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## **WVS joins Amazon C.A.R.E.S. in Peru**

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*Five vets combine neutering with competing in the Great Amazon Raft Race!*

### **WVS / Amazon C.A.R.E.S. Peru Trip**

**VETS:** Beth McGennisken, Sheradan Harvey, Aoife O'Sullivan, Jane Little and Lorna O'Dowd.

This trip was organised by **Amazon C.A.R.E.S.** in conjunction with **WVS** and was aimed at neutering and vaccinating street dogs and cats in the city of Iquitos and villages in the surrounding jungle area. Iquitos is a bustling city, overflowing with mototaxis, in the heart of the jungle. I could feel the humidity as I tried to catch my breath as soon as I got off the plane.

We were met by Molly (the director of the charity) at the airport and on the way to the clinic she explained the history of the charity to us and also the plan for our stay. Accommodation was provided and turned out to be a delightful apartment above the clinic complete with snacks and drinks as well as internet access. That evening we made two appearances on local TV networks to try to promote the charity as well as the upcoming raft race.

The following day our campaign began in earnest. We travelled to the suburb of Bellavista Nanay and set up our mobile clinic. This involved a local lending us floor space so we could assemble our cages, operating tables and recovery area. The rooms we were given were basic but perfect for the job in hand. Once our equipment was set up street dogs and owned dogs were brought in for treatment. All dogs

and cats were vaccinated for rabies, treated for worms, fleas and mange. Those that were sterilised were given antibiotic cover, analgesia and a right ear notch and tattoo. All of the dogs vaccinated for rabies were given a red plastic collar for identification purposes.

Beth became the public liason officer and dealt with the difficult task of keeping a record of each patient and its treatment. As she has spearheaded the neutering campaign, alongside Molly, this worked really well and she was always available to answer questions from the vet team and the public alike.

Our anaesthetic protocol worked really well. It consisted of a xylazine premed, iv access was then secured followed by a diazepam/ketamine induction. All dogs remained on iv fluids for the duration of the anaesthetic and every bitch was entubated. Top-ups, when needed were again diazepam/ketamine. This was by far the safest anaesthetic protocol I have used in a "field" situation.

Our day was very productive and one grateful owner even brought us a bottle of Coke as a gesture of kindness. Molly also brought lots of snacks, sandwiches and cold drinks to keep us going. While the vet team operated, Molly took local children in groups and conducted education seminars so that they could be made aware of animals welfare.

The following day we travelled to another suburb, Los Delfines. This was more remote and the local hospital had allowed us to use two rooms for the day. Again, Molly held seminars for the local children while the vets operated.

The following day the vets caught a bus to Nauta, a town situated on the Amazon River to meet up with our fellow competitors for the raft race. Here, we climbed aboard the most overcrowded riverboat and like sardines in a tin, we found space to hang our hammocks. Despite the close quarters, we all had a great time on the boat and it was an excellent way to mingle with other competitors. Unfortunately with one toilet/shower and 40 passengers, the long drop was occupied constantly. Lorna, did not compete in the raft race but had the important job of being team motivator and cheered us on at every opportunity.

The Great Amazon Raft Race (said to be the longest raft race in the world- 142km) began at dawn the next day. Our rafts were made by tying 7 logs together with vine- they were not the most aerodynamic of vessels and sometimes not the most buoyant...The river was brown (said to be silt but more likely full of sewerage, E.coli, giardia, typhoid, spirochaetes, piranhas and cholera). The first day we paddled for 8 hours on the trot- we were unprepared for the scorching sun or the physical exertion necessary for such endurance. There was vomiting, blisters, sun-burn, heat stroke, delirium and power-napping but we struggled on and completed the 40km. Day Two was awesome- we power-rowed for 9 hours through one tropical storm and many dolphin sightings completing the 60kms in second place. Day three was difficult from an endurance point of view, but we managed to complete the remaining 42km in 7 hours. The final kilometre was upstream into the port of the Nanay River and this was probably the most gruelling part. We finished a very respectable second place in the international section and received a beautiful wooden trophy made by a local craftsman. I think it is fair to say this was the hardest, most excruciatingly painful, mentally and physically exhausting thing I have ever done in my life, but in many ways it is also the most satisfying.

The next day we packed up our equipment and travelled on another river boat downstream along the Amazon to local villages. This boat was comfortable, we had lovely sleeping quarters, delicious food and I even had an impromptu birthday party complete with cakes! Each of the four days we stopped at a different village to treat local animals- Indiana, Mazan, Los Palmeras and Yanamono. While the vets operated Molly, a local teacher, Tania and Karina, an English girl we met through the raft race held seminars in the local schools to educate the children. Bethjane and Ricardo also came along- they are veterinary nurses from the clinic and proved to be invaluable in terms of hard work but also liaising with locals. This two pronged approach of education along with veterinary care is a far better approach than vet care alone and in my opinion will create a wave of change in the upcoming generation. We also met with Nancy Dunne, an American lady who has established a library in one of these villages to encourage local children to read books.

Molly also organised a night time boat trip to watch the stars and spot local wildlife aswell as a tour of the local rum factory- complete with complimentary drinks!

One of my funniest memories of this trip was visiting the home of one of the villagers to return their neutered dog and cat. Their house had fallen into the river the previous year due to erosion of the river bank and the family were rebuilding it piece by piece- set further back from the bank. The dog was called Shakira, which had me giggling from the outset. We explained that the cat would need to be confined overnight and after some hunting about, a large plastic tub was placed upside down on top of the cat. Problem solved- until the tub started moving across the floor!!! Everyone was in fits of laughter, apart from Shakira of course!

We encountered two bitches with TVTs which were transported back to Iquitos for treatment with vincristine. These dogs will be returned to their original villages once treatment is complete. In one village we also encountered larval cysts subcutaneously in the elbows of several dogs. These were dissected and the larvae were removed- I believe it to be a relation of either the warble fly or the bot fly. The main disease we saw was skin disease (mainly sarcoptic mange and also demodectic mange). We saw one case of distemper which needed to be euthanised as it had neurological signs not compatible with life and also one haermaphrodite. I also operated on a bitch that had been neutered two years previously but was having recurring heats. I was amazed to find two intact ovaries! These have now been removed.

In total 83 dogs were neutered, along with 15 cats. A further 30 dogs were treated as well as three chickens and a sloth. This brings Beth and Molly's neutering campaign close to the 400 mark. I feel that this trip made a huge difference to the lives of as many animals as it did people and I would hope that the work we have started continues on, for many more trips like this one.

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