V.A.Rybalko. WHERE DO HOMELESS ANIMALS COME FROM?

Homeless animals usually mean cats and dogs that do not have an owner. They live in and out of populated areas; in one way or another they interact with a person (first of all, receiving food from him), and coexist with cats and dogs owned.

Homeless animals in Russia (and the CIS countries) are an example of the phenomenon of feralization, i.e. making wild of domestic animals, occurring throughout the history of mankind, but having its own characteristics depending on the specific time and place.

Almost all homeless animals depend on humans, but show varying degrees of trust in them. Some in behavior are almost indistinguishable from the owner's pets, some do not allow direct contact, but willingly accept food from people, and only a small part is completely wild and runs away, not allowing a few meters to come to them.

But the origin of almost all homeless animals in Russia is derived from the owner's animals: they are either themselves former owner's animals, or are their offspring.

There are several ways for the appearance of homeless animals:

1. Direct abandonment.

This happens most often at the will of the owners. In this case, the reasons are the low level of culture of keeping animals and the so-called overproduction - overabundance of animals. Responsible demand for kittens and puppies is less than supply – this is a situation of overproduction. Some of the animals born to the owners will not find an owner. They are either killed or sooner or later end up on the streets.

Less, but quite often, animals are thrown out by relatives or other heirs of the former owner after his death or in case of serious illness.

Most often, this is how mongrel animals get on the streets. Thoroughbreds also find themselves there, but due to their relative value, they are more often picked up, in addition, mongrel quickly dissolve imperceptibly in the environment of the hereditary-homeless and do not catch the eye. It is also necessary to take into account other factors that are not too noticeable, but cause a redistribution of the ratio "mongrel-thoroughbred" on the streets in favor of mongrel. This is something that many thoroughbreds are poorly adapted to life in the cold (short haired). In addition, as a result of advertising and prestige considerations, the demand for mongrel animals is skewed towards certain segments of the population, which, for obvious reasons, are less inclined to (or have fewer opportunities for) the full maintenance of animals or control over their reproduction.

When crossbreeding on the streets, the signs of breeds gradually disappear, which also is a factor of their outwardly weak demonstration among the homeless.

Forms of getting rid of unnecessary animals:

(a) Unnecessary offspring. The owners of the female cat or dog which brought the litter throw them away. The options are very diverse. Newborns and suckers are carried to the streets in boxes. Often puppies and kittens are dropped in ones and twos in yards, to entrances, to retail outlets. Further fate depends on age - the older the young, the greater the chances. Suckers obviously die (the chance that they will be thrown to homeless nursing females is negligible). Cubs from one and a half to two months that have begun to feed on their own also die. But the older ones have the opportunity to survive: the droppers – those who are "kinder" – choose places where the animals, as they think, will be "taken care of". That is, colonies of cats cared for by some people, or feeding areas for stray dogs. By the way, this is how the phenomenon of homelessness serves to reproduce oneself.

(b) Adult animals that have become unnecessary for a variety of reasons. The lack of a system for collecting and redistributing such animals (operational shelters in many settlements) exacerbates the situation.

Reasons for leaving and abandoning the animal: deterioration of the financial situation, illness (old age) of the owner - the inability to care and control, or, conversely, the unwillingness to keep a sick or old animal, allergies or "just tired". As well as moving or a seasonal change in the place of residence: an animal taken for summer cottages is not needed in the winter in the city.

2. Indirect (phased) abandonment.

The animal does not become homeless immediately, but passing through the intermediate stage of "adopting" to conditions where, however, there are no guarantees of its successful future fate. For dogs, a typical example is the attachment of a puppy or an adult animal "for protection" of a construction site, parking lot, or any enterprise. Such protection is often only a screen, behind which the semi-free habitation of a pack of "guard" dogs hides at the entrance. If any of them go on an independent trip around the city, no one will look. And if there is a closure or re-profiling of the enterprise, the construction is completed, the parking lot is demolished - then often all the dogs "adopted" to it once become homeless. Interestingly, puppies born to such dogs are often adopted to the same conditions. So there is a "cycle" of stray dogs in the nature of large cities.

For cats, an example of such indirect throwing is usually adopting kittens "to the store (option - to the warehouse, to the market, etc.) so that the rats are caught." Not every outlet or warehouse will take care of the fate of such an animal.

Another option in large cities is the system of resellers who buy animals from owners under the pretext pretext of their further addition, but then simply throw them out on the street. Most often, their victims are kittens.

3. Independent wildness.

This is a factor primarily affecting animals kept on "self-walking" - that is, uncontrollably. Sometimes it is not the owner’s animals themselves who are wild, but their offspring born on the street. At the same time, the female continues to visit the owner's house, and her feral cubs remain on the street.

Such wildness is common, first of all, in rural areas - with negligent owners, or occurs when the owners die, become ill or move.

In large cities, it is the final phase of the previous version of the appearance of homeless animals.

4. Self-reproduction – that is, the birth of offspring of stray animals.

This is a factor about which there are discussions regarding its relative contribution to the population. But, first of all, it should be noted that in any case, the "success" of this way of replenishing the number also does not do without human participation. This is especially evident when considering such a phenomenon as guardianship. For example, in the territories of organizations and enterprises, construction sites, etc. - often workers and watchmen provide stray dogs with opportunities (shelters, food base and even protection from captures) for successful and long-term reproduction. This leads to the fact that usually in areas of industrial and warehouse buildings, in arrays of garages, etc. the population density of stray dogs is noticeably higher than in other areas of the city. In residential areas, this opportunity is often provided by individual guardians. In addition, there are also local "inclusions" of the territories of organizations, construction sites, parking lots, with breeding "conditionally guard" dogs. Sometimes their offspring in the above-described step-by-step way is distributed to other objects and replenishes the number of "fence" dogs, contributing to the preservation of the "tradition" of keeping packs at enterprises in cities with a neglected situation.

Guardianship is a social phenomenon potentially common to any country. Among the population there are always people who are prone to feeding stray animals (as, indeed, wild ones that come out to people). Some socio-psychological features are inclined to this (a typical idea of a guardian in a residential building is an elderly woman, often lonely), or the peculiarities of the profession - a watchman in enterprises tends to support stray dogs as "assistants" (in conditions of a disregard for the rules for keeping animals on the territory of organizations) or a kind of remedy for boredom. How much spontaneous guardianship will develop, and its consequences, including negative ones, depends on the policy of the authorities in solving the problem of homeless animals. The common use of caregivers is to try to involve them in TNR / CNVR programs (for both cats and dogs). However, it should be remembered that guardianship, due to its spontaneity, as well as the actual lack of control of the animals under guardianship (if they retain the position of homelessness), is not able to affect the fundamental limitations of the TNR / CNVR method.

There are no clear boundaries between all of the above options. Especially taking into account the large intermediate group of semi-free-owning animals, which, among other things, also make an indirect contribution to the genetic diversity of the homeless, mating with stray dogs and cats.

I must say that in almost any more or less large settlement, all four options take place, but the ratio of their contribution to the overall picture depends on the specific conditions of the city (settlement, village), and even on the specific type of development and the urban environment in general. Therefore, the statements that "all homeless animals are former owners", or, conversely, "all stray animals are hereditary-homeless in dozens of generations'' - are equally far from reality. In large cities with a neglected situation, the "self-reproduction" of stray dogs is responsible for more than half of their number. Especially in industrial and warehouse areas (however, there is usually indirect throwing animals away described above). Whereas in small settlements or in cities where there are few or no packs (due to capture), most of the stray dogs

are former owners. In smaller settlements, independent wilderness also plays an important role due to the significant number of self-walking dogs.

It is also worth noting that in the course of changing the situation in a particular locality, the ratio of "former owners" - "hereditary homeless" also changes. For example, in a number of large cities during the 90s - 2000s. there was a phenomenon of a gradual transition to the prevailing self-reproduction, accompanied by the emergence and enlargement of packs, gradually spreading from industrial zones to residential quarters (this phenomenon is noted, for example, for Kiev (L.L. Matsevich, personal message)). The phenomenon is associated with a drop in the level of culture of keeping animals, the deterioration of control (both for the homeless and for the possessive), and, to a large extent, the introduction of CNVR programs, where they are unsuitable.

As for cats, then, apparently, the contribution of former pets everywhere is great. (This is also because overproduction of cats is more difficult to control due to less strict supervision of their behavior, frequent keeping of several opposite-sex animals together and the usual self-walking in the city or in the country). According to a survey of guardians of stray cats, conducted by E. and S. Ilyinsky, even in the metropolis of Moscow among stray cats, the number of former owners is only slightly less than half.

Comparative chances of survival also depend on local conditions and the specific case. By the way, despite popular belief, former owner animals sometimes have a number of advantages over hereditary homeless animals. First of all, it is less fear of a person, allowing them to beg more successfully, "begging" for food from people.