



Big Hearts Foundation

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OUR VISION

“To transform the society in Russia and former Soviet countries into one where animal welfare is understood, respected by everyone and protected by effective legislation.”

In 2011 Big Hearts Foundation was the first international charity to start helping companion animals in various regions of Russia, apart from the two main cities Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Today, the results of our work improve the lives of animals in 35 cities across Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova and counting. In our 5 year history we have come a long way and extended our reach to help wild animals, as well. Russia is the largest country in the world and is in dire need to improve the plight of animals. After the fall of communism the area of human-animal interaction has been left unattended. The situation is [critical](#) and animal suffering is rife. We aim to change this by bringing the Western expertise and decades-long experience in animal welfare to Russia and surrounding countries.

OUR PROGRAMMES:

- **Raising Awareness.** Raising awareness of animal welfare, its importance, problems related to that and the most effective and humane solutions; promoting responsible pet ownership in order to stop animals from being abused and abandoned; improving the work of animal shelters and volunteer groups, rescuing and helping animals on a daily basis.
- **Subsidized Neutering.** Providing affordable spaying and neutering for pets of low-income households and fostered homeless animals, awaiting to be adopted.
- **Humane Education.** Fostering a more compassionate and responsible generation through implementation of Humane Education at schools in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine with plans to expand to other former Soviet countries in the nearest future.
- **Effective Legislation.** Writing and promoting effective animal welfare law proposals and lobbying the federal government for urgent reform in the animal-related legislation.
- **Wild Animals.** Supporting the work of a unique Wildlife Rehabilitation center, that rehabilitates orphaned bear cubs, whose mothers were shot by hunters or illegal poachers and releases them back into the wild.
- **Captive Wild Animals.** Improving the plight of and rescuing, where possible, wild animals in captivity, such as zoo residents, wild animals in private ownership, circus animals etc.

Our Founder and Trustees do not receive any financial benefits from the charity's activities. Instead, they invest their time, energy and money in improving the plight of companion, stray and wild animals, that need our help. Our overheads and employee costs are kept to respectable 26% of our income, with a vast part of the overheads being covered by the Founder.

This means that every pound sterling, dollar and ruble that is donated to us is spent directly on saving thousands of animals from cruel and painful death.

COMPANION AND STRAY ANIMALS

IMPROVING REGIONAL PRACTICES AND LEGISLATION

Russia is the world's largest country with different regions and cities having often radically different approaches to the issue of stray animals. Some of the regions have already adapted some good practices, while in most of the country the problem of stray animals is still being "solved" by plain killing of cats and dogs on the streets, often in front of local people, and even children, using inhumane methods.

Until 2015, no competent animal welfare organisation had ever tried to prepare an in-depth review and analysis of different practices, both good and bad, and to produce a comprehensive report, containing recommendations for variety of environments, from large metropolitan cities to smaller towns and villages. This is precisely what a biologist and shelter director Vladimir Rybalko, a data expert Nikita Danilov and a lawyer Anastasia Komagina of Big Hearts Foundation have been focusing on this past year.

They have been speaking to the government officials, veterinary doctors, municipal veterinary stations and local stray animal management departments in the majority of regions of Russia, collecting and analyzing precious data. This first part of the research should be soon completed and will allow us to actively propose and lobby for effective stray animal practices and comprehensive approaches across Russia. We will also use this to lobby the federal government to enact legislation, that will make it easier for the regional governments to implement humane and effective stray management policies.

These and many other issues require a lot of work and expertise and often involve the delicate task of convincing the local administration regarding the cost effectiveness and necessity to implement those solutions.

This is a long and tedious work which cannot be carried out by volunteers only. We need to have expert staff who will dedicate their time, knowledge and efforts to doing this. If we don't build the base for responsible animal welfare approach in Russia now, nobody in foreseeable future will. Collecting and analyzing tons of data, dealing with reluctant and suspicious politicians and bureaucrats might not appeal to most people, since it's nowhere near as rewarding as rescuing and rehoming a single animal and the majority of animal activists in Russia would never do this kind of job.

In order to have significant and timely results we need to be able to remunerate the work of Vladimir, Anastasia and Nikita, so that they can keep doing this vital research. As of today, they have the most expertise in Russia to carry out this kind of work. There are more regions in need, than we can cover right now and even more of those in dire need of being made aware of their problems in terms of animal welfare. We are hopeful to have the resources to keep doing this crucial work next year.

SHARING OUR KNOWLEDGE

In May 2016 part of the Big Hearts Foundation team attended and presented at the first of its kind conference held in Penza, Russia, called “Problems of homeless animals: from theory to practice”.



Left to right: Anastasiya Komagina, Vladimir Rybalko and Nikita Danilov at the conference in Penza.

The conference was dedicated to various approaches towards stray animal population management in Russia and abroad.

Anastasiya Komagina, the president and the lawyer of Big Hearts Foundation delivered a presentation called ‘Problems and paradoxes of animal welfare in Russia’. She told the attendees about how animal welfare organizations in Russia are often divided due to inability to agree on some issues and are, hence, unable to communicate effectively between themselves, let alone with the authorities and reach compromise for the benefit of animals and people.



Vladimir Rybalko presenting at the conference in Penza.

One of our charity’s main tasks involves helping and advising regional shelters, animal welfare groups and NGOs on how to improve their work and become more effective and sustainable.

Vladimir Rybalko is the only scientist in Russia to specialize in the problems of stray animals and their solutions. He presented the analysis of global experience in regulating the number of stray dogs.

For more information click [here](#).

SPAY AND NEUTER PROJECTS

For a number of reasons the majority of Russians fail or refuse to spay and neuter their pets. Among those are: the wrong common belief, that castration is “against nature” and may harm the animal’s mental and physical health and negatively alter behaviour; desire to show young children “the miracle of life” by letting family pets have litters and, obviously, low income vs. still quite high cost of the surgery.

Traditionally, unspayed and unneutered pets are allowed to roam the streets freely, leading to tens of thousands of unwanted puppies born and thrown onto the streets every day.

Limited resources and housing conditions prevent people from being able to keep the litters or to place all of them to “good hands”. The municipal shelter system is very poorly developed. Private shelters are few, mostly struggle to survive and burst at the seams with animals in their care. Therefore, over 80% of the unwanted litters are destined to become strays. Often, these very pet owners also get frustrated by their female dogs getting pregnant so often, so they just prefer to abandon them, too.

Due to the severe economic crisis, that hit Russia in 2014 and is not showing any signs of slowing down today, spaying and neutering of pets has become even less affordable for people on medium to low income, who constitute the majority of the population.



