

Sun, sea and strays...

The island of Corfu has everything: awe-inspiring architecture, diverse landscapes, stunning shores - and a huge stray dog problem



STRAY AND ABANDONED animals are unlikely to appear in any holiday brochure, but an increasing number of visitors have been shocked by what they have seen on the idyllic island of Corfu.

During the summer months, thousands of tourists flock to the island, providing a constant food supply for the strays. But when the summer season is over, visitor numbers dwindle, and the dogs are left struggling to survive. With their main source of food gone, they scavenge around the towns, searching for scraps.

By winter, the animals have lost condition, and most suffer from malnutrition. Almost all the dogs and cats are unsterilised, so the population of strays increases, as does the demand for food.

It's not unusual for dogs and cats to be poisoned by people, and a large percentage are killed or injured in road accidents.

The Ark Dog Rescue, founded in 1997, aims to make life better for the animals of Corfu. The Ark's main role is a humane 'catch, neuter and release' programme.

Above: Nanda, a puppy rescued at Boukari, Corfu.

Above right: Lima a dog found at Corfu harbour was full of milk and had a broken leg and damaged eye. She was fostered by Ark for a few months after which she found a nice home in Holland. The cat, Meme, was found as a kitten of about three weeks old. She was missing a big part of one ear and had part of stomach protruding from her abdomen. He is now doing very well.

"Once caught, the animals are sterilised, wormed, treated for fleas, ticks," explains Cameron White, a previous director of The Ark. "The Ark does not have a rescue centre, so reluctantly, we have to put them back whence they came." Sadly, many animals are killed or injured after release.

With limited resources, the charity finds it hard to help every dog or cat that needs medical attention. However, tourists are increasingly playing an important role in assisting the charity, reporting injured and stray dogs and cats. "Visitors can call us for help and advice," says Cameron. "We can recommend a vet, sometimes help with transporting an animal, and, in exceptional circumstances, we can pay for veterinary treatment." The organisation receives so many calls during the summer that they can barely cope with demand.

When food becomes scarce, particularly as winter progresses, The Ark runs a feeding programme around the island. "We distribute the food mainly to volunteers and some of our

members who feed the animals in their specific areas," explains Cameron. "This programme has been successful because of the hard work and dedication of my friends, Wendy and Spencer Bell."

The Bells, from Bushey, Hertfordshire, are the organisation's only UK representatives. They support the charity in many different ways: from raising funds, to getting food and supplies safely out to Corfu.

Spencer and Wendy met Cameron at their Bushey K9 Training School, and they became involved with the charity when Cameron moved to Corfu and sent them an email, asking for donations. They were glad to help. Spencer and Wendy have now been part of the organisation for two years, and each month they handle a ton of dog and cat food donated by a leading dog food manufacturer, and shipped free of charge thanks to the Greek shipping firm Mondial.

However, it's not just food donations that the charity will accept. "Money, collars, leads, food, bedding, blankets, worming and flea treatment, out-of-date medicine and veterinary items are welcomed," says Spencer. In Corfu, The Ark has a charity shop where it sells some of the donated items and issues educational leaflets.

Sadly, it is impossible to rehome every cat and dog in Corfu, but The Ark offers advice and assistance to anyone - tourist or local - who wishes to offer an animal a home. "We mostly rehome dogs abroad, in Germany and

How you can help



The Ark is run by a group of dedicated members and volunteers in the UK and abroad. To donate your time, email info@corfuanimalwelfare.com or write to, The Ark, PO Box 484, Corfu 49100, Greece, for an application form.

If you are planning a trip to Corfu, why not combine it with some hands-on volunteering at The Ark? Call 26610 43332, 26610 80308 or 26610 58035 for more information.

The charity is looking for the support of a printing service that can help produce animal welfare and care leaflets. Contact Cameron White on 0030 6610 58035 or email cameronwhite@acn.gr

The charity needs collars, leads, food, bedding, blankets, worming and flea treatments, out-of-date medicine, and any veterinary items (eg surgical dressings). Send these donations to The Ark, PO Box 484, Corfu 49100, Greece.

Financial donations can be made through the charity's UK bank account at Barclays plc. The account number is 80795070; sort code 20-51-23. Cheques should be made payable to The Ark. For people visiting or living in Corfu, you can make a donation through collecting tins, The Ark's charity shop, or call 26610 43332, 26610 80308 or 26610 58035.

To report an injured or stray animal in Corfu, call The Ark tourist hotline on 26610 32111.

For more information about The Ark, visit www.corfuanimalwelfare.com



Holland, where loving homes are often found before the dog leaves Corfu. It is possible to rehome a dog or cat in the UK. Unfortunately, it can be expensive, but there are ways in which British tourists can help our animals."

However, getting the rehomed animals out the country has become increasingly difficult. Rumours are circulating around Greece that animal welfare organisations are sending stray dogs abroad for animal-testing and the production of fur coats. The Ark is involved in neither. The stories have been further fuelled by media support, which has sparked distrust and suspicion. Some people find it hard to believe that a person would pay large amounts of money for a stray animal.

The Ark has encountered abusive animal lovers at airports, who have tried to stop the dogs and cats from boarding planes. To avoid conflict, the charity now has to send animals in secrecy.

While the course of rehoming may not always run smoothly, there are some happy endings. One person who has given a Corfu stray a new home is Jackie Stevens, from Wellsbourne, Warwickshire. Jackie was holidaying on Corfu in 2005 when she met Mythos, a Pointer cross.

"Mythos, named after the local beer, came up to me in the village of Govia," says Jackie. "She was in good condition, and nearly four weeks pregnant. I wondered how anyone could leave such a beautiful dog."

When Jackie returned home, she couldn't stop thinking about the pregnant stray. "I was worried to death about Mythos, so my friend looked on the internet and found Cameron's telephone number." After discussing with Cameron what was likely to happen to Mythos and her unborn puppies, Jackie decided that she couldn't leave Mythos in Corfu. Within four weeks a flight was booked for Mythos' arrival in the UK. "Mythos was living on the street right up until the last moment. Cameron visited her three or four times a week during the four weeks leading up to the flight to check if she was okay. A few days before Mythos left Corfu, Cameron took her to the vet's, where she was checked over. Cameron couldn't have done more for her." After arriving safely in England, Mythos began her stay in quarantine kennels, and, 17 days later, gave birth to three gorgeous puppies.

The pups stayed in quarantine with Mythos until they were seven weeks old, and Jackie has rehomed the two



female puppies. She kept the male, called Troy.

"Troy is seven months old, and loves gardening - otherwise known as digging up my bulbs! He still sees his sisters, and the young couples that have adopted them say they both have lovely natures."

Mythos finished her six-month quarantine period five weeks ago, and has now settled well into her new home. She loves to sit in the sunshine and stare at birds, and gets on well with her son. "They love each other, and are great friends."

It cost Jackie £3,000 to rescue Mythos and her puppies, but it was worth every penny, she says. "If I had left Mythos, The Ark would have probably received a phone call, saying that she had given birth on a beach somewhere. The puppies might not even be alive now. It was costly, but it was worth it. I don't think I'll ever go back to Corfu, because now I know what happens to dogs there."

Looking to the future, the charity hopes to educate the next generation about humane animal care. "We have an education programme, and we try to show young people there is a better way to treat animals," says Cameron. "The ultimate aim is to achieve fair treatment for the stray and abandoned animals of Corfu. We do not ask that everyone likes animals with a passion. However, there is no reason why they cannot be treated with dignity and respect." ::

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Stop press

We are pleased to announce that Troy has reached the final of the Crossbreed and Mongrel Club's 'SCAMPS' competition! The final will be held at Wicksteed Park, Northants on 24 September.