



REACHING OUT TO THE Community

6TH NATIONAL G2Z SUMMIT & WORKSHOPS
14-19 SEPTEMBER 2015, MANTRA ON VIEW HOTEL, GOLD COAST



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Maaïke Bouwman is a Dutch student of the VHL University of Applied Science. She's currently majoring in animal and society and will receive her bachelor degree next year. After graduation, she will start with a training in veterinary medicine. She has interned at several different non-profit organizations, such as a Dutch animal shelter and at the communication & PR department of The Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals. During her time there, she learned a lot about the protection of animals and positive involvement of human and animal relationships.

Abstract

Animal sheltering in The Netherlands

This presentation will be about the current state of animal sheltering in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands animal welfare is a very important aspect. The country has one of lowest euthanasia numbers and an own animals act, which provides rules for the care and housing of companion animals. Of all Dutch households 55% keep a pet, of which there are 1.8 million dogs & 3.3 million cats. The micro-chipping of dogs has been mandatory since 2012. In late 2011, the first animal police service, has been launched to tackle cruelty to animals and animal neglect more effectively. The Dierenbescherming (DB) or Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals plays a very important role in this. It is the largest animal welfare organization of the country and holds a total amount of 38 shelters.

Full Presentation

The Netherlands is one of the best countries when it comes to attitude towards companion animals. Pets are very popular and animal welfare issues are given high priority by the government. The country has one of the lowest euthanasia numbers and an own animals act, which provides rules for the care and housing of companion animals. This paper will be about the current state of animal sheltering in the Netherlands. It is written by Maaïke Bouwman, a Dutch student of the VHL University of Applied Science and currently majoring in animal and society.



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General information and community attitude

The Dutch population is currently 16,8 million. Of all Dutch households, 55% keep a pet, of which there are 1.8 million dogs & 3.3 million cats. Most households with dogs have only one dog (80%). With cats, it is more common to have more than one; 44% of cat owners have two or more cats. 44% of the dogs are from breeders, both with and without a pedigree certificate. The remaining 56% comes from private individuals, shelters and trade (internet and animal traders). Cats from breeders amounted to only 8%, the remaining 92% of cats are from private individuals or shelters.

In recent years, the number of dogs remained fairly stable, while the number of cats has dropped lightly-four percent compared to 2012. Dogs are right behind the cats as the most common pets in the Netherlands and generally live indoors. They can be held as a working dog or companion (largest group). Working dogs include:

- Assistance dogs
- Sheepdogs (Dying sport. Nowadays, shepherd dogs are more used as police dogs or guide dogs.)
- Police and fire dogs
- Guard dogs
- Hunting dogs
- Test animal (under a strict legislation)

It is illegal in The Netherlands to keep a dog as fighting dog or cart-dog.

Other trends:

Dogs and cats are aging. More than 40% of the dogs are older than eight years, with cats it's 46%. Most dogs and cats are held in families with children; Dog owners live relatively often in outdoor areas, while the cat owners are more frequently found in cities. The number of dogs that someone has, is more related to education and age than income; There are more mixed-breed than pure-breed dogs.

There are no laws to curb the number of pets allowed in one household.

Animal Sheltering

Every year, more than 25.000 dogs and 50.000 cats end up in shelters because they were lost, taken, surrendered, abandoned or stray. At first, the shelter will look for the owner of these animals. When the owner can't be found or no longer wants to take care of the animal, they search for a new owner. The following tables provide data on the number of dogs and cats that the shelters in Netherlands annually take in.

Table 1 Total amount of sheltered dogs

	2006	2008	2009
Sheltered	23.964	24.274	21.571
Returned	10.772 (45%)	10.489 (43%)	9.566 (44%)
Placed	11.031	12.066	10.719
Exchanged	355	218	450
Euthanized	987	995	1.037
Passed away	79	51	45



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Table 2 Total amount of sheltered cats

	2006	2008	2009
Sheltered	47.235	54.135	52.584
Returned	4.476 (9,5%)	5.269 (9,7%)	8.135 (15,5%)
Placed	35.541	41.499	39.524
Exchanged	647	620	567
Euthanized	4.032	4.293	4.520
Passed away	1.370	1.647	1.250

Compared to 2006, the number of sheltered dogs decreased (-10%) and the cats increased (+ 11%). The percentage of dogs that goes back to its owner remains stable around 44%. The percentage of cats however, has remarkably increased (15.5%) compared to 2006 (9.5%).