Cats recovering after neutering surgeries.

Hence, unless Russians get educated about the benefits and crucial importance of sterilization and the procedure becomes widely available at affordable cost, millions of new stray dogs and cats will be forced to survive in harsh conditions and die atrocious death on the streets of the world’s largest country.

Only in 2011-15 Big Hearts Foundation helped to spay and neuter over 5,000 animals in various Russian cities, thanks to our Subsidized Neutering programme.

The number of people with income below the poverty line in Russia increased from 14.4 million in the 4th quarter of 2015 to 22.7 million in the 1st quarter of 2016. Today, average income is 130 pounds per months, whilst it costs about 35 pounds for neutering a cat and about 80 pounds for a dog, which is unaffordable for many.

This programme has prevented suffering of hundreds of thousands of unwanted puppies and kittens, by attracting the attention of local communities to the problem of stray animals and its effective and humane solutions.

Neutering projects are proven to be the most effective in reducing stray animal populations as they aim at fighting the cause and not the consequences of the problem. This is why neutering is one of our main priorities.

In the past year we were able to run subsidized neutering projects in Petrozavodsk, Tomsk, Astrakhan, Michurinsk, Suoyarvi, Balashikha, Makhachkala, Murom and Nerjungri, thanks to the two grants we received from trusts and foundations, and our successful crowdfunding campaign.

Besides the importance of promoting sterilization of pets, these projects make neutering of fostered animals affordable for volunteers, who rescue cats and dogs every day and raise the chances of adoption, allowing them to rescue more animals in need.

We cover 80% of the cost, while the animal guardian pays the remaining 20%, instead of covering the full cost of the surgery, which can be as high as 1/3 of the average monthly income in the country.

Between September 2015 and August 2016 we neutered 618 cats and 133 dogs preventing thousands of unwanted puppies and kittens from being born and suffering a cruel fate.



Some of the lucky dogs and cats we helped this year.

CROWDFUNDING FOR ANIMALS

In February 2016 Big Hearts Foundation launched a 2-month campaign on a Russian crowdfunding platform aiming to raise funds for a subsidized Spaying and Neutering project in Russia and to attract attention to the problem of stray animals and its most humane and effective solution.

The successful campaign raised over RUB 306,000 (nearly GBP 3,900) from 187 individual backers and provided us with an opportunity to sterilize over 200 dogs and cats in 4 Russian cities, so far.

The subsidized neutering is still taking place and several local animal groups in Russia have launched their own crowdfunding campaigns using ours as an example. We are currently consulting them on how to fundraise successfully for animal welfare.

Starting from October 2016 a series of webinars dedicated to this and related themes is being conducted by the author of this campaign and other members of the foundation for volunteers across Russia and former USSR countries.

We are eternally grateful to everyone who took part in this campaign!



The image shows a screenshot of a crowdfunding campaign page on a Russian platform. The title at the top is "Снизим количество бездомных животных гуманным способом!" (We will reduce the number of stray animals in a humane way!). Below the title, it indicates the location as "Россия г. Москва" (Russia, Moscow) and the category as "Общество" (Society). The main visual is a blue banner with a cartoon illustration of a nurse with a red cross on her cap, holding two small white cats. A speech bubble next to the nurse says "Хочешь Помочь Бездомным Животным?" (Do you want to help stray animals?). A play button icon is overlaid on the illustration. To the right of the banner, the amount raised is "306 765 ₽", with a subtext "собрано из 305 000 ₽ - 187 спонсоров" (collected from 305,000 ₽ - 187 sponsors). A progress bar shows 100% completion, with a date "Завершен 02 апреля 2016" (Completed 02 April 2016). A green bar with a checkmark indicates the campaign is "Успешный" (Successful). Below this, there is a "Проследить" (Track) button. At the bottom of the page, there is a call to action: "У вас есть интересная идея? Пришло время создать свой проект!" (Do you have an interesting idea? It's time to create your project!).

VETERINARY TRAINING

This year **Mayhew International** gave us a great opportunity to train two veterinary surgeons from Petrozavodsk, Russia in the latest spaying and neutering techniques. This will allow us to run our Subsidised Neutring campaigns even more efficiently and, more importantly, save thousands of cats and dogs from miserable existence on the streets.

Thank you very much, Mayhew International, for this amazing opportunity!



Some of the pictures from the Veterinary training, courtesy of Mayhew International.

REHOMING EFFORTS

Two adoption fairs of shelter cats called “I want to go home” took place in Moscow region in July and September 2016. The shows were organized by our local volunteers with the support from Big Hearts Foundation. Besides actual rehoming of rescue cats, the aim of these events was to raise awareness of shelter animals and promote the “Adopt, don’t shop” philosophy among the public.



*Our cute little supporters interacting with rescue animals and learning to respect all living beings.
Photos by Julia Krasovskaya*

During these gatherings many families with young children had a chance to not only interact with rescue animals and learn more about how to be responsible pet guardians, but also get to know local volunteers, groups and organizations who help animals in need and support their work.

Some of the lucky kitties found their forever loving homes. For others, still in foster care awaiting adoption, the visitors brought some yummy treats and toys to play with, while they are waiting for their forever families.



Visitors and rescue cats taking part in our adoption fairs. Photo by Julia Krasovskaya



Our amazing volunteers with the donations raised during the adoption fairs. Photo by Julia Krasovskaya

RESCUE “TAILS”

Murka, the miracle cat

What you see now is a relaxed fur baby, lying on the floor of her new home, where she lives with her loving family.



But just a few months before this picture was taken, Murka was dying a horrendous death. She was found by our volunteers with a part of her hind leg already missing, together with the half of her tail, a part of her ear and some fur on her head. It was clear she was tortured and most likely acid was poured on her head.

Despite this horror, Murka, the miracle cat survived and even managed to nurture her kittens until they were rescued by our amazing volunteers. The whole is now having the time of their lives in their new forever homes.

To avoid cruelty like this from happening Big Hearts Foundation is introducing Humane Education in schools all over Russia and nearby countries in order to educate new generations about responsible and kind attitude towards all living beings.

Pushistik and his second chance

Pushistik (“Fluffy” in Russian) is a hit-and-run victim, who was left to freeze to death. After our volunteers found him they fed the starving fella and rushed him to one of our shelters, where he was checked by a vet.

The X-rays showed he had a broken spine and the sensitivity of the back part of the body was completely absent.

