

Acres sets up unit to probe animal abuse

Rescue group's new unit will gather proof, prepare case brief to prosecute offenders

Samantha Boh

In many cases of animal abuse, it is the lack of incriminating evidence that proves the stumbling block when prosecuting suspects.

To overcome that, wildlife rescue group Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres) has set up an animal crime investigation unit, which will be dedicated to investigating animal cruelty and wildlife crime, collating the necessary evidence and preparing the case brief for prosecution in court.

The unit was launched yesterday at a public forum on animal protection policies held at Chong Pang Community Club. It was attended by more than 200 people, including secondary school students, animal welfare groups and members of the public.

"It is a constant theme at our forums. People will say we investigated a lot of cases but few are prosecuted," said Acres chief executive Louis Ng.

"We want to increase the rate to make sure we send out a very deterrent message that we take animal crime, wildlife crime, very seriously and we want to make sure the penalties that we have in legislation are meted out as well."

The unit comprises four full-time staff members who have qualifications in areas such as law, environmental management, life sciences and criminal investigation. It will be headed by Ms Noelle Seet, a lawyer with more than 11 years of litigation experience.

During the forum, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam fielded questions from the audience on topics such as the culling of stray dogs and agreed there is a need to be more specific as to what defines animal abuse.

He also said that a pilot programme that lets Housing Board flat owners in Chong Pang keep cats in their homes has been successful in identifying and register-

ing owners.

"Responsible cat ownership can be promoted and we can extend to other parts of (Nee Soon) GRC, not necessarily every constituency at the same time, but where there is a need and where it is possible to achieve it," said Mr Shanmugam, who is also an MP for the GRC.

The programme will be rolled out at the other constituencies over the next couple of years.

Cat Welfare Society president Thenuga Vijakumar was happy with the news and noted that the programme encourages responsibility.

Separately, the Wildlife Reserves Singapore and the South-east Asian arm of wildlife trade monitoring network Traffic jointly launched a year-long "You Buy, They Die" campaign yesterday to fight wildlife crime.

It aims to educate the public on the seriousness of wildlife crime and how their buying decisions can help support the conservation of endangered wildlife.

✉ samboh@sph.com.sg