

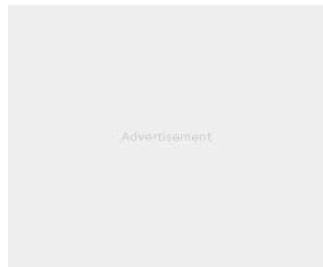


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International dog day: Care for canines

By - TIMESOFINDIA.COM | Updated: Aug 26, 2022, 12:21 IST



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My close bond with dogs dates back to my childhood, when I used to bring injured puppies home from the street and nurse them back to health. Since then, they have been my close companions. I have 5 of them at home! Dogs and humans have had a special bond for millennia and have evolved together creating a truly unique companionship.

The true essence of celebrating International Dog Day is in ensuring the welfare of all dogs, regardless of breed, size, gender or age. The day is celebrated to encourage people to adopt more dogs instead of buying them. The first time it was celebrated was 26th Aug 2004 when the 'animal oracle' Colleen Paige's adopted her first dog 'Sheltie' from a local shelter. Since then, the day is marked to highlight the importance of 'adopting' dogs as opposed to 'buying' them. When you buy a dog from a pet store, there is an element of supporting those who put profits ahead of the welfare of animals, occasionally to the point of cruelty with inappropriate breeding practices. In India, there is no need to buy since we have so many dogs looking for a home.

Unfortunately, the stray dog has become that one animal which is neglected. The recent news is filled with incidences of cruelty against strays, be it abandonment or attacking. These voiceless lives have no access to nutritious food, health facilities or love. We can help by adopting them in numbers, but we must also help by controlling the population to minimize conflict between dogs and communities. India has 20 million stray dogs out of which only 10% have been sterilized & immunized which is not enough to control the steep rise in the dog population.

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There is a clear need for a robust animal healthcare ecosystem in India, with a focus beyond just home pets. But the veterinary ecosystem is still at a nascent stage. India has only around half of its required number of veterinarians - 63,000 registered veterinarians today, as compared to the requirement of between 1.1 - 1.2 lakh. I believe a comprehensive approach is imperative for ensuring dog and human welfare, health, and safety. A major obstacle is the Spay and Neuter of strays. Almost all ABC programs have only targeted urban centers, completely ignoring the rural centers. Another concern is Rabies, which is the cause of the death of more than 50,000 people annually. A systematic and scientific plan must also include a mass vaccination drive to the control rabies in dogs.

Of course, many non-profits and individuals who are doing admirable work for stray dogs. It is because of these individuals and organizations, along with progressive Government policies that strays are in a better condition in some geographies. Ten years ago, I started an animal shelter – YODA (Youth Organization in Defense of Animals), which not only works to provide shelter & healthcare to needy animals but is also continuously working towards sensitizing people and spreading awareness on human-animal conflict. By means of awareness programs in schools, slums, and amongst various communities, the aim is to educate individuals about what to do when they see a stray animal in distress. Next, we ventured into treatment and rehabilitation of animals in distress via best in class medical and behavioral rehabilitation services by our expert team of vets and behaviorists.

I truly believe in the principle of One Health, a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach that recognizes the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment for holistic health. At our Anil Agarwal Foundation, a group of very passionate animal lovers are on a mission to create large-scale impact. They have started The Animal Care Organisation (TACO) which is a first-of-its-kind animal welfare project that will provide world-class infrastructure, veterinary services, training facilities, and animal shelters. The initiative caters to the needs of stray and domesticated animals and aims at sensitizing people and creating a compassionate India where every animal lives with dignity and respect.

While there are gaps in the current ecosystem, it also provides us an opportunity to come together as a society and collectively make a difference. In my experience of 10 years in the field of animal rescue, rehabilitation, and welfare, I have realized that the present-day scenario is much better than earlier as the laws and establishment of various non-governmental organizations having created a safer atmosphere for strays. The task at hand is to scale it up to every corner of this vast country. Every dog in India deserves our attention and commitment to their welfare. That is the least we can do for a species that has been a loving friend and loyal companion in our long history.

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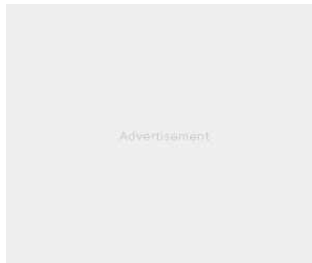

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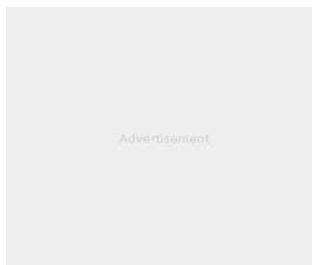
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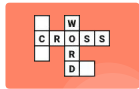


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