Our amazing vet Omar performed a very complicated long surgery on his spine which, luckily, was successful! But Pushistik still had a long rehabilitation ahead, that included injections, antibiotics and physiotherapy.



After a long therapy Pushistik was able to walk and run again. Today, this beautiful and very active boy lives in the countryside. We would like to thank everyone who helped us save Pushistik and gave him a second chance in life!

Lada, the lucky one

Lada's mom never even had a name, she gave birth to her 4 kittens in a basement and nurtured them in the bushes, far away from people, whom she never saw kindness from, not even once in her short life.

When our volunteer Olga looked out of the window of her apartment and saw a group of kids in the courtyard kicking something and throwing stones she ran downstairs, but it was too late. Lada and her siblings were left orphans. Despite Olga's desperate attempts, chlamydia, rhinotracheitis and other infections, common in stray cats, claimed lives of 3 out of 4 kittens. Lada got lucky. Katya, Olga's colleague fell in love with the tiny survivor and gave Lada her loving forever home.



As a souvenir from her life on the streets Lada will forever have her sad memories, a cataract on one of her eyes and a tiny sterilization scar on her tummy, which guarantees, that she will never have to repeat her mom's faith.

Greta, survivor against all odds

Our volunteers from Makhachkala, the capital of the Republic of Dagestan, found this beautiful Central Asian Shepherd dog roaming the streets of the city back in June.



Apparently, Greta had been living on the streets for a while and was already well-known to the locals. They were very happy when she was finally rescued by our team.

The life as a stray, for this once someone's dog, didn't go without consequences. Greta had nasty sores on her paws and had developed an allergy to the food she was eating out of dumpsters. Once she was rescued, our amazing vet Omar checked her, treated her wounds and, later, spayed Greta. Today, this incredibly smart and sweet girl is thriving. She is up for adoption and we are hoping for the best paw-rents for her!

WILD ANIMALS

MAKING ORPHAN BEAR CUBS WILD AGAIN

Last year was a very busy one for our partners at Utyos Wildlife Rehabilitation centre, as they kept receiving orphaned bear cubs in need of rescue. The centre specialises in rehabilitation and release of Himalayan and Brown bears and Amur tigers back in the wild. Every year the centre admits and raises around 10 orphaned bear cubs, that lose their mothers to hunters and illegal poachers. The centre's staff become their family for a year until the cubs are old and strong enough to make it on their own in the wild.

This year we received a very generous donation from Brigitte Bardot Foundation, who took four of the bear orphans under their wing.

Tiny Gavroche.

Tiny Gavroche, a male Himalayan bear cub, was brought to the centre in March. His mother was most likely shot by cowardly poachers while she was still hibernating and nursing her young in her winter den. He was tiny and malnourished! Yana Panova, the centre's vet and foster bear mum, quickly put Gavroche on a nourishing diet of 5-cereal porridge with fresh fish, meat and vegetables. After a few days of scoffing up his nutritious dinners, Gavroche started to gain much needed weight and strength. And just a few weeks later, Gavroche was joined by another fuzzy bear who looked very different to him...



Gavroche just after he arrived at the centre in spring and later in the enclosure in the summer.

Platon was a brown bear cub, who was brought to the centre by his rescuer in a dog carrier by train! He was saved by a lovely young lady, from Blagoveshchensk, a city located 700 km away from the centre. Platon had simply been dumped on the door step of the animal shelter Olga Shchetinina was volunteering at. After a couple of months of [hand rearing Platon](#), Olga was determined to find a proper home for him, because neither her house nor the cats and dogs shelter she volunteered at were a suitable home for a bear cub! This is why Olga decided to bring Platon to Utyos - she knew Platon would be released back into the wild once he was ready, instead of being stuck in a cage for the rest of his life. After spreading the word about Platon, he became [a local superstar](#) and the whole town raised enough cash for a train ticket to Utyos. Olga and Platon's train was seen off by local residents and a news channel. It was a royal farewell!

Platon, the traveller.



Platon on his train journey to Utyos, accompanied by his rescuer Olga.

Four months later, Platon is too heavy to follow his step-siblings up the trees. His nickname is Fatty, but we don't tell him that! You see, brown bears are considerably larger than Himalayan bears, and once fully grown are no longer able to climb trees due to their sheer size and weight. Whereas, Himalayan bears spend most of their lives in trees. Platon is big enough to make it on his own in the wild. Final preparations, last big fattening dinners and Platon will be released into the vast Russian forest so he can build his winter den and hibernate all the winter. When he wakes up in April he will be a fully grown mighty Russian bear.

Barnat, the climber.

The third cub, Barnat, arrived at Utyos soon after Platon in April. His story is the one the team at Utyos have seen too many times before: mother shot whilst hibernating in her winter den, still nursing her babies. He had been kept back as a toy by poachers and then surrendered to the authorities once they were bored of him. Barnat was so malnourished and small we found it hard to believe he was 3 months old. He swiftly joined his new brothers Gavroche and Platon who quickly accepted him in their gang and started teaching him how to be a wild bear, which involved climbing trees and making barking noises at the scary humans who were approaching only to bring food.



Platon climbing a tree with Barnat.



Barnat and Gavroche, doing what wild bears do.

Little Miss Molly.

And as the two members of our team were getting ready for their volunteering trip to Utyos in July, the centre unexpectedly received a call, about another tiny cub in need of a rescue. It is unusual for Utyos to receive such small cubs in the summer. Molly was kept back by a poacher after he most likely killed her mother in the spring.

They never confess to this, but rather claim that they found a cub wandering by itself in the forest. During the months when the poacher kept Molly as his pet, she was caged and only fed dry oats. In the wild, bear cubs grow up suckling on their mothers' milk and learn how to forage for fruit and nuts in the forest.

No wonder, that during the inspection Yana discovered, that Molly had lost most of her milk teeth because of malnutrition. Yana designed the most nutritious diet for Molly she could: porridge with fish, fish oil, meat and lots of fruits and vegetables. We needed our Princess Molly to gain as much weight as possible quickly, so that she could survive the winter in the den with her adoptive big brothers. Although she is the smallest of the four cubs, she is ruling the roost and bosses the boys around the enclosure!



Molly in the feeding cage just before her first steps into the natural enclosure environment.

VOLUNTEERING AT UTYOS

Our team members were very lucky to take part in the day-to-day lives of the bear cubs in August. Their days were filled with the food preparation and feeding routine for the cubs and the resident Amur tiger [Zhorik](#), checking up on the cubs and helping Utyos with some hands on tasks around the centre. They witnessed the process of transferring Molly to the natural enclosure, monitored her behaviour and condition while she was getting used to the new surroundings. They came back supercharged with positive emotions and vivid memories they will cherish their whole lives.



