Caring for Cleft Puppies

Save The Clefts Rescue Protocol

(Disclaimer – This is what we do; it’s what works for us…. others may do things differently.

If you are fostering for us you will be expected and you have agreed to follow this protocol.)

**It is the opinion of many rescues, including ours, that tube feeding is the safest way to feed a cleft. Nursing, bottle, syringe and/or dropper feeding are not recommended because that often leads to aspiration of the lungs.**

**You are expected to ONLY tube feed any of our rescue babies in your care unless otherwise discussed with a rescue director.**

There are many “how to” tube feeding videos on YouTube. Watch a few for different techniques. We also have a step by step tube feeding document which you should have received as well.

YOU ARE NOW THE PARENT TO THIS PUPPY! You will have to follow a very strict feeding schedule and you will also have to stimulate the puppy to make it poo and pee. The puppy cannot potty on its own at this point so that is up to you to do EVERY feeding. We usually use a warm fragrance free baby wipe to massage the puppy’s private parts until it goes to the bathroom. You can also use a cotton ball or anything soft to do this. The mother dog uses her tongue to stimulate her puppies so keep that in mind when you are choosing what to use for your puppy. We find they don’t always poop every time but you should expect them to pee every time. Please let us know if your puppy has not had a bowel movement in 24 hrs. We want them to go at the very least once in 24 hours.

**Supplies List**

**You will need and our rescue does supply:**

**5 French Catheter Tubes**

**8 French Catheter Tubes**

**Bigger ones if you end up tubing mushy food**

<https://www.revivalanimal.com/product/sterile-feeding-tubes/all-dog-and-cat-supplies>

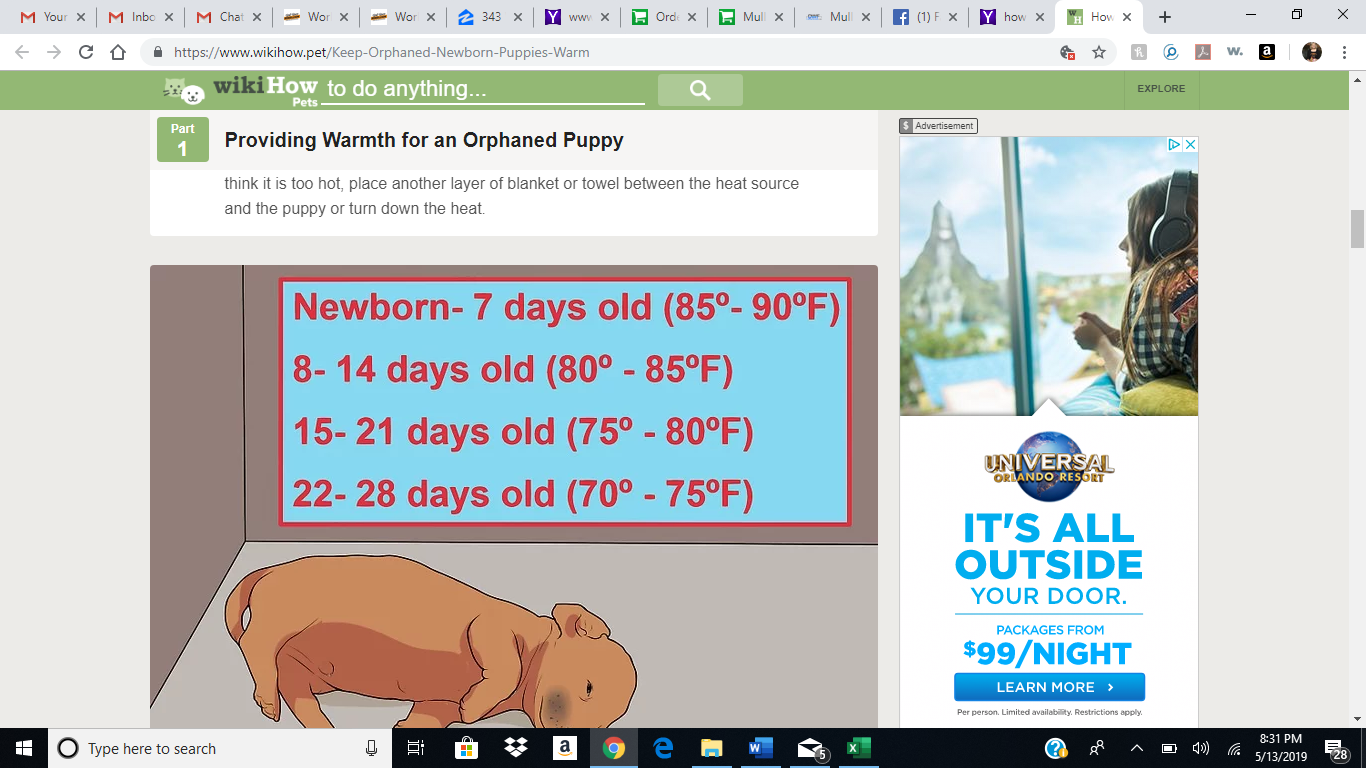
<https://www.squirrelsandmore.com/products/4-fr-feeding-tubes-clear-15-16-long>

