



SPCA: British expat's new animal project

CRITTER KINDNESS: Sean McCormack hopes to raise awareness of how to humanely treat creatures great and small by garnering support for a national chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

BY CELIA LLOPIS-JEPSEN
STAFF REPORTER

For British expatriate Sean McCormack, founding Animals Taiwan was just one step in improving the lot of Taiwan's critters, but he has no intention of stopping there.

McCormack's new pet project is a Taiwanese chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), and the goal is tackling animal welfare problems at their root.

"Animals Taiwan was started more than four years ago now because I was tired of seeing animals in the streets. I knew there were people like me who wanted to help them but couldn't do so individually, so we started Animals Taiwan," McCormack said in an interview with the *Taipei Times*.

Since then, the organization has rescued hundreds of strays and launched outreach efforts to inspire more people to adopt abandoned

animals rather than purchase from a pet industry that has long come under fire for putting profits before animal welfare.

"We were very lucky," McCormack said of the success of Animals Taiwan. "As soon as we started it we got a lot of support. And within a year we had our own rescue shelter in Shilin [Taipei]."

Today the organization has paid staff, hundreds of volunteers and a board of directors. Animals Taiwan, like the animals it rescues, is thriving, and McCormack has moved on. He now envisions a second organization to complement the work of Animals Taiwan: the Taiwan SPCA.

McCormack said that Animals Taiwan is a great tool not only for rescuing and "re-homing" animals, but also for focusing public attention on the stray problem. But strays are just one of many animal welfare issues, he said. Much work

"You only have to prosecute one person [for mistreating animals] to prevent 1,000 from doing it. It puts a system in place and tells people that [cruelty to animals] is not acceptable."

— Sean McCormack, Animals Taiwan founder

remains in promoting the spaying/neutering and humane treatment of pets and mistreatment of other animals goes largely ignored.

"But it's difficult to pull resources [at Animals Taiwan] away from all the emergencies you're getting every single day: a dog in a trap in Wulai, a dog hit by a car in Taipei. It's difficult to say, well let's leave that dog" and branch out the organization's work, McCormack said.

That's where a local chapter

of the international campaign organization SPCA comes in. McCormack's focus for the project is entirely "non-hands on" work such as campaigning.

The goal is to prevent animals from ending up "in these horrific situations in the first place," McCormack said.

This means increasing the rate of spaying and neutering, for one — one of the international SPCA's key campaigns.

"We can have a huge effect,"

he said. "If we start promoting the neutering of pets and we do it properly, that alone can prevent thousands of animals being rescued in the first place."

McCormack says Taiwan's SPCA will launch its Web site, taiwanspca.org, within weeks. With proper promotion, he hopes the SPCA — like Animals Taiwan did — will hit the ground running.

Another goal of the Taiwan SPCA will be promoting enforcement of the law. McCormack praised the country's animal welfare legislation, but said there was a gap between the letter of the law and implementation.

"If you call the police and [report a case of an animal being underfed and kept in a tiny cage] nothing will happen, because the law isn't specific enough. That is something we definitely want to address," he said.

There is a need for clearer regulations on what constitutes humane treatment and for better enforcement, McCormack said.

"You only have to prosecute one

person [for mistreating animals] to prevent 1,000 from doing it. It puts a system in place and tells people that [cruelty to animals] is not acceptable," he said.

Nor does this apply only to pets. For McCormack, animal welfare doesn't stop at taking Fido out of his undersized cage and giving him enough to eat. Reports of abused pets often spark public outrage — as did recent allegations that a National Taiwan University student tortured kittens he had adopted, but cruelty to livestock that end up on our dinner plates goes unnoticed.

"The SPCA will speak for all animals, not just pets," McCormack said.

Many people think they have to choose between eating meat and supporting humane treatment of livestock, he said, but this is a misconception. He does not oppose eating meat, but believes there is an element of cruelty in the meat industry — particularly at factory farms designed to produce meat and eggs as cheaply as possible — that could, and should, be eliminated.

"When I was at Animals Taiwan, in those four years we helped 500 animals, which is huge. But consider there's probably that many animals being reared in horrific conditions every day just to supply a handful of restaurants," he said. "The people who are giving Animals Taiwan money are also giving their money to factory farms [by buying their products] to torture animals so that they can be kept as cheaply as possible."

McCormack wants the public to recognize these contradictions and begin to address them.

Mistreatment of animals exists in every country, he said, but he believes Taiwan is making progress and will continue to do so.

"People don't usually consider the welfare of their animals until they've taken care of other needs in their lives," McCormack said. "It's the same for a country. If a country is successful, as Taiwan is, it should start focusing on tidying up its animal welfare issues."

The SPCA intends to promote just that.

PIGEON POST

TES plans Summer Fair

EVENTS

The annual Taipei European School (TES) Summer Fair will open on May 30, the school said. The event will feature a flea market, a second-hand book sale, food and drinks and game booths for children, it said.

The fair will be held at the TES Swire Campus in Shilin District (士林), Taipei City, from 11am to 3pm. Those interested in booking a table to sell second-hand goods can contact Rebecca Earnshaw at 0972-105-984 or send an e-mail to tbspta@gmail.com.

Community Choir to perform

EVENTS

The International Community Choir will present its Cabaret Concert 2009 on May 17 at Mother of God Church in Tainmu, Taipei City. The choir will perform selected pieces from *Cabaret* and *Camelot*. The repertoire will also include a special guest performance from students of the Taipei American School (TAS). The ticket price is NT\$300 and all proceeds will go to St Anne's Home for children with special needs, the event's organizer said. Seating is limited and tickets will be available for sale beginning today at both TAS and the Taipei European School. For more information, contact Siew Kang at (02) 2533-4247 or internationalchoir@gmail.com.

