

TRACS

*The Responsible
Animal Care Society*

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Summer 2008

aim

**animal issues
magazine**



Photo: Carmen Crosland

**Feral Rabbits: City of Kelowna Chooses Killing
Over Compassion**

President's Message: Kelowna's War against the Innocent

Responding to a crisis situation this spring, TRACS plunged headlong into the rescue of Kelowna's feral rabbits. To date we have removed close to 250 bunnies off the streets in an effort to save as many as possible from the city's hired gun, EBB Environmental Consulting Ltd. We attended council meetings and submitted a proposal to the city in hopes of winning the rabbit control contract. However, instead of choosing non-lethal, compassionate intervention, the City of Kelowna opted to hire a company whose usual rabbit control methods involve "culling" (a softer but misleading term for killing). The city remains close-mouthed about extermination methods, but at the time that this issue of *aim* goes to print, we understand that capturing and killing is to begin shortly.

Please read *Feral Rabbits: City of Kelowna Chooses Killing over Compassion*, beginning on page 4. This article examines the bureaucratic red tape and blatant insensitivity that our organization has battled during the course of helping the feral bunnies. However, it is also the story of caring and compassion in the general community, resulting in waves of interest and support that continue to be felt months after initial media coverage propelled the rabbit issue nationwide. CBC French T.V. news reporters traveled from Vancouver to cover the bunny story at Easter. The Globe & Mail ran two separate articles on the rabbits, and the story aired on CTV as well as CHBC. Local media coverage was extensive.

It is small wonder that the City of Kelowna's war against bunnies went national and prompted such outpouring of emotion. Considered wildlife by the B.C. Ministry of Environment, rabbits are companion animals in the hearts of many--no less worthy than dogs, cats and horses. Many Kelowna citizens and tourists have indicated that they love the rabbits and wish no harm to come to them. They are appalled at the city's callousness. The consequences of Council's decision remain to be seen, with voters declaring publicly that on election day this fall, they will not consider supporting legislators who are not animal-friendly.

Meanwhile, TRACS will continue with our Feral Rabbit Rescue Program. Rabbit-catching was launched in March, well before the City of Kelowna had made any decisions about the fate of the rabbits.

We also hold some hope that a future Kelowna will be led by legislators and city officials who will understand the wisdom in the following simple quote:

*"If [man] is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practice kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men.
We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals."
--- Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)*

For peaceful communities,
Sinikka Crosland

TRACS Directors

President: Sinikka Crosland *Vice-President:* Alice Hooper *Secretary-Treasurer:* Louise Adams
Director of Nutrition & Food Animal Issues: Brenda Davis *Director of Publicity & Promotions:* Anna Schmidt
Directors-at-Large: Michael Hooper, Lorraine Devost
Newsletter Editor: Carmen Crosland

TRACS AGM

Come to our Annual General Meeting to find out more about TRACS, to meet like-minded animal defenders, and to enjoy dessert with us!

Date: Thursday, August 21, 2008

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Location: 1094 Lambeth Court, Kelowna (home of Paul & Brenda Davis)

Phone: (250)712-1094

Baked treats will be provided. Please bring your own drinks and some kind of fruit to share (strawberries, grapes, etc.). See you there!

BULLETIN BOARD

Our TRACS distribution list is in the process of major updating. Please contact TRACS if:

- **You know of anyone who would like to receive our newsletter**
- **You would like to receive an electronic copy of aim**
- **Your mailing address is in need of revision.**

Contact information for TRACS: phone 250-768-4803 or e-mail: tracs@shaw.ca

The following businesses and organizations have contributed immeasurably to the health and safety of Kelowna's feral rabbits. We also thank our generous private donors as well the numerous individuals who have volunteered countless hours to helping the rabbits...we couldn't have come this far without you!

Alpine Pet Hospital, Buckerfield's, Central Valley Veterinary Hospital, Critteraid & CDART (Canadian Disaster Animal Response Team), Don-O-Ray, Earthanimal Humane Education and Rescue Society, Harmony Honda, House Rabbit Society, Nature's Fare Markets, OK Builders, Okanagan Humane Society, On Trax Excavating, Tamarack Bed & Breakfast, TELUS, Total Pet, Tri-Lake Animal Hospital, Urban Harvest, Vernon Rabbit Rescue, Warren Peace Bunny Sanctuary, Westbank Animal Care Hospital

(Please let us know if we have missed anyone!)

