

Parts 1 and 2. Introduction and "Moscow Experience"

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DOGS AND CATS IN TOWN. THE PROBLEM OF HOMELESS ANIMALS.

(Protecting urban pets is an illusion and a reality.)

Preliminary explanation. In early 2004, I wrote a polemical text, "Animal Welfare – Illusions and Reality." It was about the problem of urban homeless animals in Russia and the first inept attempts to solve it. Originally conceived as a letter to the newspaper on behalf of a biologist studying the problem of stray dogs, it was eventually published as an article on the Animal Welfare Tribune website. Time passed, and in 2008 I decided to return to this topic, which became even more socially significant. In principle, the main contradictions between "illusions" and "reality" are still relevant, however, given the increased interest in the problem, I decided to dwell on some points in much more detail. It is necessary to introduce adjustments in connection with the new available information and its discussion in society. Research data has emerged, from which, among other things, it follows that the negative consequences of rash approaches to the problem have worsened – and in fact the warnings were made in advance. Some important issues have finally either appeared in the focus of public attention, or began to be more actively discussed, including under the influence of such a completely unique information resource as the above-mentioned site – this, for example, is the problem of overproduction of pets.

1. Instead of introduction.

1.1. Formulation of the problem.

In recent years, many opinions have been expressed regarding the problems associated with urban dogs and cats – including, and above all, the homeless; moreover, the discussion of this topic attracts everyone's attention and causes a storm of emotions. However, there is still the impression of confusion and inconsistency of the information picture. In Russia, a platform for a fruitful discussion on this topic has not yet been formed; emotions are constantly eluded by the most important questions, the answer to which (or at least their formulation!) would help to orient the situation and public opinion, and activists of animal protection organizations, and the authorities. Finally, it would help to really solve problems whose existence is not denied by the majority.

In our country, there is no serious experience in setting and solving such problems. This is characteristic of most of the so-called "third world" countries, but Russia is still considered a more or less developed country. But it so happened that its history developed in the 20th century that the questions of the coexistence of animals and humans in the urban environment were solved at best superficially. After the collapse of the USSR, control over the situation in this area was generally lost – and the problems grew many times over. Since the late 90s, at their own peril and risk, individual cities and subjects of the federation have been trying to find solutions (as a rule, on the basis of a very poor analysis of both their own situation and someone else's experience). More often these are declarations, less often - attempts to implement them, and the main trouble is without clear criteria for testing effectiveness. But there is still no clear national position reflected in regulations at the federal level; nor a community of specialists capable of giving verified recommendations on the topic. Hence, to a large extent, the short-sightedness or unreasonableness of various ideas, decisions and events of recent years.

The absurdity of some lies on the surface and is visible to almost everyone. These are, for example, the facts of prosecution of veterinarians in some cities for "violations" of ultra-strict regulatory restrictions in the use of ketamine. It's harder with other, less obvious, but much more important things. Among other social and environmental issues, the issue of "regulation and control in the housing of urban pets" is one of the leaders in relation to the depressing superficiality and inconsistency in attempts to solve. It's not even that a large number of questions do not have sufficiently reasoned answers - some key questions are not even put before society and the authorities with a sufficient degree of clarity. The arguments presented in rare more or less professional discussions are little known. Against this background, a large number of semi-mythical ideas, and sometimes outright lies, continue to be reproduced in the media and circulate among the population.

What questions do I think we need to think about? For example, of the most important - what ideal should we strive for or what is the ultimate, desirable goal of working on "homeless animals" in cities and in rural areas? There is no assessment of priorities: what are the priority problems that really need to be solved, and what is secondary. What are the origins of these problems, what approaches should be used to solve them? What should be the criteria for success? How should the means and ends correlate – especially if we are talking about the long term, taking into account the multifaceted complexity of the problem: should the environmental, ethical, economic, socio-psychological aspects be considered? What is the relationship between the tasks of the public and the authorities? How can we use the existing experience, both foreign and domestic, at least to reduce the unpredictability of the "spontaneous" period in resolving the issue?