Nelly and Paul during their volunteering trip to Utyos.

If you are interested in volunteering at Utyos, drop us a line at info@bigheartsfoundaiton.org.

Thank you so much to **Brigitte Bardot Foundation** for making sure our bear cubs can be wild again!



Brigitte Bardot and Big Hearts Foundation plaques on the bear nursery.

UTYOS WILDLIFE REHABILITATION CENTRE - THE “BEAR” NECESSITIES

In 2016 we raised enough funds to feed the bears and make a large capture cage to leave inside the enclosure. This cage is essential for the cubs' safety, as it is used when they need to be moved or get veterinary care.

Last autumn, we sponsored the repair of the electrical fence, surrounding their beautiful enclosure when it started having electrical issues, as without it the cubs were simply not protected from the wild. Adult bears, common in the area, are curious, territorial and strong, and can easily break into an enclosure without electricity, looking for food or, in the worst case scenario, trying to eliminate their perceived competition – the cubs.

While the fence was being repaired the cubs were moved to a smaller area in which Utyos cared for them as best as they could: feeding them, largely thanks to local food donations, and trying out different forms of enrichment by giving them natural objects to play with. In November 2015, they finished building a comfortable den in which the bears could hibernate in the winter. Watch a video of how the den was built [here](#).

The babies are safe and as happy as the circumstances allow them to be. With the little money they have, Utyos must rely on food and donations mainly from the local people and us.

Our volunteers are working to develop an “Adopt a Bear” programme for these cubs, but in the meantime sharing this information could go a long way: more exposure can bring more donations, and any amount of money is essential for them right now. It will buy more material for their bedding this winter; more vegetables and fruit so they can continue building up the life-saving layer of fat that they'll use up while they're hibernating; veterinary care, if needed.

And then, when these *bear* necessities have been covered, the money will start going towards repairing their much-needed enclosure, which really must be ready as soon as possible!

Find out more about rehabilitation centre Utyos on our [website](#) and [blog](#).

CAPTIVE WILD ANIMALS

Animals in Russia's zoos, dolphinariums, traveling and petting zoos and circuses suffer a range of abuses. Living conditions in most zoos do not resemble their natural habitats at the slightest. Most of them simply spend their days in small cages, often with limited natural light and no enrichment.

Many of them display severe stereotypic behaviors, such as pacing and swaying due to being neglected and denied even basic enrichment by often unskilled and unprepared zookeepers. Most animals receive no medical care and many suffer from injuries and diseases, that are left untreated.

Captive wild animals are often cruelly mutilated by being defanged and declawed and chained to use as photographic props, like the famous [Sochi bears](#) Big Hearts tried to help back in 2014. The techniques used to "train" circus animals are often cruel and abusive and their living conditions generally fall far below acceptable welfare standards for animals in captivity.

We educate zookeepers on animal husbandry and appropriate habitat building to help them meet health and welfare needs of animals in their care.

We investigate and campaign for regulatory changes regarding the standards captive wild animals are kept in within public facilities throughout the country.

For that we draw on a wide range of experience in captive animal welfare accumulated by our partner organizations such as Animals Asia, Waza, WAP etc.



One of the bears living in horrible conditions in a small filthy cage in private ownership in Russia, whom we are currently working towards rescuing and rehoming.

Through our captive wildlife program, we attempt to rescue animals from cruel private keeping and educate zoos in Russia about the psychological and physiological needs of wild animals and recommend enrichment.

HILDA TRESZ VISIT TO ROSTOV ZOO

5 Chimpanzees residing in a zoo in Southern Russia were dumped by street photographers in very bad shape. The staff of the zoo didn't have the knowledge required to provide these very complex animals with an interesting and enriched life. As part of our Captive Wildlife improvement programme, we have arranged for a [world renown expert on primates, Hilda Tresz from Phoenix Zoo and Jane Goodall Institute](#) to come and consult the Rostov zoo on the appropriate primate care. Upon her arrival Hilda saw many other animals in need of help. A tiger was wailing in a small bare enclosure all night, and wolves and a lion needed much better care, too. With our help, Hilda persevered to turn ideas for necessary changes into a reality.

Case Study: **ROSTOV ZOO, RUSSIA**, by *Hilda Tresz; January 22-28, 2016*

Doroty (Dora) chimpanzee.

Five-year-old female chimpanzee, Doroty, was living by herself at the Rostov zoo. She was separated from the other chimpanzees because she appeared to be stunted in her growth. She *looked* like she was approximately two-years-old, didn't appear to use her legs very well and had limited social skills. Consequently, staff was concerned about her not being able to protect herself from her brother. Doroty was loaned to the Rostov Zoo. She was hand-reared by the primate manager and her family in a cage modified to be a nursery inside the chimpanzee building.



Photo by Polina Aksenova.



Photo by Chloe Rossman.

Although her caregivers loved her very much, and she seemed to be in good spirits, it was imperative that she be with her own species. Chimpanzees, especially infants, should not live in solitary confinement. In fact, until they reach about eight years of age, they learn survival skills and social behaviors from their mothers and group members. Just as humans, keeping them isolated takes a toll on their mental and physical health.

The Rostov Zoo management was concerned about her development and decided to seek consultation about the possibilities of introducing her to other chimpanzees. Haus, a six-year-old male, was the best choice with which to pair her. He was hand-reared, friendly and similar in age. However, the introduction couldn't proceed because Doroty had a piece of wire in her neck (under her skin) – a possible remnant from a snare or capturing/restraining device of the poachers. Indeed, it was necessary to remove the wire prior to any introductions to avoid probable injury in the future.

We have also translated [9 presentations](#) on everything concerning physical and mental wellbeing of many types of zoo animals. They were used by Hilda in a webinar to 9 other Russian zoos. We hope to get the material to every zoo in Russia and have the ability to follow up and see through improvements.



Photo by Victoria Kostenko.



Photo by Chloe Rossman.

Every morning on the visit, Haus was separated from his cage mate (an early adolescent male Mikl) and walked by hand next to Dorothy. He spent 30-40 minutes per day “greeting” Dorothy, and then put back with Mikl in the afternoon. Haus could approach Dorothy through a small tunnel and she could climb up and meet him sitting on a metal bench. Staff needed to stay with the infants at all times to monitor the two chimpanzees.

