

**Field Report:** Post Tsunami Animal Survey in Banda Aceh, Sumatra, Indonesia  
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Banda Aceh

It is absolutely impossible to describe the carnage of the horrific situation in Banda Aceh. The area of devastation within Banda Aceh is about 7.9 km x 15 km (118.5 sq km). This represents about two-thirds of Banda Aceh.

We will describe several areas of devastation that we have surveyed

### **General**

Two thirds of Banda Aceh is completely destroyed. That two thirds has been almost completely razed to the ground – this is no exaggeration. Think of the pictures of Hiroshima after the atom bomb and you begin to get the picture.

The reality is that where there is devastation there is no life – human or animal, except for maybe a few dogs, cats and chickens. The line demarcating the devastated areas from those areas untouched is sometimes striking. In the untouched areas there's life and everything moves as normal. Within those areas, many which have little backyard farms, we saw no significant signs of welfare issues.

### **Central Banda Aceh**

There were six Indian elephants brought in by the Forestry Department. They came 75km by truck and were being used to clear the debris. They were being attended by German veterinarian Dr. Stremme of the Sumatra Elephant Foundation. He had initial welfare concerns that the diet was not suitable, but that has now been corrected and a number of minor wounds have been attended to. He health screened the elephants and they are OK. We were glad to see that these elephants were in professional hands.

### **Heading East**

Heading east of town, we stopped in an upper middle class residential area with relatively large homes with small little backyard farming setups. We understand the majority of these houses kept chickens, ducks and goats. In the non-devastated areas near town, the animals were tethered or kept in restricted enclosures, whereas in the fringe areas of town the animals were free to roam and graze. Understanding this, it is safe to assume that the animals in the devastated neighborhoods had no opportunity to escape, except for maybe the occasional cat up a tree. Most of these animals died having been confined to their enclosures. We are staying in such a neighborhood.

To give an example, a typical household would have approx 2-3 ducks, 6 chickens, 1-4 goats, 1-2 cats and a couple birds in cage. The small home backyard farms would have included 1 or 2 cows or water buffalo and 6 to 8 goats. These figures are antidotally derived from our counts in the neighborhood situated south of the devastated area.

The numbers that follow are not representative of the pre-tsunami animal population in the neighborhood that we surveyed. Rather these are the animals that we were able to count in and among the debris. In many cases the debris stood two or more meters high. One point to be made here is that the dogs didn't look like they were starving. They were not emaciated. But the soldiers from the Indonesian army tasked with removing the bodies reported to us seeing the dogs feeding off of the cadavers. This was supported by our observations of hands, fingers, and toes that had obviously been chewed off.

### **Around Iskandar University**

We drove another 3 km through a secondary maze of streets and avenues surrounded with polluted and stagnant water containing decomposing human bodies floating in it. The bodies were oozing effluents. Within this area we walked a neighborhood about 1 km by 2 km which was reprehensive of a 15 km square area (i.e. multiple the numbers by 112.5 to get estimates within the 15 km sq area). Within this neighborhood we saw live animals: 4 dogs scavenging, 5 cats, 1 squirrel and 30 bodies in bags - not to mention the number of bodies in twisted rubble and floating in the streams.

Within this neighborhood area sits Iskandar Muda University, a teacher training college. The college appeared to be a safe haven for dogs that seemed to be very familiar with the building and its passageways. We saw 16 live dogs.

We found a typical small backyard farm with - Dead: 1 fish washed in 6 km from sea, 1 goat, 4 chickens. Live: 1 dog and 8 chickens.

Near a canal with in the neighborhood we found - Live: 1 injured dog, 1 cat, 1 monitor lizard, 15 ducks. Dead - in the river 1 goat, 1 dog and 1 cow.

### **Stue and Kecamatan Meuraxa**

As we drove out of this area we passed through an area called Stue where 2 cows were tethered to a tree within the grounds of a devastated bus station.

Two km from the sea on the same road we drive to Kecamatan Meuraxa where we passed the Ministry of Agriculture buildings, including the veterinarian buildings which were complete destroyed. It was confirmed by an employee that ten district veterinarians had perished in the tsunami.

## **Near the Sea**

As we neared the sea, the devastation has completely leveled the area as far as the eye can see. It looks like Hiroshima after the bomb. We were told that this was a very wealthy neighborhood. The body bags increased in numbers along the side of the road such that within about two minutes we counted 150 body bags. This did not even include the ones in the rubble that we could not see. We stopped counting.

In many areas the debris was piled as high as 20 ft. The whole sight was so emotionally overwhelming.

## **Wahyu's In-Law's Home**

We then came to Dr. Wahyu's, our host, father in law's home where he had just recently buried his mother-in-law in a shallow grave. Other family members were still missing.

