

## Close encounters of humankind

Publish Date: Sunday, 10 May, 2009, at 12:20 PM Doha Time

By Peter Townson

Hundreds of animal lovers visited the Qatar Animal Welfare Society (QAWS) shelter on Friday afternoon to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the organisation’s existence, pledging their support for its continued efforts in Qatar and hoping to draw government assistance for its future.

The shelter houses dogs, cats, birds and various other animals, but as of yet QAWS has not managed to achieve the charity status it so desperately needs to keep up with the various fees for the farms maintenance.

But Friday will have gone some way towards securing money and supplies for the foreseeable future, with a number of stalls and other attractions at the farm to help raise money.

The occasion was celebrated in a large tent at the shelter, which was provided courtesy of [iloveqatar.net](http://iloveqatar.net), who along with corporate sponsors Noble Denton and various other sponsors “made the day possible.”

Janet Berry, chairperson of QAWS, explained that she was “absolutely stunned at the amazing turnout.”

“I can’t believe how many people have turned up today,” she said, adding “it really provides you with the inspiration to carry on because you realise just how many people in Qatar do care about animals and want to see them being looked after.”

“The support from all members of the community has been absolutely fantastic and I am just thrilled,” she added.

Leader of the Qatar Living Volunteer Group, Speed who was also at the event, explained that the online volunteer group had been helping with some recent renovations at the farm, and said that the work the people at QAWS do was “necessary and really wonderful.”

“When I first visited the farm I was amazed at what they are doing here with so little help,” he said, adding “today shows that the government need to start providing support to QAWS as they are doing a job that is needed here and as there are so many people who are willing to help, they need their charity status.”

He also said that it was an “Islamic obligation” to look after animals, arguing that it is something that everyone should do.”

Many people from various nationalities and age groups attended the family-orientated day, and a number of pet owners who have adopted their animals from QAWS in the past also gathered to celebrate the landmark day for the shelter.

Matt, who arrived from the US around two years ago, adopted a bull mastiff – Pumpkin – from the shelter, and after eight months with his new pet, he described her as “a great friend.”

“I work too hard, so when I get home it is really nice to have a friend who is pleased to see me,” he said, adding “I would be really lonely if it wasn’t for her – she is so entertaining and just lovely to have around.”

Another visitor who had just adopted a pet was Trish, who chose to give a home to the three-legged dog, Penny Lane. She was abandoned at the shelter despite her owner having taken her for veterinary help following her road accident, and Trish explained that she fell in love with her the first time she saw her.

“She is absolutely lovely, and I am so happy to have her,” she explained, adding “I would never get an animal from anywhere other than QAWS – it is such a great place.”

Plenty of companies were represented at the event, including Qatar Airways, who were informing people about the possibilities of transporting their pets when they leave the country – something that is too often forgotten.

One of the main problems with the stray population here is that people often buy animals or bring pets with them when they come to Qatar, but then decide to abandon them when they leave the country, Berry explained.

“It’s great that Qatar Airways are here to persuade people to take their pets with them if they leave,” she said, “its not difficult and people need to realise this.”

QAWS is currently overstretched and is having to house cats and dogs wherever they can find space in their various kennel areas. But Friday may have led to a number of new adoptions which is exactly what the society’s board want to see happen.

The group is also interested in educating young people about the importance of animal welfare, and helping them understand how to look after their pets. One such person is 23 year-old Nayla al-Thani, a Qatari girl who helps out at the shelter and wants to spread the word to as many young local people as possible.

“If more Qatari people get involved with QAWS then the government will not be able to ignore us any more,” she said, adding “it is important to educate people about animals, and stop them from buying animals and abandoning them as soon as they get bored.” Al-Thani has five rescued pets of her own, and highly recommended that animal lovers should visit the farm to learn more about animals and possible find themselves a perfect pet. “There are some lovely dogs here,” she said, adding “QAWS is doing an amazing job and needs all the help it can get.”



Visitors to QAWS meeting one of the shelters many kittens

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