Warning for foreign spouses

CRIME

Wang Shih-chih (王世智) of Tainan County's Mude Care Association, which has long helped foreign spouses, said the naturalization of foreign spouses and obtaining an ID card are complex processes and warned applicants not to believe anyone who promises to speed up the paperwork, cut costs or bypass regulations. Wang gave the warning after a recent case in which a Vietnamese immigrant surnamed Ruan, who is married to a Taiwanese man in Tainan County's Dongshan Township (東山), tried to obtain a Taiwanese ID card without her husband's knowledge with the help of a third party. Ruan was told that proof of studying in Taiwan was not required to complete the procedure. After Ruan gave the middleman her passport and NT\$20,000, the person disappeared. Wang said that although many applicants use an intermediary to handle applications, some believe that handing over a "red envelope" (紅包) can shorten the process, and this puts them at the mercy of unscrupulous people. For more information, call the Mude Care Association at (06) 698-9789.

STAFF WRITER



An elephant-shaped rock is pictured near Shenao Port, just one of the many weird and wonderful rock formations dotting the Keelung area.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF MILLER

A morning with the unofficial US envoy to Keelung

DISPELLING THE MYTH: A few hours with Jeff Miller and one comes away knowing there's much more to the northern port city than big crowds and seafood

BY RICHARD HAZELDINE
STAFF REPORTER

Mention Keelung to many people and it immediately conjures up images of a dull, rainy and rather uninspiring place with tightly packed, crowded streets. The city often gets a bum rap.

To American Jeff Miller, however, Keelung and its environs are a veritable treasure trove of historical wonder.

Miller, a former American Institute in Taiwan employee who first arrived in Taiwan as a student, has lived here for most of the past two decades. He made the move to Keelung around 10 years ago to escape the smelly rivers, MRT construction work and pollution that typified 1990s Taipei.

Keelung offered something new, Miller said, with its "hills, valleys and the ocean."

It also presented plenty of opportunities to explore the city's history and what he likes to call the "clashes of culture" that played out here over the centuries.

Formerly the largest and for a long time the most important port in Taiwan, Keelung has seen its fair share of "cultural clashes" through the years as traders, invaders, settlers and colonists arrived from various locations around the world with vastly different objectives in mind.

Miller's sense of curiosity and his thirst for history developed as a young boy, he said, while cycling back roads and exploring a derelict former railroad town near his home in Metamora, Michigan.

"I think it's very important that wherever you live you understand the origins of the place; that's the primary motivation," he said.

And it is clear that he has put this philosophy into practice in the decade since he arrived in Keelung.

Just a few hours in the company of Miller is an eye-opening experience. He guides you around the city pointing out interesting sites that most people wouldn't give a second look, all the time explaining the history and significance of each location with an enthusiasm that is infectious.

The first destination on our whistle-stop tour (I spent a half day exploring Keelung with Miller early last month) was the French Cemetery on Chungcheng Road, Ershawan (二沙灣). This peaceful, shady spot was built just after the turn of the 20th century to rehouse the remains of the approximately 600 French soldiers who died, many from disease, during the Sino-French War (1884-1885).

Here Miller explained how the French tried to take Taiwan to use as a bargaining chip against the Qing emperor for control of Vietnam. Particularly well-versed about this conflict, he then told how the Chinese troops defending nearby hills would take note of French burials because their generals provided a cash reward for each head of a French soldier.

So after a burial the soldiers would come down at night, dig up the body, take the head and collect the reward.

Next stop was Peace Island (和平島), where a sudden right turn took us away from the crowds hankering for seafood into what looked like a long-forgotten park. A short climb up a steep path revealed a small, well-hidden Aboriginal community and Sheliu East Fort (社寮東砲台), a Japanese-era gun battery placement overlooking the entrance to the harbor that Miller explained was built to defend Taiwan at the height of Japan's anti-Russian paranoia in the early 20th century.

Veer down another trail and the



Keelung Harbor is pictured in the distance from near the Shiqiuling Fort.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF MILLER



Jeff Miller is pictured at the Sheliu East Fort in Keelung on April 1.

PHOTO: RICHARD HAZELDINE

"I think it's very important that wherever you live you understand the origins of the place; that's [my] primary motivation."

— Jeff Miller

as Miller spent five minutes telling them in fluent Chinese his views on how they should develop the city's historic spots to preserve their significance while making them more attractive to tourists.

Miller is not only passionate about Keelung. He is familiar with many other regions of Taiwan and as part of his work compiles travel guides for companies — his handiwork can be seen in Chunghwa Telecom's English telephone directory, for example.

Not surprisingly, his depth of knowledge often puts locals to shame. When taking Taiwanese friends around Keelung and the east coast, he said: "People are always surprised, they say *hao diulian* (好

丟臉, "how embarrassing"), this *wai-guoren* (外國人) knows more about Keelung than me and I've lived here my whole life."

"That just reflects the Taiwanese focus on the here and now," he laughed. "History is less important than what's in front of me."

Spending a morning with Miller is an education and makes one realize there is a lot more to Keelung than meets the eye.

If just a few more visitors were to run into the city's unofficial US ambassador, maybe the encounter could dispel its damp and dreary image and help them appreciate Keelung's historical value as well as the many other things it has to offer.



THANKS MOMS

Mothers originally from other countries are pictured wearing the traditional clothes from their respective cultures at a Mother's Day event in Kaohsiung on Sunday.

PHOTO: CNA

IF YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS FOR EVENTS, INTERVIEWS OR TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE COVERED ON THIS PAGE PLEASE SEND YOUR IDEAS TO: community@taipeitimes.com

