



**Photo: Molly Wald, Best Friends Animal Society**

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# Peru Earthquake 2007: Animal Relief Efforts following Peru's Earthquake

*Dispatch to Noah's Wish by Molly Mednikow, Director of Amazon Community Animal Rescue, Education and Safety (Amazon CARES)*





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This report summarizes rescue activities carried by the Peruvian Association for the Protection of Animals ([www.asppa-peru.org](http://www.asppa-peru.org)), Amazon Community Animal Rescue, Education and Safety ([www.amazoncares.org](http://www.amazoncares.org)), Canadian Animal Assistance Team ([www.caat-canada.org](http://www.caat-canada.org)), Animal Rescue New Orleans, and Best Friends Animal Society ([www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org)). All teams are working under the auspices of the Peruvian Ministry of Health.

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**Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS**

## August 15, 2007 / Day 1: 8.2 Earthquake Shocks Peru and the World

The world is stunned by news of an 8.2 earthquake that devastates the southern coast of Peru. Despite media attention paid to natural disasters worldwide, news of this event quickly disappeared from the front pages. The Peruvian government counts over 600 deaths, and thousands more injured and homeless. They estimate that 3500 animals are affected by the earthquake. Animal rescue teams believe this to be a very low estimate.

The sheer destruction and devastation is indescribable. A photo only captures a moment. However volunteers traveled many hours observing the same scenery. Collapsed buildings, homes, and people wandering in desolation or camped in front of their former home to protect what little has been spared. Homeless or abandoned animals, primarily dogs, are prevalent. During the first ten to fourteen days following this disaster, major animal protection agencies worldwide remain conspicuously quiet. No

information or activity is reported on their websites. As the weeks progress several agencies begin reporting on their activities, conducted by Peruvian based local charities associated with said agencies. The Peruvian Ministry of Health is coordinating animal relief efforts through the Peruvian Association for the Protection of Animals. ASPPA, nor other volunteer teams, ever hear about or observe these other



**Penguins at the Ica Zoo have no water. Photo by Jennifer Picard.**

groups. Local health officials that organize our worksites are also completely unaware of other activity.

Humane Society International requests a report from CAAT Director Donna Lasser regarding the status of the Ica Zoo. The Ica Zoo is in a very poor state, and animals there are suffering. Although Donna did not hear back from HSI, their website reports that they are arranging

for a university to send a veterinary team to assist the zoo.

Noah's Wish Director Amy Maher took initiative early on and contacted Molly Mednikow of Amazon CARES. Following several emails and telephone conversations, Noah's Wish pledged to support the charities involved in the rescue efforts. Due to a Memo of Understanding with the US government during hurricane season, she is unable to send volunteers. We are grateful for her interest and willingness to publicize the activities. The tardiness if this report is the responsibility of the author, not Noah's Wish.

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## August 19, 2007 /Day 4: ASPPA First on the Scene

The Peruvian Association for the Protection of Animals ([www.asppa-peru.org](http://www.asppa-peru.org)) is thrust into the spotlight.

This is a volunteer driven organization that lacks veterinary volunteers. Despite being a small organization, ASPPA is the most recognizable animal welfare charity located in Lima, the nation's capital. The Ministry of Health asks ASPPA for aid, and Director Angie Sanchez sends a mass e-mail requesting support, mainly in the form of donations. Peruvian's have a six day work week. Volunteers are primarily available on Sundays only. Purina donates over two tons of dog food. These initial eighteen volunteers focus on rescuing trapped animals and feeding and watering animals.



**Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS**

## August 20, 2007 / Day 5: Amazon Cares Veterinary Team Arrives



Amazon Community Animal Rescue, Education & Safety ([www.amazoncares.org](http://www.amazoncares.org)) closes their veterinary clinic located in remote Iquitos, Peru. The 501 organization sends two veterinarians and two vet technicians, leaving a skeleton crew behind to manage their no-kill animal shelter. After purchasing medicines in Lima and arranging safe transport to Ica, located four hours from Lima, they arrive in the midst of chaos. ASPPA is forced to focus their work on weekends, and Amazon CARES has little direction. They walk the streets to provide triage and emergency care to wounded animals. By coincidence, both veterinarians from Amazon CARES grew up and practiced veterinary medicine in Ica prior to joining the charity. The family home of Dr. Miguel

Sebastian Salas is completely destroyed. Luckily, the family home of Dr. Esther Castillo Pena is intact. This home provides lodging; meals and a mini-headquarters for the international volunteers mentioned in this report.

