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Long Island animal shelters debate rescuing animals from overseas, out of state

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Adoption woes rise at some LI animal shelters


Organizations like the Southampton Animal Shelter Foundation has struggled with a decrease in pet adoptions and donations. NewsdayTV's Steve Langford reports. Credit: Randee Daddona and Thomas Lambui

By Joan Gralla


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Next month, two young dogs plucked from a Ukrainian battlefield arrive at a Hampton Bays shelter.

Next week, 50 dogs saved from East Asia’s meat trade land at Kennedy Airport.

And just last week, another 50 small dogs and puppies rescued from Missouri commercial breeders came to the North Shore Animal League America in Port Washington.

From Egypt’s strays, known as Baladi, to Puerto Rico’s Satos, Thailand’s soi, the Yucatan’s Malix and the Caribbean’s potcakes, cats and dogs from around the world have found a home in Mid-Atlantic and Northeast shelters, as have pets from the South and Midwest.

WHAT TO KNOW

- **In addition to local rescues**, some Long Island animal shelters take in cats and dogs from across the world, as well as other parts of the country.
- **Proponents argue that doing so protects pets** that might otherwise be euthanized and the publicity of overseas rescues can increase adoptions of other rescues.
- **But critics say importing additional pets can overburden municipal shelters** and make it harder to adopt out less-desirable animals. The focus should instead be on expanding spay-and-neuter and education programs, they say.

Animal advocates agree all pets — local or not — deserve forever homes. But some say taking in pets from out of state or overseas can overburden municipal shelters and prevent less-desirable breeds, older animals and ones who are ailing or ill-trained from being adopted.

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“That’s a great thing to save these animals from other states and other countries. I’m certainly not against that,” said Roy Gross, Suffolk County SCPCA chief.

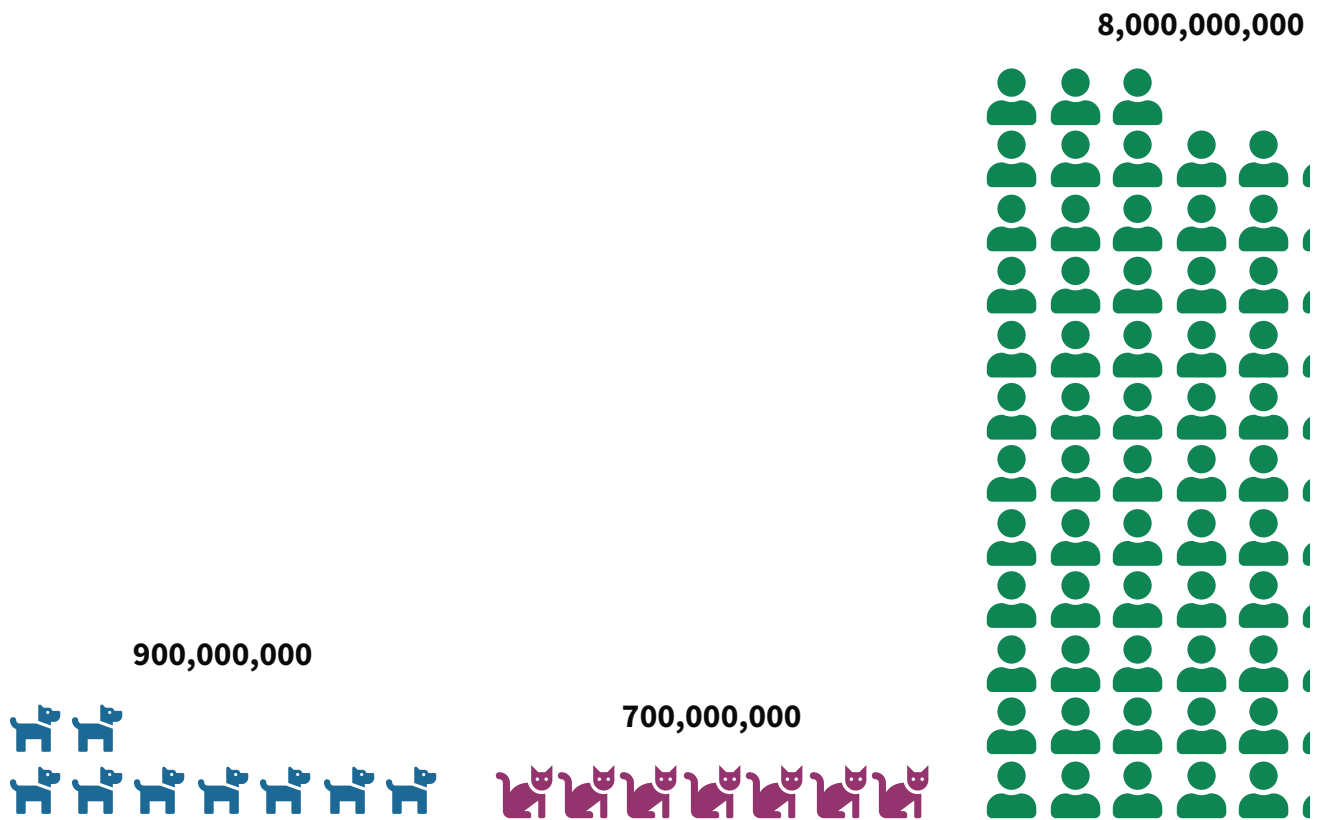
But, added Nassau County SPCA board president Gary Rogers, “We have a lot of our unwanted pets in our local animal shelters and they need help too – and they seem to be forgotten souls.”

