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RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERSHIP & POPULATION CONTROL

The Jamaica Veterinary Medical Association (JVMA) notes with horror yet another report of an attack by free roaming dogs, which this time has resulted in the tragic death of Mr. Whittington Cole last month. This comes against the backdrop of continued lax attention to the issues of responsible dog ownership and dog population control in Jamaica. Our hearts go out to the family and all those affected by similar tragedies over the years.

From as far back as 2004, when it became clear that dogs such as American Pit Bull Terriers were being smuggled into the island, circumventing the legal importation process, the JVMA warned of the possible consequences given the lack of sufficient legislation and public practice with regard to responsible dog ownership as well as the general view of many Jamaicans that their dogs must be “bad” for security purposes.

In 2009-10, the Association participated in a committee established by the Minister of Agriculture which examined the broad issue of the movement of companion animals into and out of Jamaica which included the issue of dangerous dogs. In its final report, recommendations were made with regard to new and updated legislation, the promotion of responsible dog ownership, a national effort at dog population control through spay-neuter, and the regulation of dog trainers. It was only in September 2017 that the regulations regarding the importation of dogs and cats were finally changed in keeping with the recommendations and we still await changes in regard to the other matters stated.

It must be recognized that dog behaviour is such that they, particularly non-neutered males, will roam, get into fights, prey upon livestock and, on occasion, attack people. This can be any breed, including our famous mongrels, and the

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concern regarding the larger, more powerful animals which can inflict greater injury, while valid, tends to obscure the greater picture.

Also of great importance is the issue of dog “training”. There are many videos posted online showing some level of abusive “training” to increase aggression which run completely contrary to the norms of protection training. There needs to be a mechanism for the regulation and certification of trainers.

There are other abusive practices such as the cutting off of ears and tails to supposedly enhance the “look” – even in mixed breeds – traumatizing the animals, making them more prone to react inappropriately.

The JSPCA’s Spay-Neuter Jamaica project and other entities are engaged in continuing efforts at spaying/neutering dogs and cats around the island, but these efforts need to be increased and sustained nationally. We are in the process of developing guidelines for such activities.

We urge pet owners to have their dogs (and cats) spayed or neutered so as to help reduce the population of free roaming animals. Contact can be made with your local veterinarian or the JSPCA to get more information on having this procedure done.

We also urge persons to engage their community and local government representatives to discuss support for spay/neuter programmes by Spay-Neuter Jamaica or local veterinarians within your communities. This requires much funding support as veterinarians cannot be expected to continuously provide such services at little or no cost. These are small but significant ways persons can help to tackle the problem and make communities safer for both humans and livestock, while pushing for more action by the government.

We must redouble our efforts – at reviewing the outdated Acts and creating modern Animal Welfare legislation that meets international standards and guidelines, at public education, at dog population control for the protection of both people and animals. The JVMA stands ready to partner with the JSPCA and other animal welfare organizations, the media, the relevant Government entities and all stakeholders. Concerned members of the public can send their ideas and comments to secretary@jvma.org.

Let us make this happen. We owe it to our people. We owe it to our animals.

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