

Malaysia Magic

Sharleen Jordan, CY O'Connor College of TAFE, WA

Getting Started

This story starts around April last year (2009) when I received an email from a "Chinese guy" (as he refers to himself) by the name of Adrian Johnson Lim. This 'guy' claimed he was from Malaysia and he wanted to confirm whether or not I actually did train Rangers how to catch dogs. Adrian is a great user of the internet and can find things that most people can't, and that's how he found me – from various web sites.

You can understand why I was a little sceptical at first. Of course I get emails from people overseas requesting training all the time. OK well NOW I do..... But after a couple of Skype calls and several emails it was established from both ends that we were all the REAL DEAL. Adrian needed someone who could teach people to catch dogs in both a "modern" and humane manner, and that is exactly what I've been doing for the past fifteen years for Rangers in Western Australia through TAFE.

So now the fun began, Government bureaucratic policies, processes and red tape. Adrian needed me on the ground in Malaysia in 5 weeks and the WA State Government process is a minimum of 6-8 weeks. Because I am classified as a "State Government Officer" there were also Ministerial signatures to be obtained – oh wonderful...

At the time I was truly lucky to have a manager by the name of Peter Harding who moved heaven and earth to push (more correctly shove) the process along. Without Peter's faith, dedication, hard work and most of all his amazing ability to get the job done, I doubt very much whether this project would ever have gotten off the ground. So between Peter, Adrian and myself we got me on a plane to Malaysia.

NB: Peter passed away in October of last year in a light air craft crash and I dedicate this talk to him. He was a wonderful boss, a fantastic operator, a dear friend and his loss is greatly felt.

The Arrival

I arrived around Saturday lunchtime and Adrian and his gorgeous Chinese wife Kelsey (with whom I am now very good friends) drove me around to visit various municipal pounds and local welfare shelters. We spent almost two days doing this, all the while discussing all that there is to discuss regarding Animal Control, practices, techniques, equipment, many and various issues, politics, cultural matters, etc. This was my speedy introduction to Malaysia and grounding for lecturing to this group of people. They were a valuable couple of days, and they gave me a lot more confidence to deliver a quality training session to these people.

I then met the rest of the Training Team who included Azhar, Eric, Murali, Isac and a couple of assistants and we all travelled to the A'Famosa Resort in Malacca.

Most of Sunday afternoon (and well into the evening) was spent using my new knowledge, together with Adrian, pulling apart my existing course and presentation and rebuilding into a more workable Malaysia-style format. I fell into bed at midnight while the rest of the Training Team busily went about printing manuals and finalising conference-type details ready for the next day.

The Training

The first 2 day course was designed for the upper echelon of Malaysian people from the Animal Industry, mostly Animal Control Management, Doctors and Veterinarians. This course was more comprehensive than the Officers' course and due to their level of education I was able to teach in English.

The second 2 day course was for Animal Control Officers themselves and it had a more practical and hands-on focus. I had to teach this course using an interpreter and it was much more fun than I had anticipated! Both courses had a strong focus on Animal Welfare and the Five Freedoms.

The first day was classroom based and on the second day we went outdoors. We used demonstration dogs and Officers got the opportunity to practice with the equipment and try out the new techniques that I had shown to them. We later went to a nearby village and put our new skills into practice by catching some members of a wild dog pack. During a course debrief all stakeholders agreed that the whole project had been successful, useful and well received.

Upon my return I worked with Adrian on various Animal Control projects and constantly stayed in touch through emails, text messages and lengthy phone calls – thank you Skype!

Training Continues

In February of this year I returned to Malaysia to continue to assist with the improvement of Animal Control practices, etc and to conduct further training. During this symposium, an overarching theme of "magic" emerged. It started with the trip to the venue, along a weaving road through beautiful Malaysian countryside and villages to the breathtaking Cameron Highlands (home of the Malaysian grown strawberries and Boh tea).

On the Sunday evening we reworked and improved the course based on our last set of courses, feedback, etc and went to bed at a somewhat more reasonable hour. During the first day we again taught the underpinning skills and knowledge required for safe and humane dog capture, handling and behaviour. We used humans for demonstration and many of the participants were sceptical with comments such as "some sort of magic" and "can't possibly work" being murmured during the breaks.

We again spent the second day outside using a (badly behaved) owned dog for demonstration. Once more the participants got the opportunity to practice the techniques taught to them the day before and to become familiar with the use of "modern" equipment. At the end of this day the comments were very positive including "hmm, she might actually have something here..."

