YOUTHS LEAD THE WAY: SINGAPORE’S INAUGURAL ANIMAL PROTECTORS GRANT WINNERS

SINGAPORE, 4 September 2008- The Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES), NTU Animal Lovers Society, NUS Students’ Animal Welfare Group and People for Animal Welfare (SMU) today announced the recipients of the inaugural Animal Protectors Grant.

Launched by the three student animal welfare groups and ACRES in May 2008, the Animal Protectors Grant is Singapore’s first grant specifically for animal welfare initiatives in Singapore. The grant was established to empower members of the public to act on their passion and make a difference for animals and the community in Singapore. It seeks to provide seed funding for projects, enabling these projects to become reality. Its also seeks to inspire others to follow the example set by the grant recipients.

“The grant is an excellent opportunity for youth activists to carry out their dream projects and gain some experience in this field. It will boost their morale and of course make a real difference for the animals” said Ms. Satveer Kaur, President, NUS Students’ Animal Welfare Group.

Sponsored by the Lee Foundation, a total of eight grants will be distributed to eight groups comprising thirty four individuals, to undertake animal welfare projects. These projects were selected from a total of fourteen project applications received. Grant amounts range from $915 to $1,350.

“It is heartening to note that we will have thirty four individuals who will be making a difference for animals in Singapore over the next nine months. It is also very encouraging that thirty three out of the thirty four grant recipients are youths. The spirit of giving is certainly alive in Singapore, and we are confident that our community is moving in the right direction” said Mr. Louis Ng, Founder and Executive Director of ACRES.

The eight groups will be conducting projects that will have a significant impact on the community. The projects include writing and publishing animal storybooks for children, raising awareness and taking action to end the illegal wildlife trade, organising animal welfare-themed carnivals in their schools, sterilising stray cats and dogs, producing a documentary on responsible pet ownership to be included in the Civics & Moral Education curriculum and a study on efficacy of the use of cat cafes in the management of a stray cat population.

"It is wonderful to see groups of young, passionate students putting their heart and so much effort into their projects, which are very comprehensive and well-thought out. There is so much that can be done to help alleviate animal suffering and to raise public consciousness about what is happening around the world, and having a grant to fund these projects is definitely a great stepping stone to informing, inspiring, educating and improving animal welfare. I believe this will encourage other like-minded students to step up to make a difference in future" said Ms. Michelle Loh, President, People for Animal Welfare (SMU).

"Hopefully we can intensify public interest in animal welfare through the grant. It funds fresh initiatives and, in turn, these may evolve into great projects in Singapore's animal welfare scene" said Mr. Chen Ming Wei, President, NTU Animal Lovers Society

The eight groups will present the results of their projects at the 2nd Singapore Animal Welfare Symposium in May 2009. The Animal Protectors Grant will be disbursed annually.

Contact:
Louis Ng (ACRES Executive Director)
Email: louis@acres.org.sg  Handphone: +65 97968592

- ends -
Notes to editors

• ACRES

ACRES is a local animal welfare charity and Institution of Public Character aimed at fostering respect and compassion for all animals. The charity is driven by its concern for animals and adopts research projects on the use of animals in various fields. Research findings are then used to educate the public to promote active community involvement in the animal welfare movement, as well as strive towards synergistic partnerships with authorities and related parties. ACRES has conducted more than 240 roadshows and/or talks to raise awareness on animal welfare issues in Singapore and to create a more socially responsible community. It currently has more than 14,000 individuals on its supporter database.

• NTU Animal Lovers Society

NTUALS is a non-profit organisation run by students from Nanyang Technological University and National Institute of Education. The Society was officially started in July 2007 and has attracted members with various interests such as pet animals and wildlife protection. NTUALS aims to educate members and the NTU population on animal welfare issues, while having fun and interest-based events as well. Members are encouraged to bond through animal-themed social gatherings. The Society will continue to explore possibilities to bring about awareness on the serious and fun sides of animal-related issues.