**Syringes** – We usually have many different sizes on hand. At first we start with the 12ml syringes then move up to the 20ml and then 35ml and sometimes 60ml (but they can be more difficult to use). If you purchase packing tape and wrap the syringes with the packing tape the numbers won’t wash off as you use them. We also find Monoject syringes do not get “sticky” as fast as many other brands.

**Formula** – We use Esbilac Goat’s Milk Formula for our cleft puppies and find it normally works well but we will consider switching formulas based on the individual puppies needs. Contact a rescue representative if you think the pup in your care is having issues with this formula. We do recommend you have some on hand so you don’t have to scramble at the last minute. Many formulas come dry and can be mixed with baby water. We each keep a can of dry and gallon of baby water on hand at all times. You can find formula at most pet stores but we find Amazon to be much cheaper if you have the time to wait for it. If you don’t have time to wait, try getting Petco to price match; they have done that for us in the past. The rescue does provide formula for you. We average 3 cans per puppy until weaning age. Let a representative know when you open your last can.

**Warming Equipment** – It is very important you keep your puppy warm AND also very important to give your puppy an option. Have half it’s area heated and the other half unheated, as this gives the puppy the ability to wiggle away from the heat if it gets too warm. A heating pad that does NOT automatically shut off and a 26qt.- 44qt. plastic tote, can be used. You may choose to place the heating pad inside the tote or set the tote on top of the heating pad. Either way, make sure only half of the base of the tote is in contact with the heat so the puppy can move away from the heat. You can also use a heat lamp but that’s a bit more dangerous. You will need to position at just the right height and still also supply an area where the puppy can get away from the heat.

The chart below is easiest to use when you have an ICU unit for a controlled environment.



We want you to still supply a heat source as a choice for the puppy up until you consistently no longer see them using it. This means when you transition the puppy to a playpen & crate combo we want you using a heat lamp in one corner of the playpen or a heating pad within the crate (crate must be attached to playpen so puppy has a choice to get away from heat). Note: If you are not using an incubator you should ALWAYS give the puppy a choice to get away from the heat source for safety reasons.

## Normal Body Temperature in Puppies

A [newborn puppy](https://www.thesprucepets.com/puppy-development-part-1-2804676) can't regulate body temperature and needs the warmth of its mother and littermates to stay at a stable temperature. The normal temperature for a newborn pup is between 95 to 99 F. A temperature lower than 92 F or higher than 106 F can indicate a health problem.

During the second and third weeks, a puppy's body temperature will range from 97 to 100 F. In the fourth week, a puppy will have the usual normal body temperature of an adult dog, from 99.5 to 102.5 degrees F.

Since normal body temperature varies between individual puppies, it's a good idea to know what constitutes your puppy's "normal." Taking your puppy's temperature at home also gets the dog used to being handled so that when the veterinarian does this, your puppy won't be scared or object to this normal part of its puppy care routine.

**Baby Wipes, Cotton Balls, or other soft items** for stimulating puppies to potty.

**Other things we use:**



Bene-bac Plus – 1 scoop per 4 oz. of formula. This is to be used right from the start and you will continue using it until puppy is weaned onto kibble.



Gerber Rice Cereal – we start with 1/8 tsp. per 4 oz. of formula at 5-7 days old and gradually increase to 1/4 tsp per 4 oz. over a period of a few days. (Between 3-4 weeks, when we’re mixing 8 oz. of formula at a time, we have used as much as ¾ tsp per 8 oz. of formula but we don’t do this all the time. We usually stay at about ½ tsp per 8 oz. until weaned.) Adding the cereal is thought to help with diarrhea and possibly spitting up.

We have also added a high quality canned puppy food to the formula (at the direction of our vet) to

help with puppies that spit up a lot. We can discuss adding this if spitting is a problem. We started

this between 2-3 weeks old and began with a very small amount, 1/8 tsp. per 4 oz. of formula and

worked our way up to a heaping tsp. (You will need the bigger tube for this – 8 French Catheter

Tube.) Some rescuers put puppy kibble in a blender and make a powder out of it and then turn that