‘Hard to say no’

Advocates may not agree on who should care for them, but one fact does achieve near universal accord: there are far too few homes for an estimated 900 million dogs – around 75% of which roam freely – along with approximately 700 million cats worldwide.

An estimated 900 million dogs – around 75% of which roam freely – and approximately 700 million cats – share Earth with nearly 8 billion people

● = 100,000,000 🐕 Dogs 🐈 Cats 👤 People



✶ A Flourish data visualization

Ukraine's animal shelters are struggling as Russia invades.

“The scale of destruction is terrifying,” Dmytro Revnuyk, founder of Zoopatru Ukraine, said in a statement.

“We are desperately looking for financial help with the purchase of building materials for the completion of our shelter in Irpin, as well as help with fuel and lubricants for the generators at the shelter, with repairing cars we use to rescue animals, with the food for dogs and cats, and medical supplies, Revnuyk said.

Last year, Irpin, about 16 miles west of Kyiv, was a prize Russia fought hard for but lost.



Candy, one of two dogs rescued in Kherson, Ukraine, will be going to the Southampton Animal Rescue Foundation next month. Credit: No Dogs Left Behind/Jeffrey Beri

Candy and Nadya, two dogs resembling small German shepherds, now are healing at the Gostomel Animal Shelter outside Kyiv, which was deprived of water and power for "long months." These are the two bound for the Southampton Animal Shelter Foundation in Hampton Bays.

“One of them was extremely ill, in really bad condition. ... Cowering and limping, it was trying to go into a building that could have just been blown up,” said their rescuer, Jeff Beri, founder and president of the Florida-headquartered nonprofit No Dogs Left Behind.

“We always look local first [but] when you get an appeal that is a life-and-death situation, it’s hard to say no,” said Pat Deshong, executive director of the Southampton Animal Shelter Foundation.

This nation has as many as 85 million dogs – which could climb to 0 million by 2030.

 A Flourish data visualization

Requests to take in pets from overseas and out of state, whether from disaster-hit areas or locales burdened with puppy mills and failed spay-and-neuter strategies, have risen, said Deshong.

“So many beautiful animals are being euthanized just because there is no room,” she said. “I can’t tell you how difficult it is. You look at these animals, I’m talking hundreds probably in the course of a day, it’s so hard to pick and choose.”

Beri, whose nonprofit has rescued thousands of dogs from slaughter overseas and hundreds of cats and dogs in Afghanistan, some left behind by military personnel, argues that the publicity of overseas rescues can lift adoptions of other rescues.

“All boats rise when the tide rises, it’s happened on several occasions when we did this,” he said. “I believe all of us collectively need to work together.”

But critics say rescues should focus on expanding spay-and-neuter and education programs.

Beri says his nonprofit spayed or neutered, vaccinated and microchipped military family pets in Ukraine and delivered six tons of dog food, “while missiles were blowing up all around us and people were dying around us, while the convoy was delivering the food and conducting a sterilization campaign.”

A number of New York shelters said they help with spaying and neutering. North Shore Animal League says its national network has almost 2,000 affordable programs.

Advocates hope New York's law banning pet stores from selling cats, dogs and rabbits, starting in two years, thins the puppy mill ranks.

Some town shelters, such as Islip and Babylon, say all their rescues are local.

One long-standing problem, critics say, is that not all shelters immediately accept returns.

North Shore Animal League says it accepts surrenders on a case-by-case basis. If there is no room, people are asked to wait.

Disease risk

Another concern about importing animals from overseas is the potential to spread disease.

“No one knows how West Nile virus got to New York City but it is a great example of a disease that spread to this country and affected animals and people. The French heartworm is another,” said Ann Hohenhaus, senior veterinarian at the Schwarzman Animal Medical Center in Manhattan.

French heartworm is a parasitic disease that can affect dogs. First discovered in France, research hypotheses suggest it will spread to North America as well.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which halted bringing in dogs from nations with rabies, warns of numerous possible ailments, from flus to parasites.

Said Joanne Yohannan, senior vice president of operations at the North Shore Animal League, “At the end of the day we are not going leave the animal there to die when we know that there are families waiting to adopt them.”

North Shore has dogs from Tennessee, Louisiana, South Carolina and North Carolina, Georgia — and local shelters — “at any given time,” and in the next month, more will arrive from Florida, Puerto Rico

and Oman, according to Diane Johnson, vice president of shelter operations.

Rescuers agree that some dogs — like the pint-size Yorkshire and Boston terriers, Maltese, pugs and Shih Tzus recently rescued from Missouri — often are the most desirable.

“Small dogs typically get adopted quickest, and large dogs, especially pit bulls, usually wait the longest,” sometimes because landlords bar them, said Vanessa Herdter, adoption coordinator at the Southampton Animal Shelter. “Even the nicest large dog will wait longer than the average small dog unfortunately.”

Yohannan agrees: “It is a sad reality that a lot of local shelters have a lot of pit bulls and so do we — they deserve a loving home too,” she said.

But she argues giving families lots of breeds and mixes to choose from is vital as otherwise they might go elsewhere.

“I think that just encourages internet sales and going to the pet store,” she said.

By Joan Gralla

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