?Blantyre closer to rabies free status, following second year of mass vaccination by Mission Rabies

Thursday 2 June, 2016

In Malawi, approximately 484 people die every year from rabies; a 100% vaccine-preventable disease, which claims around 59,000 lives a year globally.

Besides the tragic loss of human life, this vicious disease costs the Malawian economy approximately MWK 9.3billion per year.36% of all human rabies cases occur in Africa, meaning that more than 21,000 people die from rabies on the African continent annually.

An article published in UK medical journal ‘The Lancet’ put the city of Blantyre in southern Malawi in the spotlight as a city with a rising incidence of child rabies deaths.

These truly concerning statistics were behind the decision for Dogs Trust-sponsored Mission Rabies, working with the Blantyre SPCA and Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development, to select the city of Blantyre as their key project site in Africa.

Dr Kate Shervell, International Director, said, "During 2015, we vaccinated over 70% of the dogs in Blantyre City and District – the required coverage to ensure prevention of disease transmission. This month we repeated the mass vaccination of the city and achieved over 35,600 dog vaccinations in 20 days, which is an improvement on the coverage in 2015 and will be a big step towards a rabies free city. We’ll begin the second year of the Blantyre rural district programme from June.”

The Blantyre City vaccination programme ran from 30th April to 25th May, recruiting 8 vaccination teams comprising over 70 staff and volunteers from 14 countries around the world. Meanwhile, the education programme covered over 50 Blantyre schools, teaching children how to behave around dogs and what to do when a dog has bitten them to prevent the spread of the disease, as well as encouraging the children to bring their dogs for free rabies vaccination at the static point clinics that were set up in schools across the city each weekend.

Furthermore, Mission Rabies continues their ‘Rabies Hotline’, allowing concerned members of the public to report suspected rabies cases, so that these dogs can be safely caught by the team to protect community members from the risk of being bitten. If a dog showing signs of rabies is seen by a member of the public, they can call 0885 31 99 22 or 0992 66 00 22 to report it.

A new part of this year’s programme was the addition of a mass dog sterilisation drive, run by partner organisation, Worldwide Veterinary Service, in conjunction with the Blantyre SPCA, which sterilised over 950 dogs in several sites across the city during May. This followed a two week veterinary surgical training programme at the newly-refurbished BSPCA premises, which saw vets from Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania receive best-practice clinical training from a team of expert vets from Germany, USA and India.

Besides the surgical sterilisations, vets at the BSPCA were able to provide treatment to many sick and injured dogs that were identified by the Mission Rabies team during their vaccination programme.

About Mission Rabies

Having seen the devastating effect of rabies on animals and people during his time volunteering and as a TV vet, Luke Gamble, CEO of the UK-based charity Worldwide Veterinary Service (WVS), launched Mission Rabies in India in September 2013. Since then, Mission Rabies, with the help of local and international volunteers, has managed to vaccinate over 350,000 dogs, educated 500,000 children about rabies risk reduction, and neutered 50,000 dogs.

The majority of the people who die from rabies are children from poor and marginal communities and over 99% of human cases of rabies are the result of dog bites. In response to these statistics, hundreds of thousands of dogs are indiscriminately and inhumanely killed, yet this makes no difference to the spread of rabies. Dogs Trust sponsored Mission Rabies will change this by aiming to vaccinate at least 70% of the canine population in rabies-endemic areas – the proportion necessary for control of the disease in both dogs and humans according to World Health Organization guidelines.

The campaign is being led by local animal welfare charities in the project countries. Dr Luke Gamble, with Dogs Trust and MSD Animal Health as the key international sponsors, leads the support team in the UK.

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Working in strong collaboration and partnership with many veterinary and animal welfare organizations will ensure sustainability of the rabies control efforts for years to come.

More information about the Malawi programme, future projects and how to become a part of Mission Rabies can be found on www.missionrabies.com

For more information and/or images, please contact:

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