Since the tunnel, that connected the two cages was about five feet high (1.5m), Dorothy was forced to use her limbs extensively. By the second day, she was clearly holding the bars with her feet and was able to thrust her body upwards.

In April 2016, Dora was operated on, and the wire was removed from her neck. With summer approaching, she was frequently let outside to a much larger enclosure that also encouraged her to climb and use her legs.

The Rostov Zoo with the supervision of the Primate Manager, Victoria Kostenko, has already started to integrate Dorothy into a group so she can live a happy and healthy life as a chimpanzee. Dora is now together with Haus in full contact. The next step will be introducing both infants to their new surrogate parents.



Photo by Victoria Kostenko.

After a visit by Hilda Tresz, keepers of the Rostov Zoo have learned about simple and affordable ways to enrich the lives of its animals. They are currently enlarging and improving enclosures, making sure all animals have natural light, some toys and vegetation and are moved together from solitary confinement. We are delighted, that Hilda’s visit helped zookeepers understand the importance of meeting not only physiological, but also psychological needs of animals in their care.



Some of the pictures from Hilda’s visit and training, courtesy of Hilda Tresz and Rostov Zoo.

Our dream is for every captive animal in Russia and nearby countries to have enough space to roam in, things to play with, to sleep in, to forage in and, for social animals, to have companions.

We will never stop working towards making this dream come true and your invaluable support is the determining factor for our success!



Lion cub in Rostov Zoo is playing with his new cardboard box, just like your domestic kitten would, not showing the slightest interested in meat. [Learn more.](#)

IMPROVEMENTS AT THE VORONEZH ZOO

In 2016 we reached out to the Voronezh zoo and had some positive outcome. We visited the zoo and assessed the state of the animals and their living conditions. According to what we saw the general condition of the zoo was acceptable and some improvements were already being implemented, such as building larger enclosures for big predators.

However, we discovered that a few predators, such as foxes, wolves and a brown bear were still kept in small enclosures with no enrichment. Other bigger predators, reptiles (crocodiles and a python) and a few birds (peacock, storks) also were placed in enclosures, that were too small for them. We analyzed the evidence collected during our visits and approached the zoo management with some suggestions on improvements, with the strong focus on getting animals to larger and more suitable habitats.

The management welcomed our suggestions, moved some animals to larger enclosures and have scheduled to relocate the birds to another zoological park, located in the forest with much more suitable conditions. The management also assured us they will consider other suggestions, such as building a better crocodile enclosure which requires some engineering works.

We plan to maintain good relationship with the zoo and continue our work with them to further increase the wellbeing of the animals in their care.



Brown bear walking towards the pool to freshen up at his new improved enclosure at the Voronezh Zoo.

CAPTIVE WILD ANIMALS: SUCCESS STORIES

Andryusha, rescued after 3 years of horrible abuse

Looking at this relaxed happy bear today it is hard to imagine, that Andryusha's rescue story lasted over 3 years. This 20-year-old bear was pulled out of his miserable existence in a tiny filthy cage, where he couldn't even hide from the heat. In addition, he was forced to share this «home» with corpses of dead dogs and rats, thrown to him as food. Andryusha's owner claimed, that he lived in «beautiful» conditions and was refusing to give the bear up under any pretext.



Andryusha in his old cage, that was way too small and filthy for him, or any animal to live in.



Andryusha relaxing in his new large home in the Eco-Park Zuratkul, Chelyabinsk region, Russia.

Big Hearts Foundation wrote an official complaint to the local authorities, while local volunteers and activists attracted attention of the local community and media to this case. As a result of this collective efforts Andryusha's owner was forced to surrender the bear.

Only then it was possible to finally rescue and rehome Andryusha. As you may see on the photos below, today Andryusha lives a happy relaxed life in his new spacious home in the Eco-Park Zuratkul, located in beautiful mountain scenery in the Chelyabinsk region.

Besides following Andryusha's case, we have written and followed up on complaints about 4 other bears kept in similar or worse conditions by private citizens. So far, one of the owners from Dagestan has been fined with RUB 10,000 and was forced to hand the bear over to a zoo.

There are 3 other bears we are looking to rehome to rehabilitation centres abroad, currently preparing the proper documentation and seeking funding.

New homes for Agat, Atos and Manya from Totem

In summer 2015 Big Hearts Foundation received a cry for help from a tragedy stricken Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre and Shelter "Totem", located in Tomsk, Russia. Their founder and the only trained veterinarian Maria Vtorushina passed away at the young age of 37 leaving "orphaned" over 250 wild animals, who were once abandoned, severely neglected by irresponsible owners or injured in the wild.

Most of them used to be pets, traveling circus performers or shady zoo residents, including 3 large animals, a young brown bear Manya, a puma Atos and a leopard Agat.

Just before passing Maria was trying to raise funding in order to provide new (more spacious) enclosures to three large animals, as they were growing quickly and needed more space.

The center has never received any support from the government and existed only thanks to the donations from private citizens and small money they made by selling the tickets to visitors.

During those guided visits Maria and volunteers would educate visitors, often school children, about different species, explain why wild animals should not be kept as pets, raise awareness of the cruelty of traveling circuses and petting zoos and teach responsible attitude towards the environment.



Manya exploring her new more spacious enclosure.

After weeks of talking to volunteers of the center and drawing budgets we started to fundraise for new enclosures to improve living conditions of Manya, Atos and Agat. We managed to raise £405 from 14 individual donors in few weeks time, but it was not enough and the time wasn't on our side. The first portion of funding together with a donation from our Founder covered the new enclosure for Manya, as she was growing quickly and urgently needed a bigger home.

In November of 2015, thanks to the Harmony Fund's generous and timely donation of £3,200 we managed to build new enclosures for Atos and Agat, 2.5 times the size of old cages the big cats used to live in, add enrichments and bring major improvements to their living conditions.

Find out [more](#).



Agat and Atos enjoying some enrichment in their new spacious enclosures.

Fox News

Volunteers from our partner shelter in Suoyarvi were asked for help by a man, who found a barely moving fox cub on the road. Poor boy was looking very frail and couldn't move, lying helplessly in the middle of the road.

He had to be taken to a small rehabilitation facility, located 9 hours away by car. With our support the staff taught him the needed skills on how to survive in the wild and successfully released him in a nearby forest, when he was old and strong enough to make it on his own.



Fox cub rescued by our volunteers in his rehabilitation enclosure.

