

TACKLING THE HUMAN-DOG CONFLICT

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Over the past few decades, the growing population of street dogs has posed increasing challenges for municipalities and cities across the country. [File](#) | [Photo Credit: The Hindu](#)

Dogs have evoked different emotions in people for hundreds of years. You can hate them or love them, but you cannot ignore them. Over the past few decades, for example, the growing population of street dogs has posed increasing challenges for municipalities and cities across the country. With so many interest holders and their beliefs, it has been difficult to discuss the issue as many emotions are involved.

The cynicism of some stakeholders has even led to the dismissal of animal birth control initiatives as a failure, which is both mischievous and wrongheaded. Various factors contribute to street dog overpopulation, and animal birth control, while being an integral measure, is only a part of the broad solution to a complex problem.

By disparaging the effects of the Prevention of Cruelty (Animal Birth Control) Rules 2001, critics overlook the progressive trajectory of the policy which has now produced The Prevention of Cruelty (Animal Birth Control) Rules 2023 rules that have been designed to address emerging challenges.

If there are further challenges after the implementation of the 2023 rules, we will see more policy reform. That is how public policy works. We should seek to improve our strategies and policy responses, and not give up and discard animal birth control altogether.

What the proponents of the new rules want is the same thing that its critics want; a safe society for everyone — humans and dogs alike. To argue that the groups or individuals that care for animals have no consideration for humankind is misleading and disingenuous. Regardless of the motivation for an animal birth control programme, all stakeholders benefit.

Yes, it is in the welfare of the animals that we do not cull them. But it is in the interest of society and its collective conscience and decency too. We should seek out ways to show that we are more than just selfish creatures.

What are the alternatives to animal birth control? First, there's culling, and it can be easily characterised as a cruel solution. We have seen it being put to practice and our dog population has bounced back time and again.

Confinement in pounds or shelters? Of course, there is a place for them. But they are economically unviable and unsustainable. The room freed up on our streets as a result of round-ups and culling will be filled by dogs that end up there because of abandonment, free-roaming and breeding pets and street dogs.

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That leaves us with animal birth control or ABC — a seemingly imperfect solution but only because it has never been uniformly implemented. The 2023 rules attempt to resolve that shortcoming by standardising processes.

Animal Birth Control Programmes are now being streamlined, and the burden of its implementation will fall on the Animal Birth Control Monitoring Committees at the State, district and municipality levels. The rules require updated infrastructure investments for the capture, housing, surgery and release of dogs; specific processes to be recorded such as keeping and reporting; procedures for responding to conflict situations; engagement of organisations to ensure that the standards of ABC are high; and differentiation of street dogs from pet dogs to improve data collection and analysis.

There is another dimension of the problem that we consistently ignore, and at our peril — irresponsible pet ownership. Because of this persistent factor, a significant number of dog bites occur, uncontrolled reproduction takes place and territorial behaviour arises in most animal communities.

Explained | [How are stray dog bites related to poor waste management?](#)

Yes, a scientific approach is required to tackle the street dog conflict and population issue. But there is a social marketing and human behaviour change component that demands our attention too. Instead of attacking each other, we must bring our shared expertise and commitment to bear on this complex societal problem. If there is no research on the benefits of ABC on dogs, we must put our money into it. If there is no research on dog bite mitigation, we must fund such research and create model programmes we can scale up. If there are poor ABC programmes, organisations must take ownership and improve their standards through training.

Dogs are true friends to humanity and if we cannot live happily, safely and peacefully with each other through simple solutions like ABC, responsible pet ownership, waste management and adoption of Indian dogs (as opposed to feeding the commercial pet trade through animal purchases), what real hope is there for our efforts to tackle still larger problems that plague our society.

If we wish to change the system, we must be a part of it and we must play a constructive role in encouraging additional reforms and resource investments. We need to come together and join hands not only for the dogs but also for the future generations of Indians. We can do them a real favour by sparing them from having to grow up in an India that has been all too complacent about solving the street dog problem. We must do away forever with the suffering, cruelty, misery and public health threats associated with archaic approaches to this challenge. The new rules, and the energy we invest in their implementation, will help us achieve this noblest of goals.

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