FERAL RABBITS: CITY OF KELOWNA CHOOSES KILLING OVER COMPASSION

TRACS launches Feral Rabbit Rescue Program

The Bottom Line

TRACS, armed with our dedicated volunteers and supporters, has managed to save almost 250 European feral rabbits from death at the hands of the City of Kelowna.

Recently the city hired EBB Environmental Consulting, a firm from the lower mainland, to capture and then kill the European feral rabbits. This contract is worth \$54,000 for one year. Assisted by hardworking volunteers as well as some public and corporate donors, TRACS had launched our Feral Rabbit Rescue Program over two months prior to the city's decision. Massive fundraising efforts continue to be necessary because there has been no financial backup from the City of Kelowna. The TRACS rabbits are in the process of being sterilized and will either find homes or be relocated to a sanctuary. TRACS will continue with our educational program.



Photo: Mike Streeter

It is interesting to note that we approached the city/regional district to make presentations on the rabbits three times and were declined three times. Furthermore, TRACS had requested funding of \$25,000 from the city earlier in the year for the project, before an escalation of the rabbit population. (That amount certainly seems like quite a bargain now.) When the city decided upon the successful proponent and released its recommendation, there was a scant three day window of time (two days of this were weekend) for TRACS and our supporters to make any sort of protest to city council on this decision.

TRACS was one of several unsuccessful proponents for the feral rabbit project. By the time the request for proposal was listed on the city website, several months had elapsed from our earlier attempts at communicating with the city, and rabbit numbers had increased accordingly in spite of serious efforts by TRACS. Our first year cost proposal was \$47,000 -- \$10,000 less than EBB's. TRACS guaranteed 250 rabbits removed, but with a provision that we would catch as many more as possible.

Further, TRACS submitted year 2 and year 3 proposals, worth another \$25,000 in each year. It should be noted that humane removal, including spay/neuter and sanctuaries, is bound to be more costly than most kill methods. However, non-lethal means are better-accepted by modern communities. We also wished to be clear about the fact that the feral rabbit situation would be impossible to resolve in just one short year.

The city cited "value" as the main consideration. Is the only measure of value made in dollars? Measuring value has many components -- the interface between humans and nature, and what messages are sent out to children and people generally. Does expediency come before humanity? The rabbits did not cause this problem. The problem arose from ignorance that resulted in abandoned pet rabbits. The problem was further compounded by the city's unwillingness to deal with the problem when it was smaller. The problem will not go away in one year but will resurface unless there is substantial follow up and education. The lesson learned is that the city views killing animals that get in the way as a major item in their problem solving tool kit.

Background

For many years there have been colonies of abandoned European pet rabbits in Kelowna in an area that is comprised of light industrial businesses and big box stores. This is the Leckie/Dilworth/Enterprise area. More recently, there have been additional colonies in the Valley/Cross area of Glenmore and six other locations around the city have also been reported.

Whether it is an urban legend or not is unknown, but the supposed origin of the first rabbits was a family near the Enterprise area that raised rabbits for food and/or pets. As the story goes, the family was unable to keep the rabbits and so they simply released them -- not spayed or neutered. Over the years, the rabbits multiplied and other people came to think that releasing unwanted, unsterilized pet rabbits was more desirable than humanely dealing with them or re-homing them.

The overpopulation of rabbits reached critical mass in late 2007. The City of Kelowna realized that the matter had to be addressed. Some businesses and individuals in the area complained about destructive burrowing and chewing of properties. Consultants were employed by the city to write reports and give advice. By March 2008, action finally came about on the city's part with respect to taking definite steps. In early April, a request for proposal to deal with the rabbits was posted.

TRACS has been aware of the problem for years. We observed as rabbit populations grew in the summer months and then declined substantially over the winter. TRACS investigated reports of cruelty towards the animals, followed up on allegations of burrowing and chewing, and tried to keep informed of numbers and rabbit behaviour.



Photo: Louise Adams

By late 2007, the situation became more than TRACS could tolerate. Major action was required. Other animal groups in the area were unable to take the lead for a variety of reasons. TRACS tried to rally these groups to form a united front to deal with the issue in a humane and compassionate manner. Some offered financial and verbal support. Others became very involved and came out with volunteers and guidance. We are grateful for the help and support that all of these groups as well as a number of individual helpers have provided.

TRACS took proactive action over the winter of 2007-08. Many contacts were made with national and international rabbit/animal welfare groups, a great deal of research took place, grants and funding were applied for, options and directions explored. Our organization tried but was unsuccessful in our attempts to make presentations to city council and the regional district.

