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People, Places, and Cultures

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ISTANBUL: THE QUEEN OF CITIES

Every Dog Will Have

by Kristina Lyn Heitkamp

It's almost impossible to count all the homeless dogs and cats in the world. But the World Health Organization has estimated 600 million strays roam the earth in search of shelter, companionship, and food. That's almost twice the population of people in the United States. The hungry pooches and felines have caused problems in several international cities — some places where there are no laws against cruelty to animals.

While prepping for the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia, city officials didn't know what to do with the 2,000 stray dogs that wandered the streets of Olympic Park. Several dogs were killed, some were transported to a nearby refuge, and a few lucky pooches went home with Olympians. Managing homeless dogs and cats is a worldwide problem. But what do you do when stray dogs have lived in a city for hundreds of years?

Homeless hounds and mousers have called Istanbul home for centuries and are part of Turkish culture. With 150,000 dogs roving the streets, there are more strays living in Istanbul than people in Savannah, Georgia. The social strays prefer freedom to fences. They abide traffic lights, knowing to stop on red and go on green. Dogs can be found under outdoor café tables, finding shade under park benches, or enjoying a satisfying belly rub from a local biped. The city is their natural habitat.

Feeding two dogs with one bone

How many bags of kibble does it take to feed 150,000 strays? Well luckily for Istanbul's pack of mutts, Pugedon (poo-ghe-dahn) has recently joined the street gang. A recycling receptacle that feeds homeless animals, Pugedon vending machines help to keep the streets clean, and the city green. Instead of taking quarters and dimes, Pugedon takes plastic bottles and aluminum cans. In return for the recycled items, the machines



its Day



Plastic in, treats out! Keeping the city litter free also helps keep stray animals fed.

dispenses kibble and water. The receptacles have recovered valuable resources from Istanbul's waste-shed. "People are always eager to cooperate with their recycling material, knowing that their small actions contribute to the well being of strays and other animals," said Liz Howell, an environmental scientist and distributor for Pugedon Americas.

The solar-powered machines are made from stainless steel. They can take up to 800 units of recyclables, and can dispense 22 pounds of food. The kibble is paid with the profits from the collected plastic and aluminum. Pugedon machines are in 29 countries around the world, including all over Istanbul and surrounding cities, and in Puerto Rico and Colombia.

But is Pugedon just a Band-Aid for much larger problem? Not everyone in Istanbul is fond of the furry critters pounding the pavement in search of food. Some see the strays as a source of disease and danger. But Howell says Pugedon has had a positive impact in every community where it's installed. She has witnessed hundreds of people adopting strays. Pugedon also works with organizations to provide low cost neutering, vaccinations, and veterinary services to help control over population. "Anyone can be part of the solution," she said.



Dinnertime! A stray cat enjoys a meal courtesy of a Pugedon vending machine.

Kristina Lyn Heitkamp is a Montana-based writer, researcher, and environmental journalist. She has housed several strays and is actively searching for the next homeless hound to bring home.

FAST FACTS

- April 4th is Stray Animals Day. It is a day to show compassion, and promote awareness for all stray animals around the world.
- Istanbul has a Trap, Tag, and Release program. Street dogs are captured, vaccinated, spayed or neutered, ear-tagged, and then released back into their neighborhood.