HUMANE EDUCATION

KINDNESS LESSONS AND HUMANE EDUCATION COURSE FOR TEACHERS

Through our Humane Education Programme we provide children with opportunities to learn about animal welfare in a fun interactive manner. Children are educated about the importance of responsible and compassionate attitude towards all living beings and why they, as humans, have the responsibility to help relieve animal suffering and treat them as sentient beings.

We have created tailor-made [material](#) for the Russian-speaking public to promote and encourage teachers and educators to incorporate “Kindness Lessons” into their programme. At the moment, over 15 schools in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine included our materials in their school curricula.



This year we held classes in Russia and Belarus for children of 15 schools. The total of 40 teachers have completed our online course so far and can now pass their knowledge on.

In order to give more school children across Russia and former Soviet countries a chance to benefit from our Kindness Lessons, with the help from the Persula Foundation we have also created and launched an online course to prepare 120 more qualified instructors. Main topics covered by the course are “Interaction between humans and animals”, “Use of animals”, “Ethics of animal welfare”, “School education on approach towards animals and their welfare”, “Relationship with other school subjects”, “Ethics of using animals for the laboratory experiments” and others.

40 teachers and animal welfare activists have already successfully completed the first edition of the course and are now passing this knowledge on to the children.

Being carried out online, the course allows anyone to join no matter the location. Our course developer and instructor Sasha Bogachuk from Ukraine has over 18 years of experience in Humane Education. He has developed Ukraine’s first curriculum on the subject, which is currently being actively endorsed by the Ukrainian government. Interested Russian and Ukrainian-speaking teachers and animal welfare activists can enroll [here](#).

The course was made possible by a grant from the Persula Foundation, whom we thank very much for helping us advance Humane Education in Russia!

RAISING AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS

SOCIAL ADVERTISING

During the current economic crisis in Russia animals are the first to suffer. Animal welfare is far less developed than in the western countries. For many animal welfare groups and volunteers across the country Big Hearts Foundation is the go-to place in times of need. And, while we are not able to fund food and medical care for numerous animals in need, we provide the rescuers and animal advocates with vital information on such topics as:

- how to effectively attract donors locally and through new tools (e.g. crowdfunding)
- how to make adoption more likely how to run a shelter more sustainably
- how to maintain animal welfare, prevent disease and overcrowding

We also provide free legal help for animal abuse cases and supply effective [social awareness ads](#), that have been displayed in **12 cities**, so far. Below you may see **some examples**.

STERILIZATION



Posters read: *Nobody needs the puppies of your cat/dog. Sterilize your pets.*

USE OF ANIMALS AS PHOTO PROPS



1. "A pic for social media? You just "liked" animal abuse."
2. "Smile! You just killed my mother".



ANIMAL CIRCUS



1. "Another side of circus".
2. "Animals are not clowns, they don't belong in circus".

We never leave any cry for help unanswered. For us it is of vital importance to let these brave and selfless people know, that we will always be there to support them, despite the fact, that we are a small charity working in the world's largest country.

The more we grow the more cities, regions and animals we will be able to help!

EVENT PARTICIPATION

In March our volunteers proudly participated in the Russian Business Week 2016 held by the London School of Economics. It was a great opportunity to raise awareness of animal welfare situation in Russia among influential Russian public, expats and the future of Russian business, meet new supporters, attract volunteers and raise donations.



Big Hearts volunteers raising awareness and treating visitors to some delicious homemade pastry at the Russian Business Week 2016 held by the London School of Economics.

Our special thank you goes to our new friends at the LSE Russian Business Society and its president Lika Everstova. Besides their warm welcome and constant help during the event, they kindly donated £2 from each ticket to our foundation.

Our founder and successful trader Anna Kogan Nasser gave an exciting speech about her professional career and motivation, that brought her to start helping animals. She was at the centre of attention of young traders and gave invaluable advice on how to be an ace in what you do.

We also met many bright and influential people from Russian political and media world who expressed interest in cooperating with us and helping us raise awareness of animal welfare issues.

Thank you everyone, who stopped by our stand, talked to our volunteers and donated during the event. We are thankful to those Big Hearts and hope to meet again soon!

BROCHURE FOR RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERS

This year we have also created a comprehensive illustrated [brochure](#) on various aspects of responsible pet ownership and animal welfare, printed 7000 copies and distributed it at pet shops and veterinary clinics. Next year we hope to attract sponsorship to print a lot more, as we firmly believe, that raising awareness of these matters is crucial in a society, that is used to treating animals as objects instead of living beings with complex needs.



A supporter holding a copy of our brochure she received at one of our rehoming events.



Volunteers from Perm' will hand out our brochure with some souvenirs at one of their events.

We believe that writing analytical press articles and appearing on television promoting responsible and humane treatment of animals is vital. That is why this year we dedicated resources to publishing articles in the press on such subjects as:

- Federal government's lack of action on animal welfare legislation;
- What happens when animal rescue groups do more harm than good and what responsible and effective animal advocacy should look like;
- Exposé article on a corruption case in administration of Samara, where stray dogs were captured by a government contractor and sold to a Korean citizen for meat;
- Myths and facts about trap-neuter-return of stray dogs promoted like the only solution to stray animal problem;
- Russian TV personalities and models “adopting” lion and tiger cubs as a part of the cruel cub petting industry leading to untimely death and suffering of animals and promoting exotic pet trade;
- Where parents should take their children in order to introduce them to the world of animals and nature without taking part in such cruel entertainments as circuses, dolphinariums and petting zoos;
- World renowned Violinist Vanessa May expressing her outrage after a gruesome case of animal abuse, when a mother polar bear was fed a firecracker by workers of a construction site and suffered in agony;
- Articles about the proposed ban on animal testing for cosmetics in Russia and the reluctance of the federal government to pass the bill;
- Cruelty and severe mismanagement at a Kazakhstan zoo leading to a slow and grueling death of a tiger and other animals.

LOBBYING FEDERAL LEGISLATION

Despite numerous efforts and growing request from the public current federal government in Russia doesn't seem to be interested in bringing any improvements to the animal welfare legislation.

They show no interest in the long awaited ban on baiting stations, outlawed in the most of the world. The legislative proposal on the “Responsible Treatment of Animals” has been stuck in the parliament without movement for years.



There is a small hope to push through a ban on traveling zoos and dolphinariums which we have been lobbying for a while. We also keep reaching out and looking for federal politicians and lawmakers interested in bringing real positive change.

However, as of now, our main focus stays on regional legislation and practices, as they have a lot bigger chance of being improved, comparing to the federal legislation.

In the meantime, we keep educating the public and raising awareness of various animal welfare issues, urgent need for effective legislation and proposals ignored by the government through press releases and articles in various mass media and blogs. Below is one of the most recent examples.