Let's try to critically and in detail consider the existing problems, the emerging and common in society approaches to this range of issues, consider the biological side of

the case and world experience, and, finally, try to outline the main contours of possible answers.

2. "Moscow Experience" – prerequisites and basic principles.

2.1. "Abhorrent Homelessness" and "Sterilization Program".

2.1.1. "Humane Program". As mentioned above, since the late 1990s, a number of Russian cities have been trying to start moving towards the creation of modern and effective systems for solving dog and cat issues. Decisions were made both in the field of rulemaking (rules for keeping owner's animals, regulatory documents for regulating the number of homeless animals, etc.), and in the field of practical.

First of all, let's pay attention to the experience of Moscow.

There is still no truly exhaustive analysis, a complete, thorough and unbiased analysis of Moscow's achievements. However, compared to most other cities, Moscow projects and their results are still much better studied. The capital is always in the focus of close attention.

It was widely believed, formed mainly by the media, that the capital, since 2001, has made the most progress in resolving the relevant issues, and in a "humane way". Truly objective and reliable details about the prerequisites, methods and results of the "Moscow approach" are still little known to the general Russian public - by the way, this is largely the result of the absence of the same professional analytical community. But at least there is an idea that a certain program (usually known as the "stray dog sterilization program") is being implemented (or has been) being implemented in Moscow, for which money is generously allocated. And the previous "trapping" was prohibited.

And of course, it is to the experience of Moscow (again, unfortunately, more often to what is known about this experience only from media sources) that other cities are looking at in the person of both public figures and the authorities, trying to use it in their practice. In some places, "in the provinces" they praise Moscow's achievements in one way or another and try to copy the "humane approach"; in some places, on the contrary, there is a distrust based on the ambiguity of these achievements (for example, on the information that has recently appeared in the media that there is no decrease in the number of stray dogs in Moscow, and everything is the opposite).

It is worth emphasizing that Moscow's experience - both in the field of declarations and in the field of real achievements - cannot be considered exhaustive for such a vast country as Russia, but it was in it that the main above-mentioned (paragraph 1.1.) innuendos and ambiguities were refracted.

So, let's try to consider the example of Moscow – more precisely, the prerequisites and foundations of its "program" – in a little more detail than is usually presented in the media, touching upon some of the conceptual points underlying the Moscow program. We will pay attention to both regulatory documents and the results of scientific research, articles and press conferences of interested parties.

2.1. 2 . The inalienability of homelessness. The Moscow program was launched by orders of the mayor and the government of Moscow, which issued several regulatory acts. Let's start with one of them. In the preamble of one of the instruction documents that formed the basis of the "sterilization program" ("Regulations on the Capture, Transportation, Sterilization, Maintenance, Registration and Registration of Homeless and Stray Cats and Dogs") in 2002, there is a clause stating that "homeless and stray animals are an integral part of the urban ecological environment." Note - "inalienable". In this way, the homelessness of once-domestic animals is enshrined as a positive reality, or at least as something that is not a problem in itself. Statements in the same vein ("stray animals are needed for ecological balance") are found in other official and semi-official documents, materials of the press conference of authors and supporters of the "sterilization program" and other texts claiming to express progressive views.

Note in parentheses that on the principle of "inherent homelessness" it was quite possible to successfully justify the uselessness of any program at all. However, apparently, certain inconveniences from finding a large number of animals on the streets were still felt - and this was also sometimes mentioned in the publications that accompanied the start of the program. And the inconvenience is mainly from dogs (not from cats). In principle, there is nothing unique here, given the size, mobility and potential danger of these animals - all over the world, dogs were and are engaged in the first place.

Stray dogs were the main goal of the trapping services of the pre-sterilization period - hence, apparently, the opinion about them, dogs, the primary protection (since capture was positioned as the main problem for homeless animals). It is on dogs, as more significant representatives of "homeless animals" compared to cats, that the attention of the developers and conductors of the program is concentrated.

This greater significance is almost never declared openly. However, in Moscow, the "dog component" of the program still disproportionately obscured the cats. The problems coming from stray cats and the problems for the cats themselves have been little discussed. Stray cats have been and are remembered mainly only in connection with the "walling up of basements", where the bulk of stray cats find refuge. Only later, thanks to the efforts of the Ilyinsky animal rights activists, it was possible to raise other, more general and important questions - about the mass

constant death of stray cats for other reasons (primarily due to attacks by packs of stray dogs), about the overproduction of possessive cats and its consequences.

So, as can be understood when analyzing the normative texts and opinions of the developers of the program, first of all, as the main goal, it was planned to somewhat regulate the number of stray dogs - in order to reduce it to some, however, not precisely designated, limits - but, of course, not to zero, because homelessness is "inherent".

2.1.3. Sterilization with return. In accordance with the fundamental principle of homelessness preservation, there are also methods of regulation. The main method is the sterilization of female stray dogs with their subsequent return to their habitat (the procedure is described, for example, in the same "Regulations ..."). According to the authors, these dogs would continue to live there, filling the "ecological niche", gradually reducing their number to (and remaining unknown) "acceptable values". Hence the common name of the program - "sterilization program" (it is more correct to call it a trapping-sterilization-return program, CNVR). This method was envisaged as the main one in several versions of the draft Moscow "Law on keeping animals" - the main document that was supposed to finally legalize the already deployed program.

Characteristically, however, there were no clear references to such programmes and their results abroad.

2.1.4. No euthanasia – and immediately. Moscow politics and the corresponding "Law..." another feature. Some domestic commentators called him nothing but the most humane in the world. Apparently, due to the fact that it is practically forbidden to euthanize homeless animals (except in cases of incurable serious illness and newborn offspring).

This "ahead of the rest of the planet" is just alarming. The fact is that in no developed country in which a high degree of protection and welfare of animals was actually achieved (that is, there are few stray animals), the euthanasia of healthy animals was not formally prohibited (of course, there are strict requirements and criteria for this procedure). And there are objective reasons for this, which will be further considered in the relevant chapter.

I will make a reservation that I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of many authors of these texts - people acting for the benefit of animals. Their emotional desire to find ways to protect animals from the primitive methods of regulating them that have been adopted in our country for so long is understandable. However, for the

benefit of the case, the reasoning and methods should still correspond to common sense, a set of scientific data and work for the future. A close examination of the history of the Moscow program reveals that it is this primary emotional urge – "we will protect us at all costs from cruel regulation" – that is the motivation not to consider the problem in all its complexity. And also to consider homelessness a blessing: then there is no need to regulate. And if necessary, then in a way that at first glance will not lead to the death of animals. Therefore, the word "humane" is often added to the phrase "sterilization program", and its humanism is determined only by one criterion - the declared prohibition of euthanasia. And no distinction is made between cruel and painless methods of killing - on the wave of rejection of euthanasia in general.

2.1.5. "Scientific substantiation". However, in addition to the appeal to humanity, attempts are made to explain from the "point of view of science" why homelessness is inherent. Thus, in the program documents of one of the Moscow animal protection organizations, which actively promoted many city initiatives, it was possible to read that "street animals are necessary for the city for ecological balance." Apparently, the euphemism "street" has been replaced by the word "homeless", which has a clearly negative connotation for people brought up in the traditional sense that homelessness for dogs is an abnormal phenomenon. References to the "ecological balance" or something similar can be found in many other texts and speeches related to the program. Also, from the point of view of science, they are trying to justify the ineffectiveness of any other methods (first of all, irreversible trapping), except for the notorious "sterilization with return".

Usually, to give weight to this position, one can find references to the opinion of zoologists from the Moscow Institute for Problems of Ecology and Evolution named after A.N. Severtsov. A closer examination of the case reveals that these are studies by A.D. Poyarkov, an employee of this institute, some of which were conducted jointly with his colleagues and students. The work of other researchers is usually not taken into account.

Of course, it is impossible not to appreciate the merits of Poyarkov as the first biologist in Russia, who chose stray dogs as the object of long-term research and participated in the development of methods for accounting for their number. However, the scientific research of Poyarkov's group – their subject, goals, objectives and results – on close examination cannot be considered exhaustive in answering many questions regarding strategies for regulating the number of stray dogs. Poyarkov's first research back in the 80s of the last century (their results were included in Poyarkov's Ph.D. thesis) concerned only the social structure of a relatively small settlement (micropopulation) of stray dogs that lived near the main building of Moscow State University and the adjacent industrial zone. In the late 90s (before the

introduction of CNVR), Poyarkov's group conducted surveys of the number of stray dogs throughout Moscow, as well as estimates of some parameters (sex ratio, age) in some individual areas. Finally, in 2006, another all-Moscow population count was carried out.

In fact, the information gathered as a result of these three cycles of research cannot unequivocally tilt in the direction of CNVR. For example, paradoxically, Poyarkov's early work testified, rather, to the effectiveness of irreversible capture, well, and a comparison of these population counts of 1997-98 and 2006 indicates the failure of the CNVR program (more on this below). However, a completely subjective interpretation (both author's and non-author's) of some of the results of these studies in favor of CNVR is still used (first of all, the thesis about the unconditional ineffectiveness of irreversible capture due to the restoration of the number - while it is forgotten that the regularity of capture removes this problem; or the thesis about the insignificance of the contribution of owning animals to the number of homeless - now, however, it is used less often). In addition, sometimes the Internet rumor attributes to Poyarkov some "irrefutable results" in those areas that have never been the subject of any detailed scientific interest at all (for example, the relationship of stray dogs with other urban animals or the life of stray cats) and, accordingly, about which he either never wrote or spoke, or spoke in passing and without due reason.

Separately, it is worth mentioning the experiment in Marfino, as part of the "scientific justification". Judging by the available information, in this Moscow district in the early 2000s, a mass seizure of female dogs to shelters was carried out (with the sterilization of the remaining females, while some of the males apparently migrated to other areas). How this experiment ended a few years later is unknown, there are no new studies and publications.

2.1.6. Forgetting Shelters. Interestingly, before the hype associated with CNVR, in Moscow and in Russia, the focus of animal protection attention was a completely different promising topic – namely, shelters for homeless animals. The fact that there are shelters for cats and dogs abroad has long been known in our country. As soon as the movement in defense of animals began to emerge in Russia (then the USSR) in the 80s, there was a desire to start such institutions.

But later, in the late 1990s, rumors about the use of CNVR appeared in our country, and very distorted (for example, the fact that CNVR has a very limited application to stray dogs became widely known much later - after publications on the website of the Animal Protection Tribune). Unlike shelters, the CNVR method at first glance bribed with a theoretical "biological justification" and the ability to refuse to kill. Ideas of "the benefits of homeless animals" surfaced. Animal rights activists en masse quickly refocused on the alluring idea. Shelters were relegated to the background, and they began to be assigned the role of only a gathering place for lost

master's animals and lifelong boarding houses for those dogs that were still supposed to be removed from the streets ("aggressive").

And only much later did the information gradually begin to spread that the CNVR method has a huge number of "pitfalls", and that the models lying in the "theory" of CNVR are too simplistic (for example, they do not take into account the problems of overproduction of possessive animals and their discarding). And also the fact that the use of irreversible trapping and shelter systems can also be no less biologically justified, and moreover, in fact proved its effectiveness.

2.1.7 . Lack of a clear position on the contribution to the replenishment of the ranks of the homeless on the part of pet owners. It was implied, however, that this contribution was negligible and could not affect the success of the program in any way (there was the following estimate attributed to Poyarkov - only 2% of stray dogs were once owned). Former master dogs on the streets are supposedly bound to "die quickly" - regardless of whether Moscow or another settlement is considered. Although detailed studies of this issue have not been conducted. About cats, as usual, there was practically no question at all.

Accordingly, the problems of discrepancy between supply and demand for domestic animals (the so-called overproduction of domestic animals), the fate of "extra" (not found a host animals), the influence of the culture of keeping host animals on the situation with homeless animals were practically not discussed. But this is a wide range of issues that are very important for the success of any program. Even acknowledging that the self-reproduction of stray dogs in Moscow has since a certain time become the main source of replenishment of their number, it is impossible to discount the influx of owners to the streets in all its variations (from the apartments of citizens, from the territories of enterprises). This influx, even if it contributes less to the numbers, may nevertheless be significant enough to bury an ill-conceived CNVR project. And even more so, it is impossible to automatically transfer Moscow performances to other cities in Russia, where the self-reproduction of dogs on the streets may not play a predominant role in maintaining homelessness at all.

2.1.8. The sum of the prerequisites of the Moscow program. Based on the analysis of various sources, it is possible to derive the following fundamental positions on which - explicitly or implicitly, consciously or semi-consciously - the "Moscow program" (and its clones in other cities) were initially based:

Homelessness of dogs and cats is a phenomenon that can generally be considered as positive or neutral, requiring only adjustment in terms of some "population control".

b. Stray animals (implied - dogs) are certainly needed for the "ecological balance".

c. Predominant attention is paid to only one species out of two, namely dogs.

The situation with owner animals has an extremely limited impact on the situation with the homeless ("there are few former owner dogs on the streets - about 2 percent", cats are not considered). (It wasn't until later that more attention was paid to this aspect, trying to explain the failure of CNVR by "throwing dogs out by the population", which is replenishing the number of homeless people.)

The primary objectives of the implementation of the programs are an almost complete ban on irreversible capture and an immediate and almost unconditional ban on the killing of animals by municipal services.

The main method is the sterilization of females of stray dogs with subsequent release into "habitats" ("trapping-sterilization-return" (CNVR).

Shelters should play a supporting role, or their role is not clearly considered at all.

2.1.9. Subsequent confusion. In subsequent years, in Moscow, during the implementation of the program, when its disappointing results became increasingly clear, attempts to "improve" it began to appear gradually. Against the background of the general awareness of the failure of CNVR, the growth in the number of dogs with all the ensuing consequences (including human casualties), against the background of mass unofficial trapping and lynchings of the population over dogs, against the background of scandalous accusations of embezzlement of funds - there was a tendency to reassess priorities. There were ideas to limit the discarding of host animals, which, as it "unexpectedly turned out", make a certain contribution to the increase in the number of homeless people. True, how to do this was unclear, especially since many issues (for example, the regulation of the registration of host animals), as it turns out, are under the jurisdiction of the federal authorities.

A few years after the start of the "sterilization program", finally, among the Moscow authorities there was an idea of its gradual curtailment and replacement by a system of shelters – which, finally, began to be actively built in 2008. Huge sums have been allocated for this. And, apparently, realizing the impossibility of placing the entire sprawling subpopulation of Moscow stray dogs in shelters for lifelong maintenance, the authorities periodically cautiously make it clear that they will have to resort to euthanasia after a certain period of overexposure. But at one time, the same authorities generously distributed promises that there would be no more euthanasia! The public is disoriented, radical animal rights activists are protesting – and therefore the authorities are again backing down, trying to preserve the principle of "no euthanasia". From here, chimerical projects are born. For example, at first, the

media flashed the idea of returning dogs back after a six-month detention in a shelter (? – how is this different from CNVR). Then it was about the rapid movement of all stray dogs at once to huge shelters that are being created, followed by lifetime maintenance. At the same time, it seems to be forgotten that it is simply impossible to catch everyone at once, because even intensive trapping is a long process, and a certain compensation of the number due to the reproduction of undercaught dogs will still occur, although the number will gradually decrease. If there is still not enough space in shelters, they talked about transporting them to shelters in other cities (and there are enough dogs there!) And such uncertainty, apparently, will last for years. And still against the backdrop of a variety of lynchings against dogs. (Here's another feature of the CNVR program, which will be discussed in more detail below – it's easy to get entangled in it under the fanfare of humanism, but it's not easy to get back out)...

So, there are serious reasons to believe that the Moscow approach, neither in conception, nor in methods, nor in consequences, can be recognized as optimal. Omissions need to be analysed in more detail.

Starting in general from the above sequence of principles (moving from "ecology" to "methods"), we will try to consider in detail how things are in the vast and still theoretically undeveloped area of interest to us.