

ANIMAL TALK

Langkawi Life – October 2011

by Teviot Fairservis

“Eighty cats and forty dogs,” says **Dr. Jen**, lifting a sleek calico patterned cat from a plastic carrier. “That’s how many we are sheltering right now.” I exclaim, “What a beautiful cat!” Dr. Jen says, “You want him? He’s a stray that was just brought in. Or there’s a new batch of kittens that were thrown in a box and dumped behind a building. Someone found them and brought them to us.”

One of the things I most admire about *Langkawi Life* is bumping into exceptional people doing extraordinary things on this island. I have visited the Island Animal Clinic several times in recent months as a friend brought me three kittens in June that had been rescued by staff at the *Four Seasons Resort*. I had once before been taken to dinner at Bon Ton where, while dining on a gorgeous meal while watching the sun set over the rice paddies, I suddenly became aware that there were cats and amazingly quiet dogs scattered around the property.



Pebbles - first day at her new “Mom’s” house

A waiter brought me a brochure and I learned that Bon Ton Resort, the Straits Restaurant and the Temple Tree Hotel all support LASSie.org and the Island Animal Clinic. Those lucky animals who are rescued from the streets of Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Langkawi live happy days at Bon Ton. Many of the longest residents have some physical problem, whether genetic or caused by accident. One-legged dogs, one-eyed cats, even a dog with a rolling wheelchair to compensate for no back legs find a home here surrounded by exceptional beauty and human kindness.

After the trauma of the kittens’ first visit to the clinic for vaccinations, we humans needed a coffee so we went to the restaurant afterwards. We placed the three kittens on a chair where they stayed patiently for a full hour as we chatted. Waiters and waitresses came by to talk to the little cats.



Bon Ton staff chatted with the kittens in the restaurant while the cat parents drank coffee.



Lucky, Pebbles, and BammBamm sat patiently in a chair for an hour at Bon Ton restaurant. They watched the other animal residents cautiously.

To mark the occasion, the restaurant gave us the coffee for free. Cats and people were completely charmed.



BammBamm fights the giant plant

At about six weeks old, their first day home, the kittens looked a bit scruffy and bewildered, but quickly settled down into a sheepskin and drifted off to sleep. They grew amazingly quickly in the succeeding months – and these clowns became a constant source of entertainment. You can't help but laugh at their antics-- bounding up on sofas and across tables, skittering across the tile floors in pursuit of balls and string. One litter but three very different kittens: one has the softest white fur on belly and legs and salt-and-pepper dark patches above. She jumped into the arms of a visiting friend who intuitively spoke her name, **"Pebbles."** Her patterns reminded him of pebbles on a beach. Naturally, her brother who is a perfect miniature yellow lion

became **"Bamm Bamm."** The two are the **"Flintstones Kids."**

The third kitten is dressed in a tuxedo – mostly black with white socks and a star on his chest. A bit of a loner, he was delighted when my daily swim-and-chat partner fell in love and took him home to her apartment. There he has become "king of the house" and sits atop the piano or stares at the strings of the guitar as her musician husband plays. He is a very lucky little fellow to have such a devoted family, hence his new name, "Lucky." Like me, my friends are infatuated with this little troupe of Malaysian cats who seem to be exceptionally smart and communicative felines. They learned quickly that they should not run out the front door, that the laundry room porch was off-limits, that they should use the litter box and not the floor. Lucky, under my friend's instructions, has even learned to use the toilet!



Lucky in his tuxedo and baby lion BammBamm

My two have not yet accepted that they cannot run across the computer keyboard or lie out luxuriously on the dining table – but they know. They also know how to demand food – waking me in the morning with delicate nips on my toes and increasingly frantic meowing. Hunger pains come on five or six times during the day and they come cuddle in my lap, look up with big eyes, then jump up on the back of the couch, race across the room and settle in front of the refrigerator to wait for me to give them another bit of canned fish or boiled chicken. Between meals, they are endlessly inventing new games – bounding, stalking, wrestling with each other or with plants. They climb curtains, jump across the tops of wardrobes, bounce off the walls, jump into the air to try to reach geckos on the ceiling high above (impossibility), then throw themselves down on the clean sheets, towels, pillows exhausted to nap. They are hilarious – I have not laughed so much in years.



