

NEPAL from cover

and that day came just a few months later.”

When the April 25 disaster happened, “We activated our plan and started to mobilize our disaster response team.”

One veterinarian was on a plane within 48 hours.

World Vets, founded in 2006 to serve animals worldwide and assist in disaster relief, sent two veterinarians to Nepal in an effort to look after the animals affected by the quake.

Having a plan in place before sending a team can be a critical part of a trip's success, said Springer Browne, MVB, MPH, a World Vets volunteer veterinarian from Ireland. Dr. Browne spent three weeks in Nepal with Australian volunteer Dr. Ben Brown.

“Communication is diffi-

cult and information is sparse shortly after a major disaster, therefore you have to arrive completely self-sufficient and prepared to adapt to the situation,” Dr. Browne said.

“We were extremely fortunate that World Vets had already arranged with a local animal rescue group, Animal Nepal, to offer assistance in case of an earthquake. Animal Nepal mainly covers the Lalitpur region, about a 150-square-mile area from the southern end of Kathmandu to rural mountainous areas to the south.

“As soon as we arrived, we had local reports of injured animals, a contact to help secure more veterinary supplies, and an office garden to pitch our tents and make camp.”

Animals and Economy

World Vets assists every type of animal, from street dogs to livestock to domestic animals. In Nepal, animals are vital to the local economy and the survival of villages and families.

For instance, 80 percent of Nepal's population lives in rural areas and relies on subsistence farming, Dr. King said.

“Most rural families have one to two cows and several goats and chickens,” she said. “The milk from the cows is a critical source of

About World Vets

It started humbly enough with just a jar on the counter of a private veterinary practice.

But Cathy King, DVM, Ph.D., had a vision when she founded World Vets in 2006. After practicing veterinary medicine for 11 years, she wanted to help animals around the world that did not have access to proper care.

World Vets' mission is to provide veterinary aid in developing countries and veterinary disaster relief worldwide.

Dr. King was inspired by the homeless dog population she had seen in Mexico.

“I volunteered at a shelter in Mexico and saw firsthand the plight of homeless street dogs that were often poisoned by government municipalities as a means of population control,” she said. “Street dog overpopulation is a serious problem in most developing countries, from both an animal welfare and a public health perspective.”

Since that beginning, World Vets has expanded to 41 countries and six continents and oversees about 1,000 veterinarian volunteers.

Requests for help across the globe became so numerous that King sold her practice so she could run the organization full time. King points out that although they're helping animals, World Vets recognizes that they also help people when they assist their animals.

“Our programs have included working with nomadic herdsmen in Mongolia to improve livestock care; community-wide spay/neuter programs throughout Latin America and other countries; providing veterinary care for working horses; rabies eradication programs; responding to disasters such as the Japan tsunami, Thailand and Bosnia floods, Philippines typhoon and the Nepal earthquake,” King said.

“All of our programs have a major focus on local capacity building to empower local veterinarians as well. In Nicaragua, we operate a year-round spay/neuter training program at the World Vets Latin America Veterinary Training Center.

“Through this program we have trained over 650 veterinarians from nine different Latin American countries.”

World Vets provides international veterinary programs for students during school breaks and has partnered with the U.S. Navy. The Navy partnership is in its seventh year and has deployed staff on nine five-month-long military humanitarian aid missions to various regions.

World Vets dispatches veterinary teams all over the world every week. Veterinarians, veterinary technicians and students all utilize their skills. Long- and short-term projects are listed on the website www.WorldVets.org for those interested in helping.

Tax-deductible donations are accepted from anyone who can't volunteer.



THOMAS KELLY/WORLD VETS

Eighty percent of Nepal's population lives in rural areas and relies on subsistence farming.

nutrition. In some rural regions of Nepal, more than 95 percent of the homes were destroyed and thousands of people and animals died. Not only are these families emotionally attached to their animals but they are critical for their own survival.”

In more prosperous areas, buildings are built stronger with concrete and rebar. The rural areas, however, consist of homes made from mud, local stone and brick. These struc-

tures aren't nearly as secure, especially in earthquakes.

“We focused a lot of our efforts in the rural Sindhupalchowk district, which had the highest human death toll and where 95 percent of the houses were destroyed,” Browne said.

“In the rural areas we saw countless downer cows, distal limb and other fractures, and various contusions, lacerations, myiasis, broken horns. We noticed that many cows and

buffalo are traditionally kept tethered either under houses or shelters, therefore some endured buildings collapsing on them and some did not.

“One hypothesis for the high number of distal limb fractures we saw could be that these cattle and buffalo were trying to pull away from their stakes in the ground when the earthquake spooked them, leaving their legs exposed when buildings came down.”

Because the need in Nepal was so critical, World Vets had Browne on an airplane bound for Kathmandu within 48 hours. When he got there, he saw displaced dogs and injuries to small animals and livestock.

“We were focused on clinical care of animals, capacity building and public health,” Browne said. “Clinical care was mainly focused on traumatic care of livestock. My first case on arrival to Bungamati to a report of two cows that had been trapped between two collapsed buildings and recently rescued by local people.

“On [my] arrival, one cow was dead but the other was alive, showing clinical signs of hypocalcemia and responded well to treatment. We saw countless numbers of downer cows, and due to the phenomenal nursing care provided by the Nepali farmers, we were still seeing cattle rise up following treatment a few weeks after the earthquake.”



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THOMAS KELLY/WORLD VETS

Many Nepalese cows and buffalo are kept tethered under houses or shelters, therefore some survived buildings collapses and some did not.

