

# CRITTER Control

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Photos by David Natt

The image of the neighborhood dogcatcher chasing Rover down an alley with a net is slowly becoming obsolete.

Today's dogcatchers prefer to be called animal control officers and spend as much time investigating cases of animal abuse and neglect as they do rounding up strays.

At the animal shelters, adoption and education are the two main goals.

The animals at the Lane County Animal Regulation Authority, the taxpayer-funded facility that serves the entire county, are usually strays that were picked up by an animal control officer or brought to the shelter by a citizen.

Less often, the animals are dogs that have bitten someone and are in quarantine or are involved in court cases.

Even though wild animals are not usually handled by the county shelter, some of the stranger guests brought in have been rabbits, ferrets, chinchillas, roosters and Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs.

"If we think it's been a pet, we'll take it," said animal regulation supervisor Randy Covey.

Covey said the main role of the Lane County shelter is to enforce laws concerning animals, including licensing laws, complaints about stray dogs and charges of animal abuse.

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— Merv Davis,  
director of Greenhill  
Humane Society

officer arrives.

If the animal is still loose when the officer arrives, the dog is either caught or chased home, and the officer issues the dog's owner a citation.

"It's a violation if the dog is off its own property," Covey said, adding that owners can also be cited for failure to license their dog properly.

Covey said that although most dogs come when called, there are some "repeat offenders who don't like riding in the truck. But we know who those are."

Cats are not handled by animal control officers except in cases of abuse or neglect.

A typical day for an officer may include follow-up calls on neglect cases, responding to calls concerning injured dogs or cats and patrolling for strays.

"It's like a police officer," Covey said. "If they're not looking for murderers or investigating robberies, they're setting speed traps."

The shelter facility can hold up to 20 cats, although usually only five to 10 are being held, and out of the 30 dog runs available, Covey said only three-quarters are typically full.

The estimated initial cost of taking a vehicle out to pick up a stray dog and impounding it is \$120, said Covey, who also added that an \$8 boarding fee is assessed for each day the dog stays in the shelter.

Out of the shelter-held animals that are picked up in the city of Eugene, 75 percent of them are returned.

"Generally, people in the city make a conscientious choice to have a dog," Covey said, explaining the high return rate.

"In the county," Covey said, "you run into people who have dogs because it's the thing to do. When they lose the dog, they don't like to look for it."

The animals that are not reclaimed by their owners are put up for adoption, depending on their health, age, history and "adoptability."

Usually, animals without an identification are held for 72 hours before being put to sleep, but they may be held longer, depending on how "adoptable" the shelter believes the animal is.

"Some people think we're breed-prejudiced," Covey said, "but we're not. If we have a Rottweiler who's friendly and healthy, we'll put him up for adoption. We don't put all the Rottweilers and Dobermans to sleep."

The adoption fees at the Lane County shelter are \$35.25 for a male dog, \$45.25 for a female dog, \$18 for a male cat and \$26 for a female cat. The prices include spay/neuter fees, shots fees, a collar and identification

Most calls begin with a complaint of some sort — for example, a stray dog — which is recorded on a card and assigned to one of the two or three officers on duty.

Covey said that in a case like that, they encourage the caller to catch the dog themselves because the dog is often gone when the



Cheryl Richley, of Eugene, holds a puppy (above) she adopted after going through an extensive screening process. Bill Waugh feeds one of the dogs at the Lane County Animal Regulation Authority's kennel (below).



tag for cats, and a leash, collar and one-year license for dogs.

Covey said that certain times of the year result in more work for the shelter, citing Fourth of July and the accompanying fireworks as being especially frightening to dogs.

"Dogs get scared," Covey said. "They need to come inside and be with their family where they know they're safe."

Covey also said the shelter recommends people keep their animals inside on Halloween because "people run around in weird costumes and dogs get scared or defensive. Also, chocolate is toxic to animals, so we tell people not to let their dogs have any candy."

An increase in activity also occurs between seasons, Covey said. "There's an increase in dog bites and dogs at large during the summer," he said. "And in the winter, there's not so many animals running around."

"We see more large animal complaints in the winter — for example, horses left out," Covey said. "That's a lack of information on the complainant's part, because most stock animals are left outside."

The Greenhill Humane Society differs from the Lane County shelter in that it is a privately funded business and receives no funds from taxpayers, said Greenhill director Merv Davis.

Furthermore, Greenhill's main goal is adoption and not enforcement, unlike the Lane County shelter.

"We adopt out three to four times as many animals as Lane County," Davis said.

The animals at Greenhill usually come from people

who don't want them or can't keep them.

"Dogs and cats make up 99.9 percent of what happens," Davis said. "We're not set up to handle exotics or livestock."

Of the animals who are adoptable, there is a 75 percent adoption rate.

The overall adoption rate of all the animals that pass through the shelter, including those that cannot be put up for adoption for reasons of health or age, is 31 percent, which Davis said is an increase from 5 percent in 1987.

Davis said the increased rate is because of the promotions and public appearances that Greenhill does within the community, citing the "pet nights" at the University.

People who want to adopt an animal from Greenhill must present a photo identification and proof of address. If the person is a renter, a copy of the lease stating that pets are permissible must also be presented.

"Frequently," Davis said, "we have University students who come in to adopt, they give us a phony address, we check it, and we find out that it's Carson Hall, which doesn't work."

Potential pet owners are also asked a series of questions, including where the animal will sleep, if the person knows a veterinarian, and if there are any small children in the home.

"A lot of people say, 'Gosh, this is harder than adopting a child,' but it isn't," Davis said.

Spaying or neutering the animal is also a requirement for any animal adopted from a shelter, according to city and county code.

"We want to put the animal into a home where the animal will be happy as a pet," Davis said.

Davis said the spay/neuter laws have made a difference in the number of animals that pass through the shelter. He said in the 1970s, Greenhill alone handled more than 30,000 dogs a year, but now between Greenhill and the Lane County shelter, only 12,000 dogs are handled each year.

Like the Lane County shelter, the Fourth of July is also a busy time for Greenhill.

"We had the biggest excitement this year when we found out that the fifth of July was on a Sunday, and we're closed on Sunday. We didn't have to take calls from people whose pets ran off on the Fourth," Davis said.

"If people would just put a collar and tag on every pet and have their dogs licensed," Davis said, "that would make our job easier."

"People say that they don't want to put a collar on their cat because they're afraid the cat will go and hang itself on a tree," he said, "but it's more likely the cat will be put to sleep in a shelter if it doesn't have a collar."

Adoption fees at Greenhill are \$57 for a male dog, \$67 for a female dog, \$38 for a male cat and \$40 for a female cat.

In the case of dogs, the price includes the costs of spaying or neutering, a collar and leash, vaccination, worm and flea treatments and food samples. For cats, the price includes the costs of a cat carrier, a spay or neuter fee, a tag and collar, and for an additional \$10 refundable deposit, a video called "Your New Cat," which the owners are encouraged to watch.