

## Travereport Elbasan/Albania, June 2023

This time my visit to Elbasan was a special one, because three female veterinarians and two female students from Austria accompanied me. Initiated by Sigrid Riener, the head of the veterinary hospital of the same name in Neunkirchen. Nina, Christina, Claudia and Anna joined to get involved in a large castration project on site. The Veterinarians from the Paw Clinic in Elbasan, Jon, Egli and Alex worked energetically and thus 140 dogs and cats could be neutered. A great success, which allows many animals now to live their lives easily, without having to worry constantly about the offspring, because most of the animals are street animals, which we returned to their previous places after catching and finishing recovery. The animal welfare workers on site, Vera, Mimoza and Marjana regularly bring food and closely monitor the animals to see if they are healthy, if not, they are taken to Jon's veterinary practice.

In Elbasan, the three women feed more than 100 stray animals every day, they even travel to the mountains to take care of the animals and this is in addition to their shelter that gives a home to 130 dogs.

The first two days it was raining endlessly, but we still caught dogs and brought them to the animal hospital.

The good:

In the basement. Jon has brand new premises for a kennel, which is not yet opened, everything is brand new, there are small enclosures and quickly three operating tables are set up additionally. Something can always be improvised and thus we prepare the treatment room and in total 4 places where veterinary operations can be done.

The enclosures can be used to accommodate the freshly operated dogs overnight. All dogs are examined in detail and some stay one day longer, because many dogs have those diseases, which are unfortunately normal there, like Leishmaniosis, Ehrlichiosis etc.. They are treated and close attention is paid to who can be operated on and who cannot.

As posters had also been put up in Elbasan prior, many people brought dogs and cats. One woman came every day with many stray cats that she feeds and that are now all neutered.

Particularly touching was a homeless woman who has quite a few dogs following her wherever she goes. She also had dogs neutered and transported them in a small stroller. I gave her some food and a little money...also in Elbasan we met a homeless man who had a dog following him. We asked him if he wanted to have it neutered, but said that the dog was already very old, which of course is understandable...I still looked after the duo and thought to myself, once again it shows that just those who have nothing themselves have a heart for the weak.

Catching the dogs turned out to be not so easy, company premises denied us access, even though especially there are a lot of dogs and although we were even there with the municipal, official dog catchers - no chance!

On the other hand, sometimes dramatic scenes took place when we wanted to catch dogs in the center. Screaming duels, tears...people thought we were harming the dogs! How great was the joy when we brought them back the next day.

I have never seen so many dogs as in Elbasan, they are brought from Tirana, with trucks from Macedonia, from Kosovo. Fortunately they are tolerated relatively well, the municipal shelter has only about 15 dogs and even those we try to get out because they are not well taken care of...but there are 10 people as staff. So clearly, the so-called shelter is only operated to provide jobs...We have been trying to close this shelter for a long time and will continue to do everything possible. One afternoon we were "supported" by the city dog catchers, but they were not a very big help, only the pickup truck used to transport more dogs was helpful.

The equipment was catastrophic, the cages completely desolate, complicated to close with screws, small...fortunately the dogs did not have to stay in them for long....

The visit to the shelter of "Elbasan Cares About Animals" was once again heartbreaking, 130 dogs live there, in spacious enclosures, many even free on the premises.

Fredi, a young man who lives there day and night in a container, is himself a street kid. Of course, he gets money for his work, food and also has a cell phone, but he keeps breaking it somehow, much to Vera's sorrow.

However, Fredi likes the dogs, you can see that and they like him and we are glad that we have him. Not everyone likes to do this job and certainly not live there....

The dogs were completely upset, barking, jumping up at us, how many shining eyes did I look into, sad because I know that they will probably never find a real home.

Little puppies romped around clumsily, curious, not knowing what life will bring them yet.

With all these trips I am always full of melancholy and sadness, simply because I know I can't help all of them, I can't give all animals what they deserve, many of them remain forever in my memory and I think of them when I am long back home.

In Albania there are of course many poor people, some collect non-ferrous metals on a garbage dump and of course there are also many dogs, which are cared for by our brave animal welfare workers.

We also got some dogs from there for neutering and one of the workers brought us a puppy that was very sick. Together we looked for the other puppies and found a dead puppy, but since the others made a good impression, we left them there. The sick puppy was immediately taken to the vet, put on IV, but unfortunately it died the next day. Every time this is incredibly sad for all of us and I wonder why these little creatures come into the world, experience only misery, to finally go from this world again...I believe in something, God...but this question remains unanswered to me....