Where are the kittens now?
High atop the bookcase!

Can we play now?



The first time we all – three humans and three kittens – went to the veterinary clinic for first shots, we were deeply impressed by the care and kindness we felt from the staff, volunteers, and especially the veterinarian, **Dr. Tim.** He took time with each kitten, talked to them by name, and

importantly, talked to us, carefully explaining each animal's special care. The working conditions were less than perfect – cages lined up on the floor, paint and wallboard peeling, rust on the weighing scales, but the professionalism and the concern was everywhere evident.

“What do you need here, Dr. Tim?” I asked as he palpated my growing kitten's tummy. Dr. Tim has been a veterinarian for 5 years at the Island Animal Clinic, the island's only veterinary hospital – and luckily for all the animals on this island, Dr. Tim and Dr. Jen are both very good and caring vets. “Homes,” says Dr. Tim. “The clinic is overflowing.”

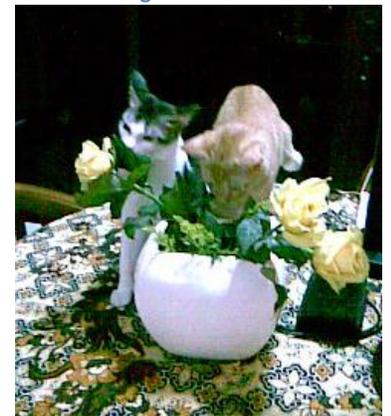
Dr. Tim told me that while it would be nice to have an x-ray machine or blood testing equipment, what he would really like to see would be a group of Langkawi islanders who would look out for the animals in their neighborhoods – especially the strays. He talked about how the feral cat and dog communities around the island need monitoring. The younger animals can be humanely caught and brought in to the clinic to be neutered or spayed for low or no cost, then returned to their 'families' so as not to disrupt the neighborhood social patterns which are so crucial to the health and happiness of individuals – dogs, cats, and humans. The island has an exploding population of cats and dogs which will inevitably impact the bird population and other wildlife. It is a real environmental concern.



1 Wildlife, esp. birds are endangered by the growing populations of stray cats and dogs

Looking after your local pack of wild dogs or herd of cats also would mean ensuring that none starve. Starving animals are far more dangerous to humans than those that are well-fed and healthy. When animals become sick, they can be taken to the clinic for care. Unlike so many places that destroy unwanted animals, the clinic practices a no-euthanasia policy and gives the animals as good care as they can until a better situation can be found for them.

Despite the isolation of the island, there are diseases that are transmitted throughout the animal population. Right now, there is a particularly nasty 'parovirus' that is affecting cats which lowers their white blood count and has about a 50% fatality rate. I asked Dr. Jen about it. She told me these diseases can be transmitted by humans on our clothes or shoes. Even cats who are kept indoors are susceptible so cat owners are well-advised to wash hands and change clothes when returning from outside before petting their household cats.



Roses are not usually on the menu



BammBamm sees his first dog in the restaurant at Bon Ton. Little did he know he would be in a cage at the clinic the following week.

My baby lion boy and rabbit-like little girl have brought me so much joy these past few months. Suddenly, for no known reason that either the vets or I can figure out, Bamm Bamm who has always been super-active and curious, stopped eating – this from a cat who had demanded food 5 or 6 times a day. Thanks to my cat-loving friends, we rushed him to the clinic one morning and they immediately started antibiotics and rehydration. He has spent the last few days and nights in a cage at the vet. I go to visit him, take him out and hold him. He moves slowly, and the expression in his eyes is misery, glazed with pain from some kind of gastro-intestinal infection and

I cry like I haven't cried in years. Somehow in the short time I've known him, we've developed one of those truly special bonds. I so admire his baby lion strut, his wild tearing up of newspapers, his scampering around

with his quieter sister. He is a performer – with an innate charisma and internal self-confidence. To see him laid so low is agony. They are my “Flintstones Kids;” I’m just praying Bamm Bamm will recover and come back to Pebbles and me.



