

Roaming Refuge: 1200 Dogs, Cats, Horses & Bunnies by Laura Simpson

Under a rainy sky, Fahshan wraps himself in a poncho and boards his bicycle. Though his fingers ache with arthritis and his clothes are quickly getting wet, he makes many stops on his way to work. He is a security guard at one of Malaysia's many factories, and though his own dinner was modest, he knows it is up to him to find food for the dogs who will emerge soon under the cover of darkness. He stops his bike at several restaurants, begging for leftover scraps, until he has filled his satchel. When he arrives at work, he gently unwraps the food and lays it down on the ground. Then the dogs begin to appear. In Malaysia, stray dogs take refuge in industrial zones where factories offer easy access to shelter and a place to give birth to their pups. The homeless dogs often hide during the day and come out at night in search of food. It is the security guards, who earn very little money, who are confronted with the reality of the dogs' suffering and who, most often, try to do something about it.

Many of these dogs and their caretakers are finding help from a special charity called Noah's Ark CARES. The group is attempting to expand a program to spay and neuter the homeless dogs and to provide a steady food supply for the caretakers who are trying to care for them. Volunteers and veterinarians are coming together in a mission to halt the expansion of the population of homeless dogs, and to even microchip them, in order to assume a stronger form of custody.

What Began With a Couple Hundred Animals....

Noah's Ark CARES was founded by Raymund Wee, a former flight steward and pet groomer who sold his Singapore-based business and used the proceeds to establish the organization's sanctuary. What began as a place of refuge for a couple hundred animals grew by leaps and bounds after a severe flood a few years back, and soon the haven was so full of three legged, one-eyed, emotionally wounded dogs and cats that he was forced to move the entire ark to Johor where more affordable land is available.

Today, more than 1,200 cats, dogs, rabbits and horses live at the sanctuary which costs a whopping \$25,000 a month to maintain and all of it must come from donations. Raymund, affectionately known as Uncle Raymund, lives at the sanctuary and is joined by an astounding group of volunteers who see to it that every animal is cared for.

Did You Say Free Roaming?

Now here's the jaw dropper...the animals here are free roaming. They amble over several acres and are free to swim, sunbathe, climb or simply be. There's even a Christmas cookie party for the dogs. Though many of the dogs are grouped in packs, separated by fences, they all have the freedom to run and play and choose their own place to sleep.

I'm fascinated by the innate understanding of animal dynamics it takes to keep such a large "herd" in balance and by the day-to-day work required to keep the animals clean and fed. It's a monumental task not only of great compassion, but great skill. And although it would be nice to see each of these animals in individual homes, the fact is that they had nowhere else to go.

My charity, the Harmony Fund, raises funds to help to sustain this sanctuary for abused and neglected animals and to expand their mission to help the industrial dogs. I hope

you'll agree that it's a place well worth our investment. Here are some stunningly beautiful pictures of the animals who enjoy this piece of paradise.