• NUS Students’ Animal Welfare Group

NUS Students’ Animal Welfare Group was formed in 2006 and is a student-led organisation of the National University of Singapore that strives to improve the welfare of animals. They hope to be a strong voice on animal welfare issues in Singapore. NUS Students’ Animal Welfare Group is dedicated to raising awareness on animal exploitation and cruelty issues in the hope of initiating change for the betterment of our fellow earthlings. They address concerns on domestic animals, industrialised animal cruelty and wild animal welfare issues: All animals matter.

• People for Animal Welfare (SMU)

PAW was founded in 2005 by a group of passionate Singapore Management University students who want to bring across a simple message – treat animals humanely. They are dedicated to broadcasting responsible pet ownership and prevention of animal suffering. They do this through education by running events, volunteering and collaborations with other animal welfare groups. Their mission is to educate and raise awareness to prevent animal cruelty, to give animals a voice and, most importantly, to spread the love for animals to as many as possible. Their past events include SMU Animal Day 2008, Pet Beach Outing and Pet Trade Lunchtime Talk in 2006. PAW also had the honour to host the 1st Singapore Animal Welfare Symposium at SMU on 24th May 2008. This nationwide forum targeted animal welfare issues ranging from domestic pet care to wildlife conservation, with a diverse panel from government institutions, private practices and students.
ANIMAL PROTECTORS GRANT RECIPIENTS PROJECTS

Ani-Rights
We are students from Anglo-Chinese Junior College and will be holding a theme-based week on Animal Rights at our school: Ani-Rights Week. Through this week, we hope to increase awareness on animal cruelty amongst Singaporeans. We hope that people can learn to respect animals as individual beings and treat them with compassion. Activities will include:
  o A quiz on animal cruelty issues to increase knowledge on these issues so that participants know the reality.
  o A talk by ACRES regarding animal cruelty to provide the participants with a general overview of animal cruelty issues that are relevant in the local context.
  o Promotion of vegetarian food to convince the participants of the feasibility of adopting an animal cruelty-free diet.
  o Screening of videos regarding animal abuse before assembly every day of the week to visually expose participants to the various forms of cruelty so that they can sympathise with the suffering of animals.
  o A petition to ban Foie Gras to encourage participants to play a part in animal activism and solving a real-world issue.
  o A cage exhibit to simulate the harsh conditions in a battery cage, allowing participants to experience and increase awareness on living conditions in a battery cage, so that they will be more sympathetic towards the layer hens.
In addition, we will design our own t-shirts and sell them at the school to raise funds for animal welfare organisations and support animal rights causes.

Awareness Posters in Hot Spots – Curbing the Illegal Pet Trade in Singapore
The sale of illegal animals in pet shops is a serious problem in Singapore, with a total of 4,000 wild animals seized from homes and dealers from 2001 to 2005. According to expert opinion, the problem prevails because people remain unaware that the pets they buy are illegal. This problem may be solved by displaying warning posters prominently in pet shops, which is the project that our team has chosen. These posters will include the names and pictures of the wildlife commonly found in pet shops. We will explicitly state in the posters that it is illegal to keep or sell these animals. The penalties for doing so will be stated. Random checks to see if the posters have not been removed will be conducted on pet shops according to their location zones (i.e. Central Singapore) by inspectors in charge of each zone. These posters will complement past ACRES awareness campaigns by serving as a cost-effective, space-effective permanent reminder to potential buyers. It will deter them, as it is stated explicitly that there are harsh fiscal penalties for such transgressions of the law. This will reduce the demand for illegal wildlife in pet shops, and rectify the problem of pet shop owners purposely selling these animals.

Cat Café Project
Our project is to determine the efficacy of the use of cat cafés in the management of a stray cat population in a large – around 200 hectares – but bounded area, i.e., the NTU campus. The evaluation of the efficacy will be a combination of a population census to determine stabilisation, and feedback from the resident campus community concerning the obtrusiveness of the campus cats. The outputs will be a survey of resident students’ opinions on the interaction with the campus cat population, and a published paper detailing the efficacy of the use of cat cafés in managing the stray cat population.