Experts and lawyers of Big Hearts Foundation have analyzed archives of the official website of State Duma searching for bills related to animal welfare proposed in the **past 20 years**.

They found out, that there were **27 of such bills** proposed, half of which in the last **3 years**.

Do you know how many were passed by the parliament? Zero.

VIOLINIST VANESSA MAE ON THE POLAR BEAR CRUELTY CASE IN RUSSIA



Vanessa Mae - world renown musician, athlete and avid animal welfare advocate.

Vanessa Mae:

“I was deeply shocked and upset to hear about the recent case of animal cruelty, involving a Polar bear that took place on one of the Russian Arctic islands – Wrangel Island. The female bear, accustomed to humans giving her food, was thrown a firecracker by those she trusted the most. Polar bears would often come to the island’s construction site to feed on the leftovers that were put out for them by the workers. She grew to trust humans so much that she would even bring her little cub along. One day, instead of tasty treats, a firecracker was thrown to her. It blew up in her mouth destroying her face and causing severe

bleeding. Her lengthy agony was filmed and uploaded online for the whole world to see.

Her cub's sad fate was also sealed, as he ran away scared of what "friendly" humans did to his mother.

I love Russia, I took part in the 2014 Winter Olympics and just gave concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg. This is why I cannot stay silent about the way the Russian government keeps ignoring demands from the people for better animal welfare legislation. There is no punishment for animal cruelty in Russia or any functioning law that make people think twice before treating animals like garbage.

This case got a lot of attention and might get a follow-up because it involves a protected species, but people in Russia know, that the chances of getting a punishment for torturing an animal belonging to a non-protected species are close to zero. There must be a price to pay for abusing those who have no voice. Yet hundreds of thousands of cases don't even make it to the police. In spring 2015, after more than a decade of pleading from its people, State Duma once again declined the amendment of the Anti-Cruelty



Polar bear agonizing and bleeding after being fed a firecracker by those she trusted the most.

Violinist Vanessa-Mae speaks out on the [recent Polar bear cruelty case in Russia](#) and the lack of animal welfare legislation in the world's biggest country.

Legislation Act 245. Several other animal related laws have not been allowed to move forward as well.

It makes me very sad, that such a beautiful country is so behind concerning animal welfare legislation. If Russia wants to be a truly developed country, it must foster a culture of compassion and a society where cruelty and irresponsible attitude towards those who cannot stand up for themselves are not tolerated.

As an animal lover and long-time supporter of Cruelty Free International's work for a global ban on cosmetics tests on animals, I praise the work Big Hearts Foundation carried out with the government on the recently published landmark bill, aiming to phase out all animal testing cosmetics and their related ingredients in Russia by 2020.

Big Hearts Foundation is a small, but effective charity lobbying better animal welfare legislation and prosecuting cruelty in Russia.

The foundation is currently trying to press criminal charges against the abusers of the Polar bear on Wrangel Island, but the existing legislation is working against them.

To make a real difference for animals in such a big country, this young organisation needs our support. Your support. With the necessary resources, including the public's voice behind them, they will be able to make the world's biggest country a better place for animals and eventually stop cases like this from happening once and for all."

CAMPAIGN AGAINST ANIMAL TESTING

Our layer and president, Anastasiya Komagina, and Cruelty Free International Director of Policy, Dr. Nick Palmer, attended Vanessa Mae's concert in Moscow in December 2015.

Ms. Mae is an animal lover and a long-time supporter of Cruelty Free International's work for a global ban on cosmetics tests on animals. Together with Cruelty Free International we have been campaigning to raise awareness of this issue in Russia.

The bill lobbying such ban in Russia was developed by a group of experts, including our president Anastasiya Komagina, and was submitted to the Federal Government by the State Duma member and lawmaker Sergey Doronin. The revised version of the bill is being reviewed by the government.

[Watch Ms. Mae's video message](#)



Vanessa Mae in Russia with Anastasia Komagina, president of Big Hearts Foundation and Dr. Nick Palmer, International Director of Policy of Cruelty Free International calling for animal testing ban.

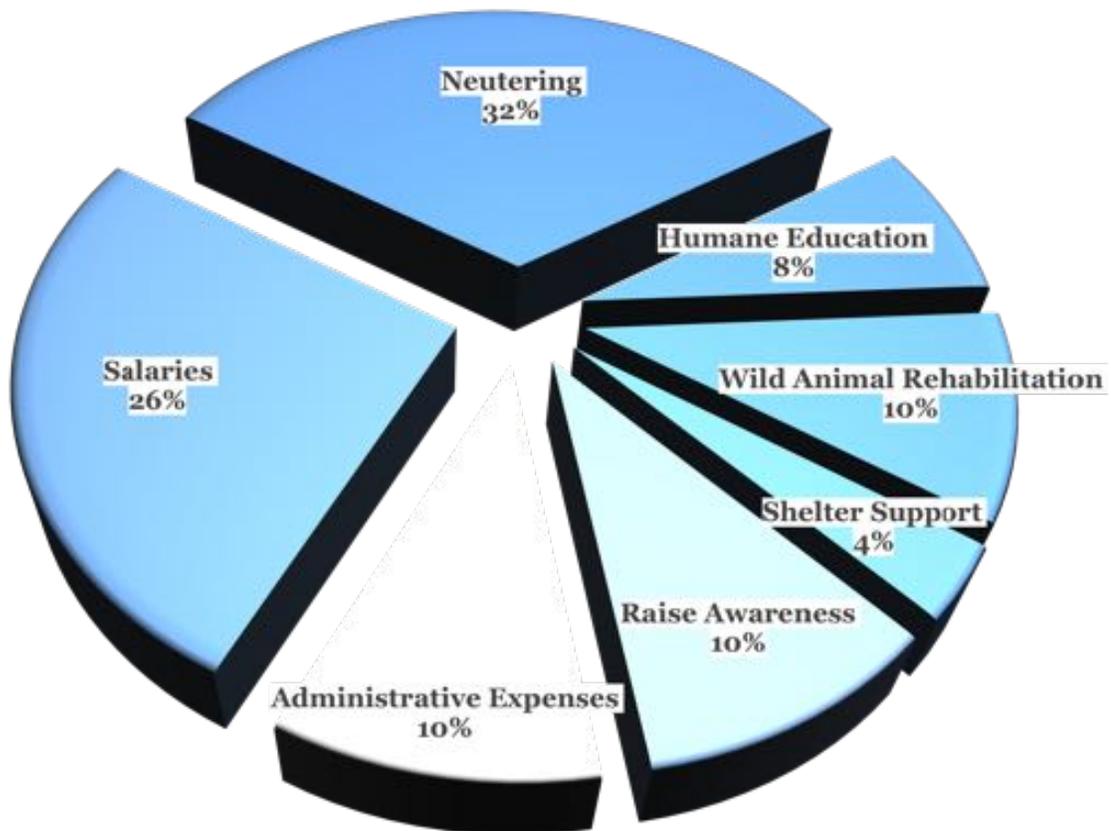
FINANCIALS

COMMENTS ON RESERVES AND FUNDING SOURCES

Currently, main sources of our income are the donations from the founder and grants. Additional funds are raised through fundraising campaigns, crowdfunding and events.

All funding received has allowed us to relive and prevent animal suffering, run subsidized neutering projects, rescue and rehabilitate wild animals and raise awareness of these and other crucial animal related issues among the general public. None of this would be possible without the donations and grants we receive.

EXPENSES BREAKDOWN



- *Neutering*
- *Humane Education*
- *Wild Animal Rehabilitation*
- *Shelter Support*
- *Raise Awareness*
- *Administrative Expenses*
- *Salaries*



Big Hearts Foundation		No (if any)		CC16a
Receipts and payments accounts				
For the period from	9/2/15	To	9/1/16	

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds	Total funds	Last year
	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Founder contribution	15.000	-	-	15.000	-
Partners and Grants	15.143	-	-	15.143	-
Individual donors	4.990	-	-	4.990	-
Giftaid	9.926	-	-	9.926	-
Events and sales	800	-	-	800	-
Crowdfunding	2.906	-	-	2.906	-
	- 0	-	-	-	-
	- 0	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	48.765	-	-	48.765	-
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
		- 0	- 0	-	
	- 0	- 0	- 0	-	- 0
Sub total	- 0	- 0	- 0	-	- 0
Total receipts	48.765	- 0	- 0	48.765	- 0
A3 Payments					
Neutering	8.976	-	-	8.976	-
Shelter support and emergency rescue	999	-	-	999	-
Salaries	7.211	-	-	7.211	-
Humane Education	2.159	-	-	2.159	-
admin: transfer costs/ book keeping/ web / postage/ transport	2.787	-	-	2.787	-
Wild animal rehabilitation	2.779	-	-	2.779	-
Raising awareness	2.787	-	-	2.787	-
		-	-	-	-
Sub total	27.698	-	-	27.698	-
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
		- 0	- 0	-	
		- 0	- 0	-	
Sub total	- 0	- 0	- 0	-	- 0
Total payments	27.698	- 0	- 0	27.698	- 0
Net of receipts/(payments)	21.067	-	-	21.067	-
A5 Transfers between funds	- 0	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	- 0	-	-	4.428	-
Cash funds this year end	21.067	-	-	25.495	-

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	cash in bank	25.495	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
	Total cash funds	25.495	-	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	Agreement Error	OK	OK
B2 Other monetary assets		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
	-	-	-	
	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B3 Investment assets			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
B5 Liabilities			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees	Signature	Print Name		Date of approval
	Akogan	Anna Kogan		9/30/16

GOVERNANCE IN PLACE

Our board of Trustees oversees all our financial activities and play an active role in management decisions.

All neutering projects are verified by means of receiving receipts and photos of surgeries from the project leads and local volunteers.

All other project expenses are verified by receipts, pictures and videos. Our volunteers also regularly visit projects we are involved in. All projects provide income/expenses reports.

FUTURE GOALS

To further increase an already active cooperation with international animal welfare organisations, trusts, foundations and animal advocates, globally raise awareness of animal cruelty and neglect in Russia and collaborate on effectively improving it.

RAISING AWARENESS

- Hold webinars on various relevant topics for animal welfare activists working at the grassroots level in Russia;
- Print 20,000 copies of responsible pet ownership and animal welfare awareness brochures for distribution at pet shops and vet clinics;
- Print 50,000 colourful rulers that convey a child-friendly message about the benefits of pet neutering to give away as gifts to children during our Kindness Lessons;
- Publish articles in national and international press raising awareness on issues in Russia, providing facts and offering solutions;
- Start education programme on wildlife protection for local community on Russian Far East.

COMPANION ANIMALS

- Launch at least one large scale subsidized neutering project, preceded by a survey on attitude towards neutering and massive social advertising, created based on the results of the survey;
- Smaller neutering campaigns in at least 6 cities;
- Continue to provide legal support for cases involving animals;
- Compile a comprehensive report on the most effective and efficient practices developed by the regional governments in dog and cat population management, and distribute it across less successful regions of Russia;
- Liaise with international organisations to provide veterinary training in modern neutering surgery techniques to Russian veterinarians;
- Use the results of the country-wide survey among regional veterinary departments to lobby the federal government for a legislative change to allow regional governments to effectively and humanely deal with stray animal issues;
- Analyze the government subsidized microchipping programme of St. Petersburg and suggest its implementation to other cities and regions;



- Continue lobbying regional governments for a change in animal welfare legislation through established collaboration with animal welfare groups.

HUMANE EDUCATION

- Teach our online course on Humane Education to 120 teachers;
- Hold Humane Education classes in 20 cities, reaching more than 4,000 children.

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION - UTYOS WILDLIFE CENTRE

- Raise enough funding to rehabilitate 10 bears back into the wild;
- Purchase a forest-friendly tractor to fix the larger section of the bear enclosure.

CAPTIVE ANIMAL WELFARE

- Work with 10 zoos to improve enclosures and enrichment;
- Raise awareness of animal cruelty among regional governments and prosecutors;
- Hire a Captive Animal Welfare officer to work directly in Russia;
- Hold a successful pilot campaign against animal circus in Chelyabinsk;
- Rehome 3 bears living in horrible conditions by restaurants in Russia to reserves abroad;
- Draft a detailed plan for the first real Wild Animal Sanctuary in Russia, where animals can live wild in their natural habitat with as little human interaction as possible.

TEAM AND STRUCTURE



And, of course, our precious regional volunteers: over 40 (and counting!) selfless individuals working tirelessly across various regions of Russia and former Soviet countries in order to make this huge world region a better place for animals.

OUR PARTNERS

We would like to thank our partners for supporting our work, we would not be able to do it without you!



Naturewatch Foundation
for the advancement of animal welfare

Working with



Movement of realistic animal welfare "5 Freedoms"



Follow our work on:

