

## Dr. Ruth MacPete, DVM

Ruth has more than 15 years of experience in the veterinary industry as a companion animal veterinarian in private practice. Along with being a writer and media personality, she is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

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[Editors Note: [On February 7th Leah McElrath tweeted a photo](#) of a stray dog that wandered into the Sochi Olympic opening ceremonies.]

Besides showcasing the world's top athletes, the Olympics allow the hosts to share their country with the entire world. The opportunity to shine on an international stage is a great motivator and host countries literally spend billions to make a good impression. Russia is no exception and the Sochi Olympics are reported to be the most expensive ever with a price tag of 51 billion dollars. Ironically, their effort to make a good first impression with a dazzling opening ceremony is being overshadowed by how they are addressing their stray dog problem.

Animal welfare groups and animal lovers have been outraged by reports that a local pest control company has been contracted to exterminate Sochi stray dogs. According to the [New York Times](#), "residents of Sochi have reported seeing dogs shot with poison darts, then tossed into waiting trucks." Although virtually every country has to deal with pet overpopulation, including our own, Russia is being criticized for entirely focusing their efforts on killing otherwise healthy animals instead of building animal shelters or supporting spay and neuter programs. Fortunately dog lovers are stepping forward to help these animals in need. [As reported by NPR](#), local animal right groups such as Goodwill Cause and the Center to Protect Animals are taking in and housing as many strays as they can in their shelters. A bright spot for Sochi, Mr. Deripaska, a major Russian investor of the Sochi Olympics, has donated \$15,000 to build a shelter on land donated by the local government. Deripaska pledged \$50,000 a year for operational expenses.

The strays of Sochi have become the unofficial mascot

of the Winter Games. Their plight also reminds us of our own pet overpopulation problem. After all, how a country treats its most vulnerable tells us more about the country than the millions of dollars spent on a lavish opening ceremony.

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*