A bit of background information on feral European pet rabbits

These cute and cuddly animals have the ability to reproduce every 26 days. They are prey animals -- meaning that rabbits are preyed upon by other animals as a source of food. They have litters of 4 to 10 babies. The babies are tiny, hairless and blind when born in the burrows. The babies are fed only once a day, albeit, the milk is very rich. The survival rate in winter is very low because of the cold and lack of food. In warmer weather, the survival rate increases dramatically. Because they are not a native species, they are not well adapted to our climate and living conditions.

Rabbit overpopulation problems are not new. Indeed, the Australian experience is overwhelming, with 24 rabbits introduced in 1859 multiplying to two million in ten years. There were as many as 600 million rabbits in Australia at one point. Sadly, shooting, poisoning, trapping, destroying burrows and introducing disease were methods used to reduce populations.

Many Canadian and American cities have experienced this issue. However, at the root of the problem, over and over again, is the abandonment of unsterilized rabbits. This is the result of human ignorance, cruelty, expediency and greed. It is not the fault of the rabbits. TRACS believes in a humane, compassionate approach to address rabbit overpopulation issues in cities and rural areas.

The story unfolds.....

This story has many, many parts and complexities to it. It is about much more than urban feral rabbits. It is about government bureaucracy and red tape; it is about ignorance, thoughtlessness, procrastination and lack of foresight; it is about what individuals and organizations view as priorities. On the positive side, it is about kindness and generosity, hard work and dedication; it is about the interaction between humans and nature; it is about problem solving, awareness and education. It is about getting to the root of a problem, not just dealing with symptoms. All of the above and more are the reasons for writing this piece.

The start of the process

In order for TRACS to remove the rabbits, a permit was required from the British Columbia Ministry of the Environment under The Wildlife Act. According to a Ministry official, the permit was supposed to be fast-tracked. Yet the process took over two months -- a crucial time when the reproductive rate is taken into consideration. Rabbits are listed as exotic animals for some purposes, wildlife for others and small livestock in other situations. Confusing? Oh, yes! Any animals captured needed to be spayed or neutered but required permits for capture and transport. Then another permit was required -- to house the rabbits in a safe sanctuary. The housing/shelter/sanctuary requirements were incredible -- specification after specification. Add to this the fact that conservation officers who do the inspections are overworked and have several internal government layers to work through.

To be fair, it should be mentioned that the B.C. Ministry of Environment regulations reflect good animal welfare principles that TRACS supports. Yet what makes all of this more interesting is that there is generally little consideration or enforcement for existing laws on cruelty or abandonment, but numerous obstacles for those who recognize the issue and attempt to take positive action.

More government red tape - this time the City of Kelowna

After several failed attempts by TRACS to make a presentation to council, the city finally called for a request for proposal to capture the feral rabbits. The document was 19 pages long. Understandably, portions were standard and would appear in any RFP. The document afforded maximum flexibility to the city while asking for the proponent to commit to numerous unknowns, and in short order. Of course, price, ability to do the job and past successes would be considered. What made this extremely difficult is that there were so *many* unknowns -- the actual number of rabbits, all the locations, further abandonment and surrender numbers and locations, etc. All the while, time was passing and the potential numbers of rabbits increasing very significantly.

TRACS' proposal was based upon a compassionate and humane approach. We showed that TRACS had been proactive in dealing with the issue on many fronts and that we were not passing the time away waiting for the city to act and provide direction. TRACS urged the city to consider a humane plan and took the lead in that regard.



Photo: Carmen Crosland

No good deed goes unpunished

Once the permits to trap, relocate and shelter the rabbits were in place, TRACS launched our Feral Rabbit Rescue Program on March 1, 2008. We applied for the city's rabbit control contract in April. The purchasing branch made its decision known to the proponents on May 9 (a Friday), and the issue appeared on the May 12th council meeting agenda (a Monday). This cunning strategy ensured that unsuccessful proponents would have relatively little time to approach mayor, council, and media with regard to their failed bids.

TRACS was diligent in obtaining all of the necessary permits and licenses. Our organization used some of our own donations as seed money, sought out donations, financial and in-kind, and procured reduced rates on goods and services. We also applied for grants.

TRACS began the capture process on March 1, 2008. Sterilization and transfer of rabbits to a B.C. Ministry of Environment-approved sanctuary followed. (Pen-building, using expensive fine-mesh wire fencing, as per Ministry instructions, cost close to \$6,000). In addition, we produced articles for our website outlining rabbit care procedures as well as fostering and adoption guidelines. Sinikka Crosland, TRACS president, participated in many radio, television and newspaper interviews. We wrote letters to the editor. We took in animals that had been surrendered and followed up on newspaper ads for rabbit give-aways and sales. All in all, a very proactive and determined approach for a small group with little money or resources.