We also visited the Roma quarter, an elderly Roma woman came with a very small dog, obviously very old, full of ticks and skin diseases...quickly we decided to take him. So we moved him into the car and I freed him from the ticks and our vets gave him medicine against his skin problems.

We returned the little one, who was much too old for neutering, because he has a home and now at least the parasites are gone.

Many dogs we brought back to their homes on the streets were happy to be back "home", but a small bitch has remained strongly in my memory. She almost wanted to come back with us, we bought her sausage and she didn't know how to carry three pieces of sausage away, all nervous she walked back and forth, we finally cut the sausage up small and she ate it all. We also thought about taking her to the shelter, but there are already so many there and at least she is free here and lives next to a café where she always finds food. It is very difficult to decide what to do in such a case...because unfortunately we can not take them all in and there is also the legitimate question whether the shelter is really the best solution....

While on the first two days it was the extreme rain that caused us problems and made dog catching a challenge, on the other two days it was the enormous heat from which the dogs fled and we had our trouble catching enough dogs so that all the vets could work well, because wasting time was not appropriate here at all.

Again and again seriously ill dogs are brought to the vet but unfortunately it is very difficult to convince people that in the worst case it would be better to put the dog out of its misery.

Two cases where it really would have been the absolute best thing to do:

A dog came with a huge tumor on the eye and the incredibly experienced Austrian veterinarian Sigrid Riener recommended to euthanize the dog because the tumor had also affected the throat and the dog could hardly eat properly at all. The owner, who had taken this dog in, which is absolutely good and right, did not want to hear about it, however, and was of the firm opinion, that the dog could still eat well, but unfortunately the dog did not look like that at all. What to do here? One can only try to convince...

Another case was a dog that had run into a car, the man said he had him since he was a puppy and he really wanted to save him. Sigrid Riener checked on him, looked at his reflexes, the dog was clearly paralyzed, the urine was very dark and she said that such a dog would have a slim chance if he would be operated in Austria and also only with very expensive therapies afterwards...here in Albania he would have no chance. But the dog owner packed him in the trunk and brought him to Tirana for x-rays, although the dog was obviously in pain and suffered despite painkillers. Actually, this behavior is quite understandable and also appreciable and we all hoped the best for the dog, knowing that there is hardly a chance for him.

I think of all these dogs so often, I don't know what became of them and probably will never know....

I do not want to withhold a particularly touching story at this point, although it happened after my

stay.

A man was walking down the street with his dog and the animal welfare workers discovered him full of worry that he would probably abandon the dog.

They approached him and he told them that the dog was very sick and he himself had absolutely no money, he also ate only peppers and for the dog he had nothing. For hours he had wandered from the mountains, asked several veterinarians, but they all turned him away because he had no money.

Vera and her friends Marjana and Mimoza brought the man and the dog into the car and took him to our vet Jon. The vet only found deficient blood values, which were caused by malnutrition.

Robin Hood immediately gave the green light to take over the treatment and, of course, to provide food.

Unfortunately, the man has no phone, but the animal welfare women brought him home, loaded with food and he was allowed to call anytime when he needs food again, he would surely find someone where he can call. Unfortunately, in this case we could not do more...and certainly it is not an individual fate.

All in all, the action has cost a lot of money. The dedicated vets from Austria paid for all flight costs, the hotel and even parts of the food themselves. Also instruments were specially borrowed and brought along from Austria. Many 1000 thanks for this help to Sigrid Riener and her colleagues and all others who made this campaign possible!

Jon ordered all the medicines locally in Albania and there were some costs involved, but thanks to our supporters we can always manage it.

Since we all worked together from morning until late at night, we did not even go out to restaurants to eat. We ate in the hotel, in front of our rooms at a small table. The food we ordered...and still had a very good time!

The action was tremendously successful, 140 dogs and cats in barely three days, most of the animals caught from the street and brought back, that can be considered a great achievement. If one calculates how much puppy suffering was reduced only by this one campaign, the action was incredibly important and we very much hope that still more of this kind will follow.

Vera, Mimoza and Marjana gave us gifts - souvenirs from Albania and I also got a beautiful vase from Mimoza.

The local people are so dedicated and friendly, here you come back with pleasure and above all the animals are fantastic. We never met an aggressive dog, on the contrary, they were all sweet and friendly.

I will definitely be back soon, maybe we can find vets to come along again and in the meantime we will continue to support this project as much as we can!

Thank you to everyone who is helping out!

Yours,

Marion Löcker and the dogs and cats of Elbasan :-)