

Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

Animal welfare on Crete

The shelter of *Manolis Spatharakis* in Gournes (North Crete)

An article from our NLUK board members *Michael Bloechinger-Daeumling*, Mainz

Preface: In March 2008, Heinz Eikamp wrote in the Forum of our website under the title: [Tierschutz auf Kreta](#) – “According to our statutory activities in Crete, the protection of animals on the island find indeed our attention but is not a field of work of the NLUK (NAOM)”. Despite this we reported time and again on the issue and in November 2010 we appointed our NLUK member on-site, *Stephanie Krips*, officially as the “[animal welfare officer of the NLUK in Crete](#)”. In the past few years a lot has been done and there are several associations and organizations actively engaged in animal welfare on Crete. A list of German- and English-language associations and organizations has already been created by our partner “[Radio-Kreta](#)” and published under “[Animal welfare in Crete with Mitso](#)”. Nevertheless, there is also the one or the other “shelter” on a purely private basis and initiative, which cannot afford any kind of advertising or even a website. So, in August 2010, *Stephanie* reported about *Manolis Spatharakis* and his *shelter in Gournes* (Northern Crete) (therefore see at: <http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/wbb2/thread.php?threadid=1837>). We would like to report just about these institutions.

March 2011, it is unusually cold for the season especially for Cretan conditions. We are driving on the national road (90/E75 - New Road) from Iraklion in eastern direction to Gournes and follow the signs to the [CretAquarium](#). From a previous visit, we know that this has found its place on the site of the former U.S. base in Gournes. There we want to meet with Stephanie to discuss the further lapse of the day and the visit of Manolis by a cup of coffee. On our way to the Aquarium we get a first impression of the partially desolate condition of the roads and buildings as already described by Stephanie within the Forum and once again confront the question of why the Mayor let wither that actually beautiful area. Tourists from all over the world must take, like us, likewise this way to the Aquarium, which really is worth a visit. Without knowing it we pass also the terrain on which Manolis has built his shelter in the year 2008. But one by one. With the typical German punctuality, we reach the car park and a few moments later a further car come down the road and stops in the roundabout in front of the building with the giant octopus over the entrance door. Due to the weather, after a brief welcome by Stephanie we go once inside and in the restaurant to warm up again and drink a good cup of coffee.



The shelter of Manolis is only a “few” metres away from the CretAquarium, up the road, just before the intersection on the left (seen from the Aquarium). Since the gate is located a few metres from the road (left figure), it is not immediately obvious while passing. I must confess that I am at first somewhat terrified. Already at the gate we are receipted with loud and polyphonic barking and yowling and a friendly-looking older gentleman comes frightened and with questioning looking around the corner. As my Greek is good for no more than the order of food I’m glad that Stephanie is with us and welcomes the Gentleman in fluent Greek, explains our concern and makes us known with Manolis. Moments later we meet also Eve and Steve, the tireless helper, and begin our tour.

During this we have the possibility for interesting and informative talks, repeatedly interrupted for a moment for loving care and cuddles. It is simply impossible to avoid the animals and their need for care.

Using the expression "Animal shelter", we all, have more or less, the same picture in mind. A building with reception, several offices, toilets, maybe a room for medical care, a court with kennels for dogs and cats, and so on. Quickly becomes clear, we are here not in Germany. Everything here is handmade. Tedious but lovingly arranged with available, modest resources. Only to pursue one goal! Give the animals a home. A place where they all are safe, get their daily serving of food and water, a roof over their heads, a ceiling on which they can reach out and love, much love.

Manolis is a somewhat older, pleasant but very cautious man who don't like to speak about himself. Only when it comes to "his" animals, he goes out of himself and tells. So we could not learn much about him. He earns a poor living as an employee of the Olympic Airline at the airport of Heraklion where he load and unload the baggage in the aircrafts. According to himself, as a very animal-loving man he could not endure "the misery" so in 2008 he decided to do something against it. The then Mayor of the municipality of Gouves made him an approximately 1,000 sqm large plot of land and a water supply available. Single-handedly he then built his shelter out of nowhere. Here he spent almost his entire spare time, from Monday to Sunday, year in, year out, in wind and weather. There is always something to do. Clearly, with currently 80 dogs and puppies, 15 cats and 6 kittens remains not much time for other things. Every single animal has its history and reputation. All are treated with the same love and care, maintained, and supplied.



Die NLUK Tierschutzbeauftragte Stephanie Krips mit ihrer Tochter Nina im Gespräch mit Manolis

Since August 2009, he is supported by the British couple Eve and Steve. Both are on the site daily from approximately 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 pm and help where they can - of course free of charge! Manolis can not pay them even if he wants to; the majority of his already low income is out for food, medicine and veterinarian costs.