So where are we now?

On Friday, May 9, 2008 (three and a half weeks after the close of the RFP process), the City revealed its choice--EBB Environmental Consulting from the Lower Mainland. Incidentally, this firm has done consulting previously for the city on goose management. Egg addling (killing unhatched goslings) has been their method of choice to decrease populations of Canada geese. In the case of the rabbits, EBB proposed humane capture and "culling".

Three months later, the City of Kelowna has still not revealed how the rabbits are going to die, although their website states that they will NOT be killed by drowning, gassing, or dry ice. It is interesting to consider this statement in the RFP: *"Within 60 days from issuance of the contract, there must be a significant decline in rabbit populations in surveyed areas and there shall be a consistent declining trend in rabbit numbers over the course of the contract, with the goal being complete removal of all rabbits prior to March 31, 2009."* It appears that either the rules have changed or the contract was not signed until recently. An August 1, 2008 news article stated that capture and killing would commence within two weeks.

On May 26, 2008, TRACS submitted a request for information under the FOI Act. At this time, we still await answers to our questions. The city's response to our initial request was to wait until the deadline (30 working days hence) and then to present us with a whopping bill of \$1,297.25 for the information sought. Of course we did not pay this, but submitted a revised request that would not entail quite as much research and photocopying. Now the new deadline to receive information is September 9, 2008. The delaying tactics continue to astound us.

The May 12th council meeting proved to be a fiasco, with the majority of council falling victim to the deceptions and exaggerations presented to them by City Parks. Amongst the fabrications was a claim that rabbits kept alive would represent a 15-year care commitment, whereas in actual fact, a five-to-ten year life span is the norm for most rabbits. Also, in response to heavy questioning from Mayor Sharon Shepherd and the five council members present, Ian Wilson, Urban Forestry Supervisor for City Parks, stated that EBB could possibly look at non-lethal methods, such as giving captured rabbits to rescue groups, placing them in sanctuaries, etc. These suggestions represented another deception, deviating from EBB's stated method of dealing with caught rabbits--"culling". (Please note that culling is just another word for killing. Exterminators use this word to make their killing practices sound more acceptable.)

Note what happened next. Councillor Norm Letnick moved that EBB Environmental Consulting be hired to do the job. This motion passed, with Mayor Sharon Shepherd and Councillor Michele Rule opposing. Next, Councillor Letnick moved that, pending advice from the Purchasing Manager, council would "direct staff to work with EBB Environmental Consulting to minimize any potential for culling and report back to Council". This motion passed with flying colours. Councillor Letnick then commented that he would never have made the first motion had he doubted that the second one would pass. *There was just one little problem, though.* The Purchasing Manager had an issue with the second motion (what power she wields), and it was ultimately not approved. EBB ended up with the contract, and the bunnies got a death warrant, despite efforts by Mayor Shepherd and some members of Council to provide protection for them. In addition, several councillors were not present for the vote.

*Many within the animal welfare community felt greatly troubled by the deceptions, discrepancies, misdirected power and poor management displayed at the May 12th council meeting and during its aftermath. Once again, innocent animals had been ensnared in a bog of bureaucracy. It appears that City staff is in charge of decision-making--**not** Mayor and Council.*

So where do we go from here? While waiting for our FOI request to be fulfilled, TRACS will humanely and lovingly care for the rabbits we have rescued. We will continue to search out additional sanctuary lands and to apply for grants and other financial assistance. TRACS will speak out on awareness and educational matters -- not just for rabbits but all living creatures.



Photo: Jenny Hildebrand

Every day that passes means more rabbits are born -- more to capture and more for the hired guns to kill. It is a heavy price paid for the slow moving decision-making of these two levels of government, years of indecision and buck passing by the city and an obvious disregard for the interface between humans and nature.

In spite of comments made by the city as far back as January 2008 that by-laws would be enacted forbidding the sale of unsterilized rabbits, nothing has occurred on that front. Not only did TRACS recommend such a by-law, we also requested signage indicating that abandonment of animals was against the Criminal Code of Canada.

Lots of learning and insights

There are more caring people than abusers in the world. Sadly, it is the abusers who drive many situations. In our capture work, we learned of numerous instances where rabbits had been abused. These situations have been reported to the RCMP and files opened. Unfortunately, these wheels move slowly.