The big difference in percentages is due to the fact many more dogs are micro-chipped than cats. This also shows the importance of a chip. The Dutch Society for the protection of animals(DB) is lobbying for compulsory microchipping of cats, to fight against the stray-cat problem (which will be discussed later) and overcrowded shelters. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Economic Affairs does not want to apply this law yet. Municipalities and the DB already play a large part in addressing the problems with stray cats, by informing citizens about the importance of chipping. This seems to have a positive effect, given there are more cats chipped and returned to their owner every year.

There are no stray dogs in the Netherlands, but there is a surplus of stray cats. Reasons to take action, are the nuisance and potential health problems for humans and impact on the native fauna. There is also a welfare problem for the stray cats themselves, because of their often poor health (disease and injuries) and lack of food. It's hard to figure out how many stray cats there are in the Netherlands. There are quite a few organizations that shelter them and the number of caught stray cats per year is more than 37.000. Stray cats that are not suited to be placed in a household, are caught and put back after castration. This project was introduced by the DB and is called TNR (Trap, Neuter, Return). In 2014, 8.666 cats were practiced with TNR.

In the Netherlands, only very sick animals and those with severe behavioural issues are euthanized and the final decision is made by the shelter manager and the veterinarian. No animals are euthanized due to overpopulation.

Municipalities have a legal obligation when it comes to sheltering animals. A found animal, with a possible owner, is the responsibility of the municipality. The owner has 14 days to retrieve his animal. When the owner is not found within this term, the municipality officially becomes the owner. It must then determine what happens with the animal. Preferably, it carries the animal through an official transfer of ownership to an animal shelter. The shelter can then start with the finding of a new home for the animal. In the 14-days period when the animal is 'property' of the municipality, the municipality is responsible for all costs for care and transport. When the owner is found in the period of 14 days, the costs are incurred on his behalf.

In reality, a municipality does not own a facility to shelter animals. That is why they usually conduct a contract with shelters. In return, the municipality pays a cost-covering remuneration for the performed service. The other activities of animal shelters are paid for through sponsoring and donations. In addition to this, when an owner surrenders an animal, a fee has to be paid. Animal shelters work with both volunteers and paid employees.



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Animal shelters in the Netherlands have strict selection criteria in place for new owners to ensure that the cat or dog goes to the ideal home and doesn't get re-surrendered. After a pet has found a new owner, a placement agreement is signed and all animals from the shelters have a permanent identification. Most cats are neutered upon leaving the shelter. Dogs are not neutered as this decision is left up to the new owner. This is mainly because in the Netherlands there is no surplus of dogs. For some time after placement, an animal is checked upon to ensure the wellbeing of both the animal and the new owner.

Dutch Society of Protection of Animals

The Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals (DB) is the largest non-profit animal welfare organization in Netherlands. When founded in 1864, they aimed for the abolition of cart-dogs, improving the living and working conditions of horses, banning the docking of ears and tail with dogs and horses, and better slaughter regulations (including mandatory anaesthesia). In 1875 came the first law which stated that the deliberate abuse of dogs and cats was punishable.

Currently, the DB counts nearly 200.000 members and supporters, and has a total of hundred employees. Its vision and mission are designed to prevent animal suffering and to create a better environment in which humans and animals live together in harmony. The DB is a national society. It consists of a main office in Hague and twenty different departments spread throughout the country. The society owns 41 shelters, 29 animal ambulances and 16 dog schools. Most shelters are for both dogs and cats, although some shelters also accept other species.