The Upgrade

Day 3 of this course was an "optional extra" – a higher level practical course and so some of the participants from the previous year came to join the group. For this training session we needed something special to reinforce our message that our humane techniques really do work – like "magic". So that night, and very, very early the next day, Adrian, myself, some of the Training team and a couple of keen course participants went into nearby villages and the jungle and caught some wild dogs. We then housed these wild dogs in an enclosed tennis court area ready for the training session.

The final "magical" experience came for participants when we took them to this tennis court to practice catching the wild dogs. Working with each participant individually, Adrian and I (working 3 abreast with each Officer) stepped them through the process of reading the body language of each dog and then applying the appropriate technique to capture the animal. When close to the capture point Adrian and I would usually drop out unnoticed, leaving the focussed officer to capture the dog single-handed! Guess what? It worked – MAGIC!! And so we have another crop of happy converts and our magic is spreading across the country.

Networking

After returning to Kuala Lumpur (our base) we spent a couple of days hanging out at the local pound, provided further training for the Training Team using impounded dogs, (we even caught a stray that wandered in!), and generally practiced working with the dogs, swapped stories and ate ice-cream sandwiches.

We also had meetings with various Government Officials and spent time visiting with one of our friends, Chandrakant Patel, Head of the Kuala Lumpur Animal Control Division. Chandrakant showed us around his pound, introduced us to his associates and people from the adjoining the SPCA Selangor spay and neuter clinic. He is very supportive of new techniques, practices and the improvement of welfare for the dogs and has implemented some innovative animal management programs of his own.

Difficulties Encountered

1. As with even some Australian Councils, spending money on training Animal Control Officers is not high on the budgetary agenda. Hence many of the participants on the courses designed for ACOs were still managers or of higher positions, and feedback was that very little was passed on to the Officers in the field back in the workplace. Also equipment currently used is cheaply made and of poor standard, as they are reluctant to purchase proper Animal Control equipment such as Animal Control Poles because of the price factor.

2. It takes time for the local government to actually realize the importance of what we are doing. As usual, leading by example should do the trick but is more labour intensive and takes more time. But better late than never!
3. Cultural differences, particularly on how Muslim's view dogs, made teaching them challenging as we often had to adapt techniques or create new ones that fitted within the guidelines of appropriateness, and that worked for people who have had little experience close up with dogs.
4. One of our biggest challenges is to change the overall opinion of Malaysians generally when it comes to dogs. The dogs currently have low significance; little emotive value attached, are usually kicked at or shooed away and treated poorly. We are working to change this mindset and are seeing some gradual improvements.
5. A couple of animal rights activists have made a little noise, but they are really of no consequence as we are about improving practices and welfare, so they are getting it a little wrong...

Benefits

- Overall improvement of welfare for dogs through the implementation of humane capture techniques and equipment
- Increased pride amongst officers
- Safer operating methods including decreased dog bites
- Decreased existence of inhumane practices
- Community improvement through the better management of wild dogs and town strays eg disease vectors, dog attacks
- Good exposure and positive feedback is being received about our techniques; see link: <http://komuniti.malaysiakini.com/news/cats-awareness-session-on-dogs> and <http://petpositive.blogspot.com/2010/06/weekend-view-plenty-of-tail-wags-to.html>

Where To From Here?

MALAYSIA:

Adrian and I are currently developing a training manual for Malaysian Animal Control Officers in conjunction with a couple of key agencies. This includes the probability that (we have had discussions) the Malaysian government will adopt our techniques described in the manual as national SOPs (standard operating procedures).

We are consistently gathering support from government agencies and relevant bodies for our training and Animal Control principles.

We are striving to encourage attendance at ongoing training by Animal Control Officers themselves, as opposed to management. Efforts to achieve this include financial support by at least 2 government agencies.

Adrian has exploited his Training Team and turned them into an Animal Control Team and is setting up several stray animal services across Malaysia promoting humane practices.

Although this project is in its infancy, he is making great headway – see attached email at end.

AUSTRALIA:

AIAM have earmarked the Pound Design and Management Position Statement as the next to be developed. This will be introduced into Malaysia to assist with appropriate standards at Pounds.

The AIAM Training Position Statement will be released this conference. Attached to this Position Statement are several projects to be launched shortly after which will also be of value to our Malaysia project.

Goal Setting?

I would like the opportunity to conduct similar projects in other countries, particularly those in our South Pacific region.

It would be fantastic to one day have a *South Pacific Standard*, perhaps even an Institute strengthening ties between our countries and bringing Animal Control to a whole new level of professionalism.

Letter from Adrian Johnson Lim, 17/08/10:

Date: Tuesday, 12th August, 2010

An Update on Animal Control Practices in Malaysia

Thanks to the two training courses and collaborations with Ms. Sharleen Jordan of TAFE College, Australia, practices for Animal Control in Malaysia has been improving. Malaysian municipalities, of late, have been trying out the methods learnt during the 2 courses which were held in 2009 and 2010 with good results and although still rough around the edges, for once, there is visible progress.

A successful state symposium was also conducted by Azhar and me. This event was organized by Dr Mohd. Noor Hisham and Dr Navanithakumar a/l Ballakrishnan (Dr Navin) from the Department of Veterinary Services, Johor for the local municipalities also resulted in great insights on the local situation there. (By the way, Dr Navin was also one of the participants during the first course in 2009!)

From the insights gained from feedbacks received during the courses, symposium and valuable advice from Dr Hamdan Bin Ahmad from the Department of Veterinary Services, Putrajaya, the idea eventually came about to start training and supervising an animal control team later on, which today, is currently operating independently in the state of Johor to actually show the benefits of what we had learnt.

Today, under our consultation (Stray Animal Solutions, Malaysia) and newly established companies (Aurum Paradisa Sdn Bhd AND Aurum Integrated Resources), we are in the midst of further improving these services. In the pipeline, will be a dedicated Animal Control Team based in the Southern Region of Peninsular Malaysia and as this report is being written, an Animal Control Team is being trained to service the municipalities in the Central Region, which by the way, we have already been awarded a couple of contracts which will be commencing operations soon!

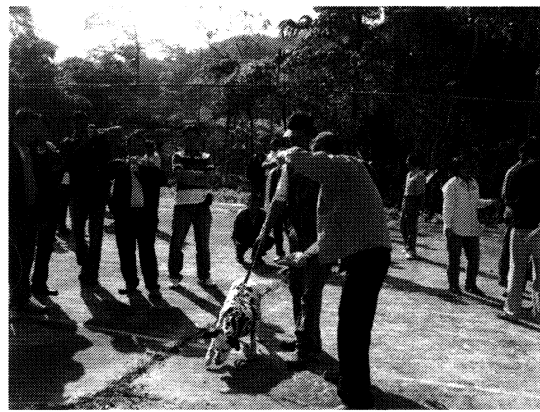
A Stray Animal Capture & Management manual is also in the works with collaboration from the Department of Veterinary Services, Stray Animal Solutions Malaysia and of course, Ms. Sharleen from TAFE!

And in addition, we have recently been approached by municipalities to help fabricate and design proper Animal Control Vehicles based on the choices of vehicles available here in Malaysia, our experiences and the local stray animal situation. There are also talks on a few municipalities offering us the job of pound management at their facilities as well as discussions on the feasibility of microchipping and adoption programs.

With many thanks and appreciation to Ms Sharleen Jordan and TAFE College, Australia, the future certainly looks very bright in respects to TRUE HUMANE ANIMAL CONTROL PRACTICES here!

With warmest regards,

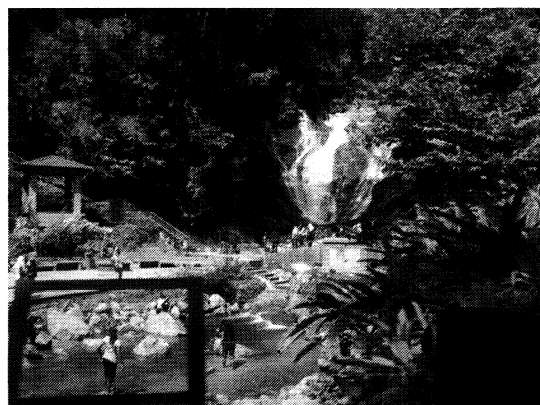
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Practicing new techniques with new equipment



Happy "magicians"



The beautiful Cameron Highlands

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Sharleen is an ASL2 (Advanced Skills Lecturer) for CY O'Connor College of TAFE (WA) who has been conducting training for the Local Government and Animal Studies sectors since 1996. Her teachings incorporate a wide scope of Nationally Accredited subjects including animal behaviour, management and control, reptile handling, livestock, emergency management, firearms, and more. Sharleen has almost ten years of service on the WA Rangers Association committee and represents them on this AIAM committee; as well as a presence on several other committees. She has worked with Animal Control in the USA and is currently conducting training and undertaking various projects with Animal Control in Malaysia. Sharleen has a vast international network of officers and through this network is able to uphold her principles of teaching "Current International Best Practice" with a strong focus on Animal Welfare and Occupational Health and Safety.