BammBamm and Pebbles --
the Flintstones Kids

He has a good chance to throw off the infection because he is receiving an IV and special attention from Dr. Jen who checks on him throughout the day. Whether he makes it or not – and it looks like he will as he gets stronger each day -- I feel such gratitude that Island Animal Clinic exists for the Langkawi animal population and for the people of this island. Not sure why or how he got sick, it’s possible he may have picked up the infection when he went in for his shots last week; like the danger to people of getting illnesses in hospitals, there is a danger that your pet may catch something in a visit to a vet. I would like to see the clinic become better outfitted, a more sterile environment. But I know in my heart that he is receiving the best care possible from the knowledgeable and truly kind-hearted people there.

I asked Dr. Jen what she would get for the clinic if someone gave a million dollars. “Another vet!” was her first answer and then went on to detail larger kennels for the dogs, better cages for cats, blood and urine testing machines, and many other things that would enhance capacity. She will be leaving the island in November after previous work in Thailand and her year here to return to a well-equipped clinic in England where she’ll work with 8 other vets. On Langkawi, she’s alone on a Sunday when I come in to visit my sick kitten. There she’ll have time off, on call only one night a week. Here she tries to be on watch 24-hours. She is sitting on the floor with a cat on her lap, telling the cat in a loving voice that it’s being very good while picking maggots out of a large wound. I know I couldn’t do what she does. I’m just thankful that there are such people.



Dr Jen cleans a cat's wounds

Perhaps there are things that we animal-lovers each can – and should -- do to offer support. Go to <http://www.langkawilassie.org.my/> for more information on volunteering or simply stop by Bon Ton some time for a meal or a coffee, or treat yourself to an overnight at Temple Tree – profits go to support the animal clinic and shelter. You’ll be doing something for the island’s animal population, and if you like, you can even get a furry cuddle.

POSTSCRIPT Yellow kitten BammBamm was saved by Dr Jen – 5 days on IV at the hospital – he’s home now and doing just fine!

NOTE TRAVELING OFF-ISLAND WITH A PET? All dogs in Malaysia must be licensed so be sure to bring your dog to the government animal clinic in Kuah. Cats do not need a license, however, if you wish to take a cat or dog off the island, you will need to go to the clinic in Kuah to obtain a special permission form showing your animal has had proper vaccinations and is in good health. Otherwise your pet will not be allowed on the ferry or airplane. Both Island Animal Clinic (near Pantai Cenang) and the government clinic in Kuah can give your pet vaccination shots and issue the official vaccination certificates (it’s a little cheaper in Kuah), however the Cenang clinic cannot issue the exit permission. Dr Jen suggests that all animals leaving the island or entering other countries should be given a worming pill on the evening before departure. Some countries will require this for entry with a pet. The veterinarians in Kuah can take care of minor injuries and illnesses, check general health, give shots, and issue government licenses. However, for surgery or major illness head to Island Animal Clinic at Bon Ton.

Below excerpted from <http://www.langkawilassie.org.my/blog/foundation/the-story-of-lassie-the-langkawi-animal-shelter-sanctuary/#more-125>:

The Story of LASSie – The Langkawi Animal Shelter & Sanctuary

Bon Ton and the animals go back a long way.

Over twenty years ago, Bon Ton Restaurant in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia began rescuing and sheltering street dogs, seven of which made the journey to Langkawi with Narelle when she opened the restaurant's island branch. Narelle soon found that on Langkawi the major problem was stray cats. There were no veterinary clinics on the island, so Bon Ton quickly set one up. For years it operated on a purely charitable basis, sterilizing stray cats and returning them to their original habitat. At the same time, Bon Ton set up a shelter for the island's stray and needy dogs.

Seven years ago the project had grown so big that Narelle established LASSie – The Langkawi Animal Shelter & Sanctuary Foundation. LASSie's main aim is to control the island's stray cat and dog population through sterilization.

LASSie now has its own open-to-the-public clinic with two veterinarians, as well as separate dog and cat shelters. To insure adequate funding for LASSie's present and future activities Narelle decided to expand Bon Ton, opening 'sister resort' [Temple Tree](#) in December 2008. All animal work is financed by the resorts and their restaurants.

The resorts share a motto in both their restaurants: 'Eat more, Drink more', as all goes to a good cause!

Island Animal Klinik

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Consultation hours: Mon-Fri 10 am – 1 pm, 3 pm – 6 pm,
Sat 10 – 1 pm. Closed Sundays & Public Holidays

Langkawi Animal Shelter & Sanctuary Foundation

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