People who care for street dogs will soon be getting government-issued identity cards. The new ID cards are expected to do away with harassment faced by many such persons from the general public, when they try to feed canines on the road. In a move that animal activists termed “unprecedented,” the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) has decided last week that anyone who voluntarily cares for strays — dog feeders and colony caretakers who tend to animals in their locality. It Board has put up a one-page registration form (can be downloaded free of cost) on its website awbi.org, for those who want to get these ID cards. The applicant needs to fill in personal information such as name, address and experience, if any, of working with the Animal Welfare Board. Once the application is submitted, the ID card would be processed and mailed to the applicant within two weeks, board member and legal advisor Anjali Sharma said. “The card would have the person’s name and an attestation that he/she is doing a right and lawful deed and the Animal Welfare Board supports it. This lends credibility to the person,” Sharma said. The AWBI is a legal advisory body that was formed under the Animal Prevention Act of 1960 to protect the animals. Sharma explained that the goal of the card, which does not provide any exclusive rights, was solely the welfare of animals and caretakers. “Most people don’t realise that sterilisation and vaccination of stray dogs would be possible only through feeding and befriending dogs,” Sharma said. In December 2011, the Delhi High Court had passed an order voicing its approval for designated "dog feeding spots" for stray canines in the city. It passed the order on a petition which sought to protect dogs from "intimidating" residents, so they could be fed without any hassle. The court also ruled that police should assist dog feeders if they faced any "harassment" from residents and also ordered the AWBI to designate specific feeding areas.

Rishi Dev, founder of Citizens for Animal Rights who has written a book on "Urban disputes over animals", said this was the first time that the government was supporting such an initiative. Sharma hoped that many would come forward to apply for the cards. "They are performing a duty," she said. "And it's a legitimate exercise."

**CANINE LOVE**

The forms for the ID card can be downloaded from the Animal Welfare Board of India website, awbi.org. The applicant needs to provide details such as name, address and previous experience, if any, of working with AWBI. The card will be mailed to the applicant within two weeks. In December 2011, the Delhi High Court had passed an order voicing its approval for designated "dog feeding spots" for stray canines in the city.