Illegal Animal Trade
Singapore is often regarded as “the main hub” for the illegal animal trading, inclusive of the exotic pet trade. Importing or exporting these wildlife species without a permit is illegal, and the sale, display or ownership of these animals is an offence under Singapore law. These smuggled animals endure cruel transport methods and captive conditions when passing through Singapore en route to buyers in other parts of the world. This issue is highly critical. If this inhumane trade continues, much of the exotic wildlife will face endangerment. Unfortunately, a swell of demands from buyers sustains this brutal business. In our project, we, a group of students from Raffles Girls’ Secondary, want to see these demands drastically cut, thus eradicating the illegal animal trade altogether, saving the lives of vulnerable wildlife. With this common goal in mind, we aim to communicate our ideas by educating the public. To us, we believe that education is key, to change
the mindsets of buyers or potential buyers. Through road shows and other outreach methods, people from all walks of life will be educated about this area of concern; one which is so critical yet so overlooked. Being youths, we hope that we can encourage fellow youths to join in to help these animals and, together, capitalise on their passion and drive to bring our cause to the forefront of public concern.

Project Kucing Coast (Cats of East Coast Park)
Project Kucing Coast seeks to implement the Trap-Neuter-Release-Manage (TNRM) programme at the core, with key components of Operations, Volunteers, Awareness-building and Fundraising supporting the TNRM programme for cats in East Coast Park. Our aim is thus to garner support in the community - by having more volunteers and strategic partners. Our communication objectives are to:

- Create awareness to the public on the reasons for the prevalence of community cats and why community cats are not a nuisance to the public.
- To increase interest in TNRM programmes and the importance of responsible pet ownership, and how care-givers are helping cats.
- To create among the public a desire to understand how one can be part of the programme to help community cats.
- To prompt the target audience towards taking action in furthering the cause of animal welfare in Singapore.

These objectives can be achieved through various touch-points, including partnerships with key stakeholders, talks in nearby schools and corporations, blogs and websites, on-site volunteers in the park, and sponsorships. The primary target audience is residents and schools within the immediate vicinity of the park and park users. The secondary target audience is those who wish to find out about animal welfare issues.

Sterilisation of Stray Animals
With the high number of stray dogs, especially concentrated in industrial estates, we felt the need to launch a nationwide TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return) programme. Hundreds of strays that roam the areas continue to reproduce as they are not sterilised. This is the main cause of many more unwanted puppies being born into the world alongside their already homeless parents. To achieve a stray-free society, we need active participation from vets, animal lovers and supporters, who are willing to contribute their time, efforts and money to help achieve this goal. It is in the animals’ best interest and ours to try and reduce the number of strays through sterilisation. We know that with everyone’s help and contribution to this project, we will be able to reduce the stray population successfully.

Stories for Lives
We are a group of students from Raffles Institution. In this project, we are aiming to reach children’s hearts and raise awareness on important and pressing animal welfare issues. In order to do so, we have created some scripts for children’s storybooks. Some problems we addressed in the books are the abuse of primates (including for animal shows, illegal trading, and experimentation) and the selling of turtle eggs. We have conducted some research on these issues as well as the effectiveness of our solution, and the results of the surveys we conducted are positive. To move our project to the next stage, we will be publishing the storybooks. We believe that if the project is successful, a big leap towards animal welfare shall be made.

Take Care of Your Pets – Sterilise Them
The project is aimed at promoting kindness towards animals and ethical responsibility towards animal well-being. We, a group of students from Admiralty Secondary School, will film and produce a documentary named Take Care of Your Pets – Sterilise Them, and distribute it to all schools and organisations to bring awareness to the public about animal welfare. The documentary will also be incorporated into our school curriculum as part of Civics & Moral Education. The documentary will look into the problems of certain pet owners breeding their pets in an unregulated way. It will also cover the problem of stray cats and dogs in Singapore. One of the methods to minimise this problem is to sterilise the cats and dogs. The documentary will look into the issue of sterilisation from the point of view of the veterinarian, SPCA personnel, cat feeders and pet owners. It will cover different methods of sterilisation, benefits of sterilisation and the procedures to get pets sterilised.
ANIMAL PROTECTORS GRANT JUDGES

Vilma D’Rozario
Vilma is Sub-Dean of Student Development and Liaison at NIE and an Associate Professor with the Psychological Studies Academic Group of NIE. She organises student development programmes related to all Initial Teacher Preparation programmes at the Institute and teaches courses in counselling psychology. She is an environmental advocate and co-founder of a new environmental education NGO called Cicada Tree Eco-Place which focuses on nature, culture and eco-living.

Jaipal Gill
Jaipal is the founder and first president of NUS Students’ Animal Welfare Group. Currently, he serves as their advisor. He graduated from NUS with a Bachelor of Science (Life Sciences) in 2007 and joined the SPCA shortly after as Inspector where his main duty is to investigate cruelty complaints. He has had a strong interest in animal issues since young, which led him to become a vegetarian at the age of 14. Jaipal wishes to spend the rest of his life fighting for the welfare of domestic, industrial and wild animals.

Satveer Kaur
Satveer is an undergraduate at NUS. At a young age she learnt that all sentient beings deserve to be treated with respect. She assisted in the formation of NUS Students’ Animal Welfare Group in 2006 and joined the group in her first year of university. There, she spearheaded fundraising projects and educational bazaars. In her second year, as Vice President, she played a role in ensuring the success of Singapore’s first Animal Welfare Symposium. Currently, she is the President of the group and hopes to bring them to greater heights.

N. Sivasothi
Mangroves have been the stimulus of the research, education and conservation activities of Sivasothi, a.k.a. ’Otterman’ since the late 1980s. A biology lecturer with the Department of Biological Sciences, NUS, his research interests include mangroves, otters and crabs. He is also the Coordinator of Toddycats, NUS’ Raffles Museum volunteers, and the National Coordinator of the International Coastal Cleanup Singapore. He maintains more than 20 blogs on nature, environment and heritage. http://www.sivasothi/com

Louis Ng
Louis is the founder and Executive Director of ACRES. He received his Bachelor of Science in biology from NUS and his Masters of Science in Primate Conservation from the Oxford Brookes University. In 2007, Louis was presented with The Outstanding Young Persons of Singapore award. In 2002, he received the HSBC / NYAA Youth Environmental Award in recognition of his outstanding contribution in the field of environmental protection and nature conservation.

Ong Leok Poon, Ivan
Ivan has been involved in community cats work since 2003. This year, he joined the executive committee of the Cat Welfare Society (CWS) and is heading the Events, Public Education and Outreach division. The goal of CWS is to spread the word about sterilisation as the better and more humane option of controlling the community cats population as opposed to culling. Ivan is currently involved in graduate level research in the areas of Personnel and Quantitative Psychology at NUS.

Students from People for Animal Welfare (PAW)
PAW was founded in 2005 by a group of passionate SMU students who wants to bring across a simple message – treat animals humanely. They are dedicated to broadcasting responsible pet ownership and prevention of animal suffering. They do this through education by running events, volunteering and collaborations with other animal welfare groups. Their mission is to educate and raise awareness to prevent animal cruelty, to give animals a voice and, most importantly, to spread the love for animals to as many as possible.

Shirley Soh
Shirley is the Director of SMU’s Office of Student Life, which actively promotes students’ engagement in the arts, sports, adventure and civil society, while encouraging the spirit of leadership that is based on personal learning, serving the community and leading by example. SMU’s People for Animal Welfare, a co-curricular activity (or CCA) club, is one example of over 100 CCA clubs that exists in SMU, which is encouraged to be concerned in issues at the community level related to their core activity. This kind of student involvement also represents SMU’s belief in a holistic education embraced in the university’s pedagogy. Shirley herself has adopted 4 stray cats.