

Editor's Note: Tsunami Effects on Nonhuman Animals

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Govindasamy Agoramoorthy, co-author of this issue's "Welfare Evaluations of Nonhuman Animals in Selected Zoos in the Philippines," (Almazan, Rubio, & Agoramoorthy, 2005/this issue) writes of helping with posttsunami relief work in her native Indian village and comments on conditions of animals:

One of the worst hit areas in India was my home district of Nagapattinam where the tsunami claimed 6,063 lives and displaced 176,000. Along the coast at Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary in Nagapattinam district, however, the number of dead, nonhuman animals—in-the-wild or domestic—was few. There were reports of fish jumping out of water at the onset of the tsunami waves. Flamingos who breed this time of year at the sanctuary on India's southern coast left for safer forests well before the tsunami waves hit. About 8 to 10 minutes before the waves crashed into the sanctuary, forest guards standing in observation towers at sanctuary saw wild animals such as the black bucks, spotted deer, wild boar, and jackals dash toward higher grounds and stand there!

The local people in the neighboring town of Sirkali acted swiftly in the relief work right after the tsunami tragedy. Temples and schools were used as refugee shelters for several days, and local people were generous with donations to feed and care for the victims. Doctors from the government hospitals, Primary Health Centers, District Medical Offices, and nongovernment organizations such as the Rotary Club International treated the wounded and involved themselves in disease prevention work such as spraying disinfectants along the coast and near burial sites. They gave antitetanus shots to those affected by the tsunami waves. Only a few cases of dysentery were recorded, and there was no outbreak of contagious

diseases after the tsunami. (G. Agoramoothy, personal communication, January 29, 2005)

Press and television reports confirm Agoramoothy's claim that large numbers of nonhuman animals—companion, on-the-farm, and in-the-wild—survived the December 26, 2004, tsunami. Yala National Park, Sri Lanka's largest wildlife preserve—closed for only 4 days after the waves struck, killing 4 park workers and 38 tourists—reopened with animals returning to park tracts by the first of the year. The tourists also are coming back, with visitors averaging 100 a day, down from the pretsunami rate of 150 ("Animals, Tourists Returning," 2005).

Wildlife officials say hundreds of leopards, tigers, wild boar, water buffalo, monkeys, and small mammals escaped the park unharmed. "All the animals escaped due to their own built-in tsunami early warning systems." Weregama, Yala Park warden, reports. "Only the butterflies are missing" ("Animals, Tourists Returnng," 2005).

Surviving animals, however, remain at high risk. On January 7, 2005, the secretary of the Commonwealth Veterinary Association met with the chairman of Blue Cross of India at Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Their detailed review of coastal damage identified Nagapattinam as the "worst-affected" district in Tamil Nadu. The review found caregivers (owners) displaced; animals abandoned or orphaned, their owners in relief camps or dead; large grazing areas destroyed; and drinking water contaminated or salty (Commonwealth Veterinary Association, 2005).

On January 16, an article in *The Los Angeles Times* (Glionna, 2005) alerted The Humane Society International (HSI) to the Sri Lankan government's plans to eradicate stray dogs. The government feared a rabies outbreak. Five days later, HSUS posted news on its Website of rapid intervention by humane relief teams already on the ground in Sri Lanka ("HSI Veterinary Disaster Teams," 2005)

HSI flew its Veterinary Disaster Team into Sri Lanka and dissuaded the government from issuing the order to destroy the dogs. Eric Davis, director of HSI's Rural Area Veterinary Services, led the team in vaccinating strays. Within a week, collaborating with HSUS's National Disaster Response Team, the group had vaccinated more than 4,000 of an estimated 100,000 stray dogs in the devastated areas. The Sri Lankan government, however, warned that it could not control the decisions of small towns or villages ("HSI Veterinary Disaster Teams," 2005). For stray or displaced animals, the danger continues.

Turning to coastlands, the Indian Ocean, and the Andaman Sea, the immediate concern is the future—if any—of marine life, specifically of Sri Lanka's sea turtles: the olive ridley, green, and leatherback—already in danger of extinction—and the heavily hunted hawksbill. "Marine turtles are among the world's most ancient creatures, with a fossil record going back 150 million years ... but hunting and pollution are pushing some breeds to the edge of extinction" (Balmer, 2005).

Stephen Kulhami, marine biologist with Reef Watch Marine Conservation, reports, "The nesting beaches in South Andaman, Little Andaman, and the Nicobar

group of islands ... have almost vanished" (Owen, 2005). The latest generation of the threatened sea turtles has been "washed away" (Owen, 2005). The tsunami washed to sea 20 of 30 olive ridley turtles in breeding tanks at Phuket Island marine center (Balmer, 2005).

Fifteen days after the tsunami, however, while marine biologists spoke of endangered marine life perhaps "pushed one step closer to extinction," a 330-pound, male green turtle turned up 1,000 yards inland (Balmer, 2005). A rare find, he had suffered a wound to his scales. At the marine biological center on Phuket, biologist Kongkiat Kittiwattanawong and his team dosed the turtle with vitamins and medicine and repaired his wound with fiberglass. They returned the treated turtle to the sea at Tablamu navy base, near where rescuers had found him.

Subsequently, 26 green turtles have been found, 24 of whom have been returned to the Andaman Sea—satellite tracking systems attached to their shells. "We have never been able to attach an antenna to a male green turtle before, so this should really help our understanding of how and where they live," said Kongkiat" (Balmer, 2005).

On January 21, 2005, less than one month after the killer waves receded, the HSUS reported HSI had distributed \$72,500 to affected areas in South Asia. HSI distributed \$10,000 to the Soi Dog Foundation in Thailand; \$10,000 to KACPAW in Sri Lanka for rabies vaccinations; \$5,000 to Blue Cross of India for immediate relief of pets and livestock; and \$25,000 to the World Society for the Protection of Animals for tsunami disaster relief ("HSI Veterinary Disaster Teams," 2005).

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