We were overwhelmed both with the personal tragedy coupled with the stench of death and sounds of cracking timbers as bulldozers dug into the debris and twisted bodies (we assume that there were also animals in there).

At this point the whole experience was such an assault on our senses that we had to take a thirty minute break. We all cried.

In this area of devastation, where it was leveled as far as the eye can see, we found: 1 dead cow, 1 live cat and 1 dog limping.

## **Banda Aceh University**

We then left to go east to Banda Aceh University.

The university covers a 1 sq km area which includes the veterinarian faculty for Aceh. These grounds appeared to be a safe haven for many farm animals. We counted: 98 cows, among them 12 were tethered and the majority were either marked or collared. They all appear to be in satisfactory condition according to Ray and Listriani.

We met with Dr. Hamdani director of Animal Production. He informed us that before the tsunami there were usually be about 8 tethered cows around the university. So the additional cows were either brought there or found their own way. In addition to the cows, we also saw – Live: 7 cats, 26 goats, and 7 dogs, 2 geese and lots of egrets.

## **Further East**

Leaving the university, we headed back over the bridge to a riverbank which was normally used as a grazing area to fatten the cows. It has now been compromised by brackish river water and the grass is dead and it can no longer provide sufficient nutrients. We counted 31 cows live. It should be

noted these are the same cows that Wayan earlier reported in his recon survey as being under the bridge. They had moved.

On the opposite side of the road (right side) we entered an area that had not been touched. In this area were small houses with fenced areas with an average of 2-3 ducks, 6 chickens, up to 6-8 goats, 2 cats, 2 or 3 cows, and 2 to 3 water buffaloes and some sheep.

In general these homesteads offered good lush grazing, shelter, water and proper enclosures. However, being on the fringes of the town, these animals were permitted to roam and graze outside of enclosures and we saw goats, sheep and cattle doing so. We quit counting because there were so many and there were no animal welfare issues in this area. There were hectares of grazing cattle, water buffalo and sheep in lush green fields. This was an example of the type of abrupt changes from a devastated area to an undamaged area. The fact is that there were no significant partially damaged transitional areas – either an area was thriving or it was devastated. On one side of the road everything was alive and well, on the other side everything was completely dead and destroyed.

At his point we were on the fringes of Banda Aceh and we had been warned of rebel activity in the area. Apparently the rebels are slowly encroaching on the city. Yesterday 1 or 2 people were killed. We returned to town.

### **Back to Town**

Heading back to the center of town, we came across 4 cats hiding underneath a 90 foot trawling ship that had been deposited 5km from the sea and now rests in the parking lot of the Medan Hotel.

Continuing through the town, the road rises slightly and had significantly less devastation. Within a short distance we counted - Live: 7 dogs, a lot of chickens, 20 cats, and 5 goats. This is significant, because as pointed out earlier, normally animals are not roaming free in the central areas. When the road dips down we again encounter devastation and we see no animals

We then stopped at a small fruit stall on a lot about 13x16 meters. There were 18 cats, 2 ducks, 8 chickens, and hordes of flies. So many flies that we called it the “Fly By Diner”. The owner of restaurant said that the cat population in general has noticeably decreased since the tsunami. But at her food stall they have dramatically increased. She is the only food seller up and running in the area. That is why the cats are there. There were cats all over the place jump up on the tables to get food when ever they had an opportunity. They were obviously hungry.

Continuing west we got an SMS message from Ken that there was a zoo that had animals that were evacuated. We asked locals and they told us that there was no zoo, but that the Forestry Department had a holding facility that had 1 tiger and 1 crocodile. Both escaped during the tsunami. The military

subsequently shot tiger for human safety. However the crocodile is still at large!

At the end of the day we did a quick recon for the following day and we couldn't believe it when we saw a Cassowary tethered by its leg to a concrete post on the road across from the forestry office. The animal had a bandage around its ankle and was being fed by a keeper. We went into the forestry office to make inquiry but they refused to give any information.

About 1 km beyond this point, we were getting near another area where the rebels were encroaching. So we turned back and saw 5 stray dogs and a cow taking shelter in a partially destroyed souvenir shop.

The survey then came to an abrupt end when we punctured the third tire of the day. It was pouring down rain.

- Sherry Grant, Ray Butcher, and Garry Richardson,

**Notes:**

1. Dr. Listriani is heading back to Bali today (Tuesday).
2. Tomorrow (Wednesday) evening, Sherry, Ray, Garry, and Wayan are flying to Jakarta to meet with Ibu Wiwi (Indonesian Veterinarian Association), the Indonesian Minister of Agriculture, and the director of the livestock division in the ministry
3. A CD of photos from both Sherry and Ray is being sent out today and should be received by tomorrow. They will be distributed upon receipt.
4. This report was transcribed over a satellite phone and edited by Ken Grant