To all the caring and compassionate people – admiration and thanks. People and organizations have come forward to help in many ways. Some have moved on to the TRACS board of directors and others help and volunteer as their time and situations allow. Some of the scenarios encountered are not easy to deal with. It takes courage to face difficult, cruel situations and to commit to making a difference rather than just turning away and pretending these things do not exist.



Photo: Chantelle Devost

Many people in the community delight in the rabbits. Stories have been told of seniors who take food out to the rabbits on their daily walks. People who could not have pets in their living arrangements have had the rabbits as their away-from-home companions. Many people consider the rabbits a wonderful part of Kelowna life. Children love them. Many businesses have been more than willing to give access to their property, point out where the rabbits are, offer coffee, chat and support TRACS financially and in goods and services. Again our deepest thanks to these wonderful people and organizations.

Many difficult situations are the result of ignorance. Public awareness is so important. Education can only happen, however, if there is a willingness to open up minds and be receptive to learning, new ideas and directions. It is important to reach children. Often times, people are so busy and involved with their lives and the day to day hustle that they don't take the time to think of consequences. Expediency becomes very important but at the cost of effectiveness and compassion.

We are disappointed with the slow moving wheels of government. While the need for order, record keeping, rules and regulations is understandable, there also needs to be an ability to amend or change quickly (a measure of flexibility) when a situation so evidently calls for it. We are especially disappointed with the City of Kelowna's attitude of "kill the problem".

Some final words

TRACS is proud to be a part of this responsible rabbit rescue project. It has not been easy. There have been many, many obstacles. TRACS and our volunteers and supporters have done a lot and have made a significant difference -- nearly 250 innocent rabbits will live as a result of our actions. We hope it will be more.

Thank you to all the volunteers, groups, businesses and individuals who have helped in this project so far. Thank you for your time, compassion, commitment, and donations.

Our work is not done. These rabbits must still be fed and cared for. The educational process must continue, and there is an ongoing need for volunteers and donations.

We are desperately in need of construction help (pen-builders), additional land for the bunnies (property owners please come forth), and monetary and food donations. Call TRACS: 250-768-4803.

A humane and caring solution is always an option, no matter what obstacles loom before us. Compassionate members of the public have been the wind beneath our wings, proving beyond all doubt that empathy can be the driving force behind success.



Photos: Jenny Hildebrand

A Message from the Canadian Horse Defense Coalition

The CHDC's most recent report on horse slaughter at Natural Valley Farms in Neudorf, Saskatchewan is now available. In addition to this landmark report produced by Twyla Francois, you will find video footage, slideshow presentations, national media articles, a radio interview and the link to CBC National's recent coverage of this issue (*No Country for Horses*).

Visit: www.defendhorsescanada.org

Take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

-- Elie Wiesel

Tribute to Sweet Nothing



“When we first got involved with Sweet Nothing, our perspective was about ‘What can we do for her?’ After a short while, we learned how much she gave back to all of us. We learned so much from her. The joy that we felt in being with her - grooming her, feeding her, walking with her, tending to her leg, and just spending time with her - is immeasurable. When we started out on this journey with Sweet, we knew very little about horses. After getting some training and guidance from some horse experts, we saw that once we understood her little better, Sweet allowed us to get close and form a strong connection with her. We feel a deep sense of gratitude that we were able to share in her life. She was a remarkable and precious horse. We will love her always.”

~Cindy, Dick, and Holly

Beautiful Sweet Nothing passed away peacefully on May 24, 2008, but she will never be forgotten by the people whose lives she touched. In particular, her family will miss her more than words can say. We are so grateful to Cindy, Dick and Holly for the wonderful care with which they tended to Sweet’s every need. As a result of one family’s love, Sweet Nothing received a prosthesis that kept her comfortable and happy for two years in peaceful paddocks. Her story is a compelling example of a disabled horse with a great will to live, and a family who responded to that need. Cindy, Dick and Holly, you did everything in your power to make Sweet’s wish come true. You are truly an inspiration.

~TRACS

Shocking Statistics: According to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada: **79,415 horses were slaughtered in Canadian plants in 2007. Horsemeat is sent overseas for human consumption. An Ipsos-Reid poll conducted in 2004 revealed that 64% (2/3) of Canadians are opposed to the slaughter of horses for this purpose.**



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I am enclosing the following (please check):

_____ \$15 for Individual Membership

_____ \$20 for Family Membership

_____ Donation \$ _____

Return to: TRACS, P.O. Box 26097, Westbank, B.C.
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Thanks from the animals!