is compounded by extensive tourism and economic expansion.

Animal Balance worked on all islands conducting mass TDR programs, 800 cats per clinic, training local groups and providing the infrastructure and equipment to desex over 100 cats per day, from 2015 to 2019, we deployed 2 times a year.

In 2018, Animal Balance brought Dr Marilyn Cruz, Director of ABG, Galapagos Islands, to meet Governor Ige to discuss the best solution and best practice for sensitive habitats where people, cats and endemic species live.

Dr Cruz encouraged an entrance fee to the Hawaiian Islands for all tourists suggesting that these funds be used for conservation efforts, such as a desexing program for cats. In January of 2026, Hawaii will introduce the 'Green Fee' for all tourists.

These massive TDR programs have helped to combat an escalating cat population on Hawaii.

However, 5 years ago, the Hawaiian Vet Board changed the rules for vets working out of state, so now they have less trained, experienced and skilled vet help. Now out of state vets cannot work under a vet with a Hawaiian license, they need to obtain their own. This is a step backwards for Hawaii. Mobility and accessibility for the desexing vets teams is paramount.



A GnRH - IM Injection - Contraceptive - Up to 3 years Efficacy

Bio-Spay is from SpayFirst! a non-profit in the US, directed by Dr. Ruth Steinberger.

It is currently going through the US EPA trials for dogs with great successes so far.

Dr. Steinberger cat vaccine could be used in Australia if there could be a regulatory pathway that would assess it and fast track it for colony cat use. Owned and colony cats can easily be given an IM injection every 3 years.

It can be used as a stop gap before securing a spay appointment.

Vaccine stored at normal temperature for vaccines.

Easy to store and easy to administer.

Thus far, it has proven effectual in female cats, but not males as more testing is required for males.

The aim for cost per vial is \$10 USD, making it possible for nonprofits to purchase, plus the cat caretakers.



Conclusion

It is far more appropriate that you hear what these key people say from the Galapagos Islands. Dr Marilyn Cruz is the previous Director of ABG. Animal Balance trained her in 2005 in the spay technique. Ruben Carrion is part of the government on Isabela. Victor Carrion was the former Director of Eradication and Control of Invasive Species. These colleagues have worked closely with Animal Balance for 20 years.





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