Rocking and Rolling

To make things more difficult, aftershocks continued to rock the area—literally and figuratively. The ground continued to shake on occasion, and a 7.3-magnitude temblor May 12 shook the nerves of residents and veterinarians alike.

“Driving on mountain roads that had recent landslides, working with animals under damaged buildings, seeing the cracks in the walls of larger buildings, and the constant aftershocks that would wake me up some nights all started wearing on me ... and I wasn’t even there for the original quake,” Browne said.

“When the second big quake hit, I could hear screaming all over the streets of Kathmandu, and World Vets volunteer Dr. Ben Brown witnessed a crowd in Sindhupalchowk almost trample each other trying to escape the inside of a café during lunchtime.

“Before the second quake, it seemed like people were starting to feel comfortable again. But after that quake we lost momentum with our field operations and workshops because people, understandably, wanted to be at home with their families. That said, a few days later everyone was out working again to help animals in need.”

The aftershocks caused more deaths, injuries and damage before the initial quake’s damage was cleaned up. Landslides cut off access roads that led to animals waiting for urgent medical attention, King said.

“Our vets had to pack in their gear and vet supplies, sometimes with treks of several hours to reach the hardest-hit areas.”

“I have to say that zipping

around Kathmandu on the back of a motorbike with 50 pounds of vet supplies strapped to my back was a new experience ... especially given the loose interpretation of traffic rules,” Browne said.

He noted, though, that despite the tough conditions, the locals remained devoted

to their animals.

“It was moving to see how much people cared for their animals, like they were part of the family. Ben and I saw countless situations where the family was living under one tarp and their buffalo or cow was under another. I also heard many stories of people talking of how their

family members had died in the quake, but they still had their animals and wanted to do all they could to take care of them. It was great to be able to help.”

Talk, Talk, Talk

Each location served by World Vets provides its own unique challenges, and Nepal

was no exception. Local language and cultural differences probably top the list.

In Browne’s case, because he had never traveled to that region before, he picked up a Lonely Planet phrase book at the airport to help out.

“I learned things like ‘gai’
Nepal, Page 24

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NEPAL, from 23

(cow), 'buff' (buffalo), 'kuku' (dog), 'kukura' (chicken), 'garmi cha' (it's hot outside), 'piro'

(spicy), 'dhanyabad' (thank you), 'mitho' (delicious), and of course, 'Namaste,' a greeting that literally means 'I bow to the divine in you.'

"English is commonly spoken, but less so in the more rural areas. By collaborating with local groups, we always had a native speaker with us to help

translate."

The blocked roads were also an issue, as were cultural aspects that prohibited animal euthanasia.

Because no two deployments are alike, World Vets needs to be prepared for just about anything.

"Every disaster is very different and the veterinary response can range from providing rescue and shelter to owned animals, to managing disease outbreaks, to technical rescues, to addressing public health concerns and even radiation decontamination," King said. "This disaster was unique in the number of livestock that had traumatic injuries and the fact that these animals were often in very difficult-to-access areas."

Before You Go

Before its team departed, World Vets made sure after-care and long-term plans were in place to help local residents with their animals.

"There were a lot of great collaborations on the response, and our organization worked together with several local and international NGOs," King said, referring to non-governmental organizations.

"Many of the livestock cases are going to require critical follow-up care, and to prepare for that our vets prepared pro-



THOMAS KELLY/WORLD VETS

A much-needed drink of water is provided.

ocols, which were also translated into Nepali, for treating downer cows and traumatic limb injuries.

"In addition, Dr. Browne taught a hands-on workshop on the topic that was well-attended by local veterinary professionals from Nepal as well as a numerous local and international NGO rescue workers. This helped to prepare other rescue workers and local vets to provide follow-up care."

Collaboration with local animal groups enabled the doctors to arrange aftercare for critical patients and every splinting and casting case, Browne said.

"Ben did some amazing work to encourage collaboration among various animal welfare groups to send out 'mixed teams' to the hardest hit areas shortly before our departure," he said. "I also helped encourage the various groups to start using a disaster response website, in use by the Nepali Army, that coordinates reports of need in the hardest hit areas, and keeps track of relief efforts to avoid duplication."

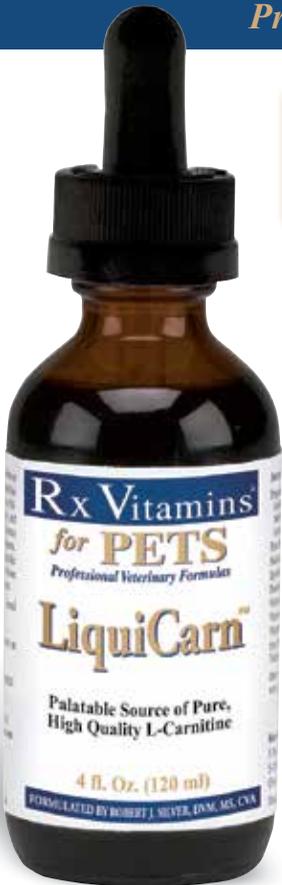
Volunteering in a disaster area is physically and emotionally taxing, Browne said, but it also has its rewards.

The veterinarians get to see the communities in need begin their recovery. Animals are treated and locals remain grateful to those who help. Taking a few moments to take in the environment also helps during difficult moments.

"Every once in a while I had to step back and admire how beautiful it was out there: walking through rice paddies, hiking up mountains, people farming at sunset, amazing religious art and buildings, food, and incredibly humble and kind people," Browne said. ●

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