### August 25, 2007 / Day 10: Animal Rescue New Orleans Arrives

Animal Rescue New Orleans (ARNO) sends three experienced animal rescuers. The dedicated volunteers are associated with Noah's Wish. They set up feeding and watering stations in various disaster areas. ARNO is in contact with ASPPA, and they are accompanied by **Shari Atardi**, an ASPPA volunteer. Shari is essential in obtaining safe worksites for the teams. ASPPA takes on a more visible and organizational role in recovery efforts. They continue to provide volunteers on weekends. Most volunteers focus on feeding and watering animals. ASPPA also recruits four veterinarians and five veterinary students to assist on weekends.

### August 27, 2007 /Day 12: Canadian Animal Assistance Team Arrives

The Canadian Animal Assistance team ([www.caat-canada.org](http://www.caat-canada.org)) was scheduled to volunteer in the Amazon region for two weeks during September. Following discussions, Director Molly Mednikow of Amazon CARES and Director Donna Lasser of CAAT change plans and work in southern Peru disaster areas. CAAT recruits additional volunteers and provides medical supplies and pharmaceutical donations. Most importantly, the CAAT team consists of very experienced veterinarians, veterinary technicians and veterinary assistants. Molly Mednikow of Amazon CARES arrives with the CAAT team.



**CAAT Veterinarians at work. Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS.**

### Three Teams Working Together

Many disaster zones are unsafe. Power and water is not yet restored to many areas, and families are living in make-shift camps inside stadiums and parks. There is civil unrest and anger that the Peruvian government did not respond quickly and is not providing necessary assistance. Despite worldwide agreement that the earthquake measured at least 8.2 on the Richter scale, the Peruvian government claims the earthquake registered at 7.9. By law, the



government must commit more money and resources if an earthquake is 8.0 or higher. In the first days following the disaster families are trapped, scared, and desperate for food and water. Tragically, many resort to eating their adult pets in order to survive. As a result, volunteer teams noted a much higher ratio of kittens and puppies to adult domestic animals.

At this time it seems much of the search and rescue effort is concluded. Many pets are homeless or abandoned. Many died of injuries or hunger. The teams treat wounds, fractures, and spaying and neutering animals. The scarcity of food for these animals as well as emerging feral instincts make this surgery an important part of the work effort. ARNO and CAAT volunteers walk amongst the tents to offer pet food, vaccines, and information about the surgery station. We work in Ica,



**A puppy with distemper must be euthanized. Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS**

Pisco, Pisco Playa, Chinchá, Guadalupe, Little Guadalupe and Las Molinas.



**Waiting in line for treatment. Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS**

A rental bus transports the three teams to our designated work-site, which varies from day to day. The work day is usually 8 am to 7 pm. In the evenings we sterilize instruments, inventory supplies and drugs, and plan for the following day. We make these plans despite the fact that the itinerary is usually different by the next morning! Dwindling inventories are carefully assessed so that Dr. Salas and Dr. Pena can locate these supplies to the best of their ability.

## Working to Prevent Mass Euthanasia

During this time Amazon CARES, ARNO, CAAT and ASPPA volunteer Shari Atardi hold long, tedious meetings with the regional and national Ministries of Health. Many survivors request that all animals be shot, so as to prevent infection. .



**Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS**

Donna Lasser of CAAT notes “Everyone who has lost their homes in the earthquake (90 % of Pisco is flattened), are being housed in large stadiums in tents, with dogs running loose everywhere. As you can imagine, this is quite a public health concern and therefore the reason the Ministry of Health is so concerned. We go into the midst of the tent cities and set up our tables, and do health exams, vaccines, de-worming, and spaying and neutering if the people agree. We have seen a few cases of distemper virus already, and as always in South America, a lot of venereal disease in both sexes.”

At this time all organizations pledge to continue our work in the region and help form a long-term plan for animal welfare. The Ministry of Health is very supportive, and hopes to create a program that can serve as a model for other South American

countries. They quickly make it clear that they can not commit any funding. The organizations involved point are stretching the absolute limits of their budgets and resources, yet we are all committed to finding a solution that will prevent mass euthanasia.

The Ministry of Health chooses Shari Atardi as the overall coordinator of the rescue effort and of volunteer groups. None of the volunteer groups



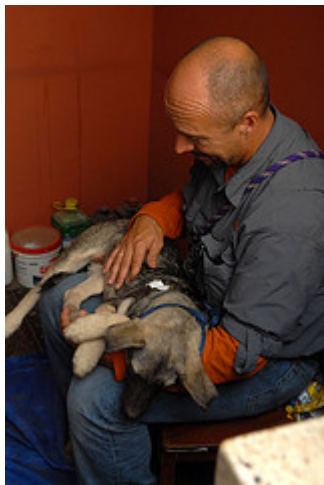
**A typical tent city. Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS**

have met or spoken to anybody else in ASPPA's leadership. In a move that can only be described as political, ASPPA contacts Amazon CARES to state that Shari has no paid position with ASPPA and is not their representative nor can she make decisions for ASPPA. Having been designated the coordinator by the Ministry of Health, and because nobody else from ASPPA has come forward, all groups continue working with Shari Atardi, a responsible, professional representative for the Ministry of Health. At her own expense she is taking a prolonged leave of absence from work because of her concern for animal welfare. We are saddened by news of the sudden death of Shari's mother. Shari returned to the disaster zones showing a brave face within three days.

### August 31, 2007 / Day 16: Departure of Animal Rescue New Orleans

We are sad about the departure of the wonderful and tireless ARNO team. ARNO and Noah's Wish are working to send more volunteers to the disaster areas. It will be many years before these small cities are re-built. The magnitude of the tragedy compels us all to continue working despite personal sacrifices. Because Amazon CARES is a 501c3 in the USA, an agreement is made that ARNO supporters can donate through the Amazon CARES website. Amazon CARES agrees to share funds raised with CAAT as well.

### September 7, 2007 / Day 22: Best Friends Animal Society Arrives



**Richard Crook helps recovering dog. Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS**

Due to reports on other international websites, the leadership of Best Friends Animal Society ([www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org)) is led to believe that the Peruvian earthquake animal relief effort is being handled effectively. BFAS Rapid Response Manager Richard Crook contacts major charities that had formed a coalition following Hurricane Katrina. He received little or no response to his inquiries about work in Peru. He quickly arranges for an assessment team to visit the earthquake zones.

Volunteers are thrilled at the arrival of the Best Friends Assessment Team. They are able to provide publicity and resources that are not available to the grassroots charities currently working in the field. BFAS and Shari Atardi meet with government officials at which time BFAS pledges to develop a long term plan for the region. Although the other charities have pledged support, none are capable of keeping a team in the region on a consistent basis.

### September 12 / Day 27: Best Friends Visits Amazon CARES

Director of Amazon CARES, Molly Mednikow, departs southern Peru earlier than scheduled in order to host the Best Friends team in Peru's Amazon region. Three more Amazon CARES team members arrive in Iquitos on September 14. BFAS observes the Amazon CARES operation, spending one night at the jungle facility which houses the animal shelter, and another night in the nearby city of Iquitos to visit



**Amazon CARES welcomes Best Friends team. Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS**

the veterinary clinic. They are interested in the continuing involvement of Amazon CARES because it is based in Peru. They consult with Dr. Salas and Dr. Pena regarding surgery and drug protocols based on what is available in Peru. BFAS reports that they are impressed with the operation.

### September 15 / Day 30: CAAT and Remaining Amazon CARES Volunteer Depart Southern Peru. BFAS Returns.

Following weeks of hard work under difficult conditions, the last of the original grassroots charities depart the earthquake zone. Volunteers are satisfied with the work effort, yet troubled at the large amount of work remaining. It will be years before these small cities and towns will be able to re-build.

Best Friends Animal Society returns to the region with a plan to sustain the animal welfare effort. Amazon CARES plans to return with more veterinary volunteers once Best Friends is ready.



**A red collar indicates the animal has been spayed or neutered. Photo by Molly Wald, BFAS**