

How animal lovers are feeding stray animals amidst lockdown

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Animal rights activists, state and district administrations in collaboration with NGOs and citizen groups have been undertaking the task of feeding stray cattle and dogs facing starvation due to the 21-day coronavirus lockdown in the country.

INDIA --- A Delhi-based animal activist Ankita Mahajan said that hundreds of citizens in at least 30 Delhi-NCR WhatsApp groups are coordinating to feed stray animals in their localities amidst lockdown. She has been issued a special curfew pass to feed stray animals during the lockdown.

"In at least 40 animal activists WhatsApp groups that I am part of, around 200 people have been given curfew passes to feed stray animals," said Mahajan.

The efforts of the activist have proved to be a blessing for stray animals who generally survive on leftovers from restaurants, dhabas, roadside eating joints etc. and are now left to fend themselves that their regular sources of food are shut due to nationwide lockdown.

"Getting a curfew pass is obviously not easy, I stay in Greater Kailash and we had to approach our MLAs, SHOs and DCPs to arrange passes. Maneka Gandhi and her sister Ambika Shukla have also helped us get passes in various areas," said Mahajan.

While Delhi Police is assisting volunteers in feeding stray animals, Mahajan pointed out that if Centre or state administration would have included caretaking of stray animals in the 'essential services' list then the animals would have been better taken care of as "people who are helping are doing it out of their own pocket," she said.

Ankita also said that there have been reports of people abandoning their pets after rumours that pet animals can transmit the virus to their owners.

Animal lovers from across the country have also launched social media campaigns urging people to feed stray animals during the lockdown.

Various states and district administrations have also allocated funds and directed authorities to not neglect stray animals during the lockdown.

Most notably, the Odisha government sanctioned Rs 54 lakh from the Chief Ministers Relief Fund to five municipal corporations and 48 municipalities to feed stray animals across the state. The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation has

been granted Rs 20,000 per day for feeding animals, while the urban local bodies of Cuttack, Berhampur, Rourkela and Sambalpur will get Rs 10,000 daily for the purpose.

The Assam government has issued passes to animal welfare organisations and individuals for feeding stray animals. The Ambala district administration provided shelter to stray animals in cowsheds being run by various religious organisations and municipal councils. While in Jammu and Kashmir, the local administration urged people to feed stray animals and birds.

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