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## Where do they go?

- [ELIZABETH PAULOSE](#)

*ISSUE* What happens to animals that are abandoned by their owners?



lend a helping handTo abandoned animalsPhoto: R. Shivaji Rao

On June 2, an injured pony was found roaming near R.S. Puram in the city. It was rescued by members of the NGO Humane Animal Society (HAS) and it is now recuperating in Seeranaickenpalayam where the Animal Birth Control Programme (ABC) is operational. The animal is being attended to by the resident doctor and an attendant. No one knows who the pony belongs to. He limps around in the one acre compound.

Says Dr. K. Ashokan, Corporation Veterinary Officer, "A lot of stray horses are abandoned in Kavundampalayam by their owners and Rekla race drivers when no longer fit." Next door to this compound is another two-acre plot owned by the Coimbatore Corporation that is meant to function as an animal shelter but at the moment it is overgrown with grass. The city faces an enormous problem of stray animals says Ashokan adding that there are nearly 5,000 stray dogs in the Coimbatore Corporation city limits alone.

At the moment, there are 80 dogs in Seeranaickenpalayam under the ABC Programme that has been operational in Coimbatore since 2006. Under this programme nearly 300 dogs are neutered every month. But this number is inconsequential says Ashokan. "A minimum of 500 dogs need to be neutered in a month to bring the population under control," he says.

It is a vicious cycle. "If five pups are born in a household and three are females, they are usually abandoned. These dogs multiply and add to the problem. We have also found pet shops and breeders abandoning older dogs," says Ashokan. There are two such dogs at the shelter — an ageing Labrador and a Doberman with fungal infections. You can hardly tell their breed. He says it is very difficult to cure skin diseases in dogs. A resident doctor in charge of the ABC programme, Abhilash A.K, says, "These animals are not fit to be left out into the streets. So they are housed here in individual cages." Stray dogs are often injured in road accidents. Abhilash says he attends to at least 20 cases of dog hits in a month. According to Ashokan, the problem can be mitigated if there was more land available to them to house these animals. Adoption drives for street dogs could also be held in such a place, he suggests. To reduce the numbers of abandoned dogs, a system of providing licenses to dog owners could be put in place. "This way owners who abandon their dogs can be identified," says Ashokan.

In a separate cage at the compound are housed 21 prancing puppies. Rescued from various areas in the city, these pups are now fit for adoption. They are vaccinated and perfectly healthy. "And the Corporation offers a lifetime vaccination if you adopt dogs from here," says Abhilash.

Fortunately, there are some who make a difference in their own way. C.R. Ravi has been feeding stray dogs in the V.O.C Park Grounds for a couple of years now. "I come here every morning. There is no one to feed these animals that would otherwise just starve and die," he says.

ELIZABETH PAULOSE