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Why do friendly street dogs chase, bark at, and exhibit aggressive behaviours towards some people?

The **excess availability of food resources**, especially through the daily feeding of full and complete meals to healthy dogs, leads to attachment to specific locations and specific people (feeders and caregivers).

This in turn leads to pet-like aggression (chasing, barking, crowding, nipping) towards people that the dogs perceive as strangers and those that are uncomfortable around dogs. These behaviours can sometimes also be linked to **increased leisure and boredom** stemming from reduced foraging because of regular, complete feeding.

The availability of excessive food also makes dogs less territorial towards other dogs leading to congregation (of dogs) in feeding sites because of migration from other areas.

Why are these conflict behaviours dangerous for street dogs?

These behaviours lead to **retaliatory action and violence**, including stoning, hitting, removal and relocation, and poisoning.

More than 25% of the cases pertaining to human-street dog conflict in the Supreme Court and High Courts from January 2022 – June 2024 pertain to feeding. Any of these cases could result in **legislative change that removes existing legal protections** for street dogs. Till 2001, street dogs were killed by local authorities (e.g., municipal corporations). The ABC Rules put a stop to that, but these Rules can be changed through Parliament and repealed by court judgements.



Where will street dogs get food if they are not fed regularly?

Street dogs have always been foragers. Foraging is not only from garbage but also from people – such as at tea stalls, roadside restaurants and meat stalls, sanitation workers, auto drivers, and residents putting out leftovers. Even today, most street dogs in India are foragers. Foraging is an important street skill for street dogs and can be a positive life-experience for them.

Does that mean we should not feed street dogs at all?

No. It just means that feeding needs to be **smart and street dog-friendly**.

- Do not feed healthy dogs regularly or complete meals. They can be fed sporadically and/or in small quantities to build trust.
- Regular, complete feeding should be directed only at starving, sick, or lactating dogs and orphaned puppies. Once these dogs recover/are ready to be independent, they should be gradually weaned off regular, complete feeding
- If dogs start to gather (whether permanently or temporarily) in locations where you are feeding a dog, pause feeding in that area.
- Address conflict behaviours immediately, if necessary, by stopping feeding and removing affection and attention temporarily.

People have always given food to street dogs. Why has feeding become a major source of conflict now?

Till recently, very few people would feed street dogs regularly. Over the last 10 years, and especially after lockdown, much larger numbers of people feed complete meals to several street dogs regularly. Very often, such feeding ends up being concentrated in certain neighbourhoods which means that there is an excessive availability of food in these locations.

Regular feeders tend to really like dogs and so dogs that are fed get much more attention and affection than dogs that forage. This makes them possessive of their feeders, territorial of their feeding sites, and aggressive towards other people (non-feeders).

The large quantities of food that are made available mean that new dogs start congregating in locations where some dogs are being fed. Resident dogs also become less territorial towards new dogs because food is not scarce.



Dogs that are regularly fed complete meals lose the essential street skills required to find food and to interact safely with a wide variety of people.

Differences between pet dogs and street dogs

Pet dogs remain ‘children’ for their entire lives as they are under the full control, protection, and care of their owners. Street dogs have to be ‘adults’ once they cross puppyhood. They need to be able to negotiate human society and different kinds of people on their own. Feeders are not there to protect them all the time from relocation, poisoning, or changes in the law.

Pet dogs do not necessarily have better lives than street dogs. Even with the best of human owners, they don’t have many basic freedoms: to pee or poop when they want to; to seek company when they want it and be alone when they want to; to choose their own mates and friends; to go out when they want to and to rest when they want to. They are also at the risk of abandonment and abuse.

Conversely, street dogs do not necessarily have worse lives than pet dogs. They have many freedoms that pet dogs don’t (such as those listed above). Their independence gives them much richer lives. Activities like foraging can be positive experiences. Animals, like humans, need a wide range of experiences to have fulfilling lives. That is why zoo animals, despite having ready access to shelter and food, suffer immensely.