

Frontline heroes

Animal rescuers are continuing their efforts to save and care for thousands of abandoned pets across Ukraine.

Joanne Bednall reports.

Right: Hampers have been distributed among needy dogs.

Far right: But many pets have been abandoned and survive on the streets.



As the conflict rages on into its second year, the world risks becoming numb to the ongoing atrocities and hardships faced by Ukraine's battle-weary citizens and animals.

But through the Save Pets of Ukraine initiative, charitable foundation U-Hearts — featured in Your Dog's December 2022 issue — is working hard to coordinate the distribution of aid, raise funds, and rescue and care for pets across the war-torn country.

The foundation's successful Christmas campaign resulted in many dog and cat hampers being donated by kind-hearted animal lovers, touched by the plight of pets left behind as families fled for their lives. Bursting with vital supplies, such as warm blankets, food bowls, vitamins, toys, leads, collars, and parasite treatments, the hampers have been distributed to needy dogs in the Ukrainian cities of Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and Kherson.

Amid the grief and sorrow of the war, many stories of resilience, bravery, and kindness have emerged...

Right: Police dog Bars.



BARS HITS A HIGH NOTE

Following the liberation of Kyiv from Russian occupation, police dog Bars and his handler, Andriy, detected around 15 explosive devices and substances.

The brave dog also sniffed out a cache of weapons left behind in a forest by retreating Russian forces.

"Arriving along the appropriate route, Bars ran for 15 minutes and sat down near one of the fallen trees," recalled Andriy. "It was a sign that there must be something there. Employees of the explosives service checked and confirmed that there were rocket launchers for RPG-5, TNT grenades, detonators, and explosive devices."

Along with other specialists, the duo also patrolled Irpin, Hostomel, and Bucha, where one of the canine team sniffed out a grenade rigged under the hammers of a home owner's piano.

U-Hearts is proud to have donated food, dog bowls, cages, and carriers to the canine service.

A SMALL MIRACLE

Few residents remain in the south-eastern Ukrainian city of Orikhiv, which has largely been reduced to rubble by constant Russian bombardment.

All the doctors and vets have left, and there's no longer any water, gas, or electricity in this ghost town.

So, when a dog named Chudo (meaning 'Miracle' in Ukrainian) was hit by an enemy shell and suffered a complex limb



Above: Against the odds, Chudo pulled through.

Above right: Some of the shelters' dogs are brought in injured; others have been abandoned.

fracture, her future looked bleak.

But animal rescuer Stanislav saved the injured dog by making the difficult, expensive, and dangerous hour-long journey to a vet in the neighbouring city of Zaporizhzhia.

Following extensive X-rays, examinations, medication, surgery, and aftercare, Chudo pulled through. She is currently in foster care waiting for her forever home.

"I AM MOTIVATED BY LOVE"

Before the war, around 50,000 people lived in Myrnohrad, a mining and industrial city, in Ukraine's frontline Donetsk region.

Established by Svitlana five years ago, the Myrnohrad Society for the Protection of Animals currently cares for 179 dogs, as well as 84 cats, chickens, and even a pig — but numbers are constantly rising.

"We have new animals arriving almost every day," explained Svitlana. "Some are brought in injured or following a road accident, while we collect others that have been abandoned by people leaving the city. Recently, eight puppies were dropped off, three of which we managed to place with a family."

The shelter is just 30km from the completely destroyed city of Avdiivka, where its remaining residents have been struggling to survive the harsh winter and constant Russian rocket attacks.

Despite the extreme danger posed by continuing hostilities, Svitlana was able to procure a supply of coal and firewood to provide warmth through the cold months. "Our main need is food and medicine for the animals," she said. "The cats and dogs need at least five bags of food every day. And also sterilisation, which is extremely expensive in the city."

Svitlana always dreamt of dedicating her life to animals. "This is my childhood dream," she said. "As a child, I brought home animals left on the street."

"Until last March, my husband and I were developing our business, and taking care of the animals was a secondary concern.

"Now, I am around animals 24/7. What motivates me? Love, of course! Love for animals. I was invited to go abroad, but I could only take five animals. How do I leave the rest? They are already my family."



Impact of the war on animals in Ukraine

Ukrainian pet food manufacturer Kormotech has recently undertaken a study to understand the scale of the disaster, identify the key problems and needs of shelters and volunteers, and to mobilise as much assistance and resources as possible from international donors. Research was carried out in association with shelters, volunteers, and sterilisation centres across Ukraine.

THE RESULTS REVEALED:

- The number of pets in shelters or temporary homes has increased by 60 per cent on average since the start of 2022.
- Most of the pets who have been offered shelter during the war have been abandoned by their owners.
- Main needs have been identified as pet food, veterinary support and medicines (particularly antibiotics and hemostatic drugs), as well as the ability to address key issues such as lack of funds, water and gas, rising heating costs, frequent power outages, a drop in pet adoption rates, staff shortages, and the spread of infectious diseases.
- Other basic requirements include milk powder, vaccines, anti-parasite treatments (for worms, fleas, and ticks), syringes, dressings, sanitising agents, bed mats, kennels and cages, transportation carriers/boxes, flashlights and torches, generators (to power refrigerators, freezers, and water pumps, charge mobile phones, and provide access to the internet), and construction materials to repair or build new enclosures.
- The burden on shelters is growing due to the decreasing trend in rehoming pets, particularly larger dogs and those that are sick, old, or have been poorly socialised. Ukrainians, particularly those living in frontline areas and outside the big cities, are increasingly unable to afford a pet.
- Every shelter dog has a daily nutritional requirement of 180 – 300g of pet food. Overall, 7,740kg of food is needed per day — or 2,825 tons per year.
- While the supply of dry pet food is relatively good, there is a specific need for puppy and kitten food, milk powder for newborn animals, special diets for chronically ill pets, and wet food.
- Between March 2022 and January 2023, the Save Pets of Ukraine initiative with U-Hearts Foundation, provided 1,030 tons of pet food, and created 27 coordination centres across Ukraine.
- There are around 26,000 dogs in Ukrainian shelters, although this number is constantly fluctuating.

MORE INFO

To find out more about how you can help, join, and support the foundation or become a partner, visit:

- <https://u-hearts.foundation>
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/uhearts.fund
- Instagram: www.instagram.com/uhearts.foundation/
- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/80526462