I talk with Eve, who is initially rather cautious, yes almost dismissive. "What do you want, why are you here?" she asks me. I tell her that I am member of the Board of the NLUK and was made aware of the shelter by Stephanie. "Stay away with all these associations and organisations that talk big, in Facebook and who knows where else brag about with their good deeds and not really do something at the bottom line. They all come here and want to tell us "what and how" we have to do our work. Look around, we have created all that alone. There is nothing special but we give each single animal here a home as well as it just goes", she states and bends down again to one of the dogs to give some loving words and share of kindness and affection. The worst are those who always swing great speeches, pledge their help and than, if we really need some help, are gone. Doing so is so easy. Help with feeding once a week for an hour or two, a little time to walk with a dog, build a kennel, paint, or spread the gravel with the rake and clean up the ground. Give some tender loving care, or what ever. No, we need to do all on our own!" When I lift up my camera to take a photo of her with one of the dogs she lifts the hand defensively:

„No, please not – I'm not here for Glory, I'm here for the dogs!“ "Where are the animals actually come from?" I ask her. "The most are taken out of the gutter. Thrown away like a piece of garbage; half starved, beaten, kicked and abused. Some are brought, mostly during night when no one is here! Only recently one was tied to the gate during the night. Good that we most of the time arrive already early in the morning. Have you noticed the young Shepherd dog at the gate?" Sure I have, how should I overlook her? She's so cute with her floppy ear and her sad look. Also she obviously may not like to be photographed. Whenever I draw nearer she turns her head to the side. "What's up with her?" I ask Eve. "Baby producer!" "Baby producer?" "Yes", she says; "she was used as a baby producer!"



Probably something went wrong during or with the last brood, so the owner brought her to us and dumped her here. She was only skin and bones and we have nursed her. But next week she will be picked up. We have found someone we believing that he will look good at her. We hope the best - you can indeed look not in the minds of the people". This brings me to my next question. "How it looks at all with the interest of the people? Are people come here and can you place animals once in a while?" I ask her. "Yes, every once in a while someone is visiting us. But we look very close at everyone. Of course, we are glad for each dog which we can give a new home but this does not mean that we randomly give away the animals. Just recently one came through the gate, stopped directly there and looked over the place. After a minute, he pointed to the rottweiler, you see her, back on the fence, and said: I want to have that dog! We then asked him to leave the place. Such people do not get a dog. But even if they take time, look around and cuddle one or the other dog, they do not automatically get one. We try to get as much as possible information from the people. Hunters for example generally do not get a dog from us. Since I also go to the gate and look at the car; look if there is a weapon in the Interior, perhaps special stickers pointing to hunting suggests otherwise in any way to hunting. Also we do not sell the dogs to cover the feed cost or the veterinarian, etc. Who likes can give a voluntary donation. In addition we explain everyone who adopted an animal, that he can return the animal again if it is still too much work or it won't work. In any case the animal should not be exposed again! And, we do not send animals. On one hand we cannot afford that and on the other hand, as already said, we want to know more about the people who want to have a dog or a cat". "What happens with the animals that you can not place?" I ask her. She looks quizzical. "What should happen with those? They stay here with us and get their charity!" (Notation: There is a municipal shelter in Heraklion also taking care of "Strays". Here it is so, that animals which are not placed after 3 months, are euthanised!)

"So, enough talk. I have to go back to work". Just said she turn around on her heel and leave my on my own, takes a rake from the corner and begins to clean the ground between the kennels. I'm totally baffled at first, but must grin and continued my way to take more pictures. The whole place and also the crates are, despite the weather conditions (it again started to rain and a cold, cutting wind is blowing around my ears), extremely clean. I have not seen only a single dog turd. My admiration for the work of the small group is growing more and more.

All others have, because of the cold and the rain, nestled around an old oven under a corrugated iron roof and are engrossed in conversations. Lydia, a young woman who arrives once or twice a week to help a little, fill water bottles with hot water. Then she goes across the square and distributes the hot-water bottles - one set for every dog in its kennel. Even we (my wife Barbara and our children Dominic & Sophie) want to help somehow. Barbara asks Steve whether the animals have a specific feed. "No" he says; "the cheap dog and cat food of Lidl is sufficient. We make no great claims, are happy for every crumb!" Spontaneously we decide to go with Stephanie to the nearest Lidl and buy a few bags. Dominic and Sophie, both being busy with stroke, meanwhile remain with Manolis and others.

Manolis, all Greek that he is, somehow wants to thank and invites us to a glass of wine, which he distributes from a large plastic bottle. So we all sit around the oven, partly absorbed in thoughts, partly engrossed in conversations, sip carefully the strong wine and leisurely enjoy the afternoon. We all have deep respect for these people after this very impressive afternoon.

Finally more, uncommented images from the "**shelter of Manolis**"





Help is needed here in any form: cheerful helpers on the site to go for a walk with a dog, clean the ground, commodity contributions, donations for food and veterinary charges.

If you would like to give aid or need more detailed information's – this can be given to / by the Crete Environmental forum (klugesei@gmx.de) or by the author of this article (NLUK@gmx.net), or by Email directly on site: (stephanie.krips@yahoo.gr) Many thanks in advance.



NR: Land und Leute: [Art.-Nr. 3.045; Zitat-Nr. 9.995] impr.Bloechinger-Daeumling 03/2011

We thank for generous donations and support to the shelter of Manolis:

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