

For Immediate Release

IFAW launches tsunami disaster relief operation for livestock and companion animals in Asia

(London, 10 January 2005) - IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare - www.ifaw.org) has launched a relief operation in Southern Asia to help animals and people affected by the recent disaster. IFAW teams are helping local people in tsunami-devastated coastal fishing communities protect their abandoned livestock, and companion animals, by providing food, temporary shelters and vaccinating animals against diseases.

IFAW has deployed emergency relief teams of veterinarians and animal care experts from the UK, Australia, China and the United States to work collaboratively with local groups in affected areas in India, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

"This is a unique operation where IFAW and local animal welfare groups have come together to help animals and people in this time of unprecedented need," said IFAW President Fred O'Regan. "Animal welfare and human well-being are not separate concerns. They are inextricably linked and core to IFAW's mission."

As fears of disease outbreaks intensified due to unsanitary conditions created by the tsunami, a massive vaccination programme began in the coastal villages of north and south Madras, India and stretching up to areas in Mahabalipuram. Over 500 cattle and goats have received vaccinations against such diseases as foot and mouth, blackquarter, hemorrhagic septicemia and tetanus. Hundreds of abandoned dogs are being vaccinated against common canine infectious diseases including rabies and tetanus in these areas.

Off the Tamil Nadu coast, on an island near Cuddalore, in southern India, IFAW is caring for more than 50 cattle and a few hundred goats marooned on the barren sand banks without food and water due to the tsunami. Nearly 500 of the 1500 inhabitants of the now desolate island were washed away in the tsunami. Those few survivors who escaped could not take their livestock as they fled the island using damaged fishing boats. The IFAW team is now camped on the island providing care and feeding these animals until they can be reunited with their owners.

"For many survivors in these areas, their livestock has become their lifeline. By saving their animals we are literally saving their lives," said Anand Ramanathan, IFAW's Emergency Relief Operations Manager.

In addition to efforts in India, an IFAW sponsored stray dog vaccination drive is under way in Sri Lanka. In Phuket and Khao Iak, areas in Thailand devastated by the tsunami, IFAW is providing food and medical care to homeless companion animals and livestock. IFAW is also using a mobile veterinary clinic based in Bali in Indonesia to bring mobilised supplies of food, water and medicines to animals in Banda Aceh, one of the coastal towns most devastated by the earthquake and tsunami.

With operations already underway to bring disaster relief to companion animals and livestock, IFAW working in partnership with the Wildlife Trust of India, is undertaking wildlife and habitat disaster assessments in coastal wildlife refuges in southern Tamil Nadu and the Anaman and Nicobar Islands. Wildlife habitats - especially endangered sea turtle nesting areas, coral reefs, mangroves, and wildlife refuges that are generally abundant in biodiversity - are presumably devastated. These field assessments will help identify opportunities to develop long-term strategies for future wildlife habitat restoration efforts and for involving local communities in conserving their biodiversity.

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Editors: Please note photographs are available.

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