The DB has the following four key tasks: animal emergency aid, animal welfare, policy and education. They affect laws and regulations about animal welfare, not only at municipal, provincial and national level, but also internationally through a membership at Eurogroup for Animals. In 2014 12.000 dogs and 32.000 cats (temporary) found shelter with the DB. The animal ambulance rides 90.000 times per year to help animals in need.

In 2014, the DB won a NRC Charity Award with its petition 'say no to shooting stray cats'. When they gathered more than 137.000 signatures, the House of Representatives of the Netherlands decided that it was no longer allowed to shoot stray cats.

Animal police service

Since 2011, the Netherlands has its own Animal police officers and a dedicated hotline (144), and those guilty of offences against animals can expect sentences. The telephone operator will pass the report on to the competent authority. Depending on the nature of the report, this may be the animal police, an animal protection officer from the National Inspection Service (DB) or the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority.

The courts can impose a fine or imprisonment for cruelty to animals or animal neglect. The sentence demanded by the public prosecutor will take into account factors such as the degree of injury inflicted. A probation report on the accused may also be requested, for example if the abuse was especially sadistic. The maximum prison sentence for mistreating or neglecting an animal is three years or a maximum fine of € 19.500.

National Inspection Service

In 1986, the national inspection service for the protection of animals (NIS) was officially established in order to improve and guarantee the welfare of animals. The NIS covers thousands reports of neglect and abuse annually. Although part of the DB, the NIS is an independent inspection service who has the power to perform government duties and – if necessary – seize animals.



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Reports that arrive via the national emergency number 144, are initially transferred to the animal police. If it includes violation, a police report and criminal prosecution follows. Since the introduction of the emergency number 144 and the animal police in 2011, the number of reports has increased (45%). More than 20.000 animal cases were dealt with by the NIS in 2013. That is about 1.500 animals per inspector per year. Most reports that come in are about companion animals and cases with neglect and mistreatment.

Animal Law

Municipalities are responsible for the animals within their borders. In addition to an animal welfare note, the DB advocates for an animal welfare councillor who is responsible for animal policy and animal welfare within the municipality.

In 2013, a new law was entered into force to simplify, review and improve some of the previous laws and regulations on animals, the Dutch Animals Act. The Animals Act has replaced the following Dutch laws:

- The Animal Health and Welfare Act;
- The Veterinary Medicines Act;
- The Protection of Animals Act;
- The Veterinary Practice Act;
- The Animal Feeds Framework Act.

In the Animals Act, specific rules are included concerning the business, breeding and trading/selling of pet animals. Some very important rules are for example:

- Sellers may not sell pets to those under 16 years of age.
- It is no longer allowed to sell animals in a shop window and selling animals on the street or in markets is illegal.
- A seller must provide the customer written information about the animal.
- Professional and hobby breeders must comply with rules on breeding and training pets.
- There are demands on the housing, health and care of animals.
- There is a strict protocol for euthanasia of a cat or dog.
- It is illegal to perform procedures that mutilate an animal such as tail and ear cropping.
- Cats and dogs must be vaccinated when going to the shelter or abroad.
- Dogs must have access to the outdoors at least two hours per day.
- The micro-chipping of dogs has been mandatory since 2013. All pups born in the Netherlands must be chipped and registered within 7 weeks of birth.

Pets may only be held in the Netherlands when they do not present a risk for people or other animals. A prescriptive list of pets is being introduced: a list that determines which animal species may be kept as a pet.

Particular to the Animals Act is the recognition of the intrinsic value of animals. Every citizen has a duty of care towards animals. This means that acts which may cause harm to the animal should be avoided or limited. The law also states that everyone is obliged to help an animal in need.

Conclusion

In general, the Dutch community is very concerned about animal welfare and animal rights. People consider their pets as part of the family and acknowledge the self-worth of animals as individuals with feelings. However, the NIS and animal police still have to deal with countless cases of neglect and abuse every year and the DB worries about the amount of pets that are taken into shelters. Despite that, no cats and dogs are euthanized due to overpopulation. This is a monumental achievement, and yet the Netherlands is always trying and pushing the boundaries in creating a more animal-friendly society, in which humans and animals live together in harmony.