



The Satos in Puerto Rico:

If you have traveled to Puerto Rico, you have most likely encountered the stray dogs along your path. Today, Puerto Rico, about the size of Connecticut, has an estimated 500,000 or more homeless dogs. Dealing with the Islands economic challenges and having a lack of low-cost spay or neuter services has resulted in uncontrolled reproduction, increasing the numbers of homeless dogs on the Island. Many Puerto Ricans think that spaying/neutering their dogs is harmful or that their dog loses its value in society by being spayed or neutered. All of this has led to the over population of stray dogs, mutts or as locally known, Satos. These stray dogs are seen on the streets, at the beaches, in the woods, and along the highways. Many local people neglected their dogs as they could not afford to

keep their pets, often dumping them at a spot called the “Dead Dog Beach” or on the streets. As people abandoned the island in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, they left their dogs behind, often along the highway as they drove to the airport. Puppies have been found left to die in boxes, in bags and even in shopping carts at Walmart.

A Satos life is very hard. The majority do not make it past their second birthday. Nature seems to have sensed this and the females are giving birth to increasingly large litters of puppies. The Satos suffer from dehydration, starvation, anemia, parasites, mange and other severe skin issues. Sometimes they are found paralyzed after being struck by a car and left to die. Sadly, sometimes they are found tortured or abused.

The limited spay/neuter practice in Puerto Rico leads to unwanted litters of puppies and a never-ending cycle of reproduction. There is a huge problem of violence in Puerto Rico: drugs, gangs, firearms. The government has its hands full with violence, and animal abuse is just not a priority. As for the police, if you are lucky enough to find a policeman willing to take your complaint, they in turn need to find a prosecutor willing to take the case, which is very rare. Puerto Rico has very strict laws regarding animal cruelty and abuse (PR Law 154) but unfortunately it is rarely applied. If a dog is taken to one of the five Municipal Shelters in Puerto Rico, they will not make it out alive. The euthanasia rate at these shelters is 99%. Most dogs do not even get 24 hours in the shelter - they are walked 'straight out back' to be euthanized. Currently the adoption rate in Puerto Rico is very low.

Satos are similar in appearance to small terrier dogs, generally under 30 lbs. and characterized by a long muzzle, large ears, short legs, and a curved tail. They tend to be incredibly smart and quick to learn. Many have the instantly recognizable ‘sato’ ears; large ears that stick up straight. It is joked that if these amazing little dogs ever get their own Disney movie, it is thought that we could watch them fly.

In order to work towards a future where every dog is owned and humanely cared for, the problem of overpopulation must be addressed. Preventing unwanted pregnancy is a critical component of this effort, as well as stopping the spread of disease to both humans and animals. Multiple local rescue organizations on the Island are trying to make a difference. These dogs are being dumped in simply horrific condition. The rescuers work together, each has their routes to feed and provide fresh water daily to the street dogs. Often, as resources permit, they rescue dogs. These rescuers tell themselves ‘This Satos life is going to change today’. And then the rescuer runs through bushes, crawls into caves or swims after the dog to bring them to safety.

And if they cannot rescue them today then they try again tomorrow. Many of the dogs come right into your arms” rescuers say, while, “Others take time. Years. The rescuers are dedicated, they never, ever give up. Once a dog is rescued, a Vet performs a thorough health evaluation and provides necessary services, including rabies and DA2LPPV vaccine and spay or neuter surgery. The Sato lives in foster care, where they are loved, socialized and vetted for adoption. Approximately 3,000 Satos are flown to cities in America where their adoptive families await. Satos are loyal, intelligent, affectionate and loving pets. They are the ultimate underdog! It is thought that they have evolved that way as result of survival of the fittest given what they’ve had to endure.

The Rescue organizations fight tirelessly for change, through their rescue efforts, education, and through their desire for island wide campaigns supporting low cost spay/neuter surgery. They support change so that spay neuter can be available at low cost, that animals be registered, that the mills be shut down, that there is TNR for the many colonies of cats. Change comes slow but they do not give up.

The Sato is known to make excellent family pets. My two dogs are from Puerto Rico, Simba and Luna. They are amazing, smart, loving, sweet and affectionate. *Simba* is always by my side, a bit insecure, as if to say, “Please never leave me to endure what I did in my early life”. My *Luna* eats her every meal as if it is her last. Luna will never know what starvation feels like again, and Simba will always feel loved and secure.

As you read this, it helps you to understand the reality from the overproduction of dogs and cats. Please consider a donation to Rozzie May Animal Alliance (RMAA). Your generosity with a donation of any size directly supports our ability to continue to provide low cost spay neuter services throughout New Hampshire and Western Maine. Low cost spay neuter services reduces the number of animals that are homeless, in crowded shelters, abused and ultimately euthanized. RMAA also administers the Keeping Family Together Pet food drive.....helping those families struggling during difficult times keep their pets.

<https://www.thesatoproject.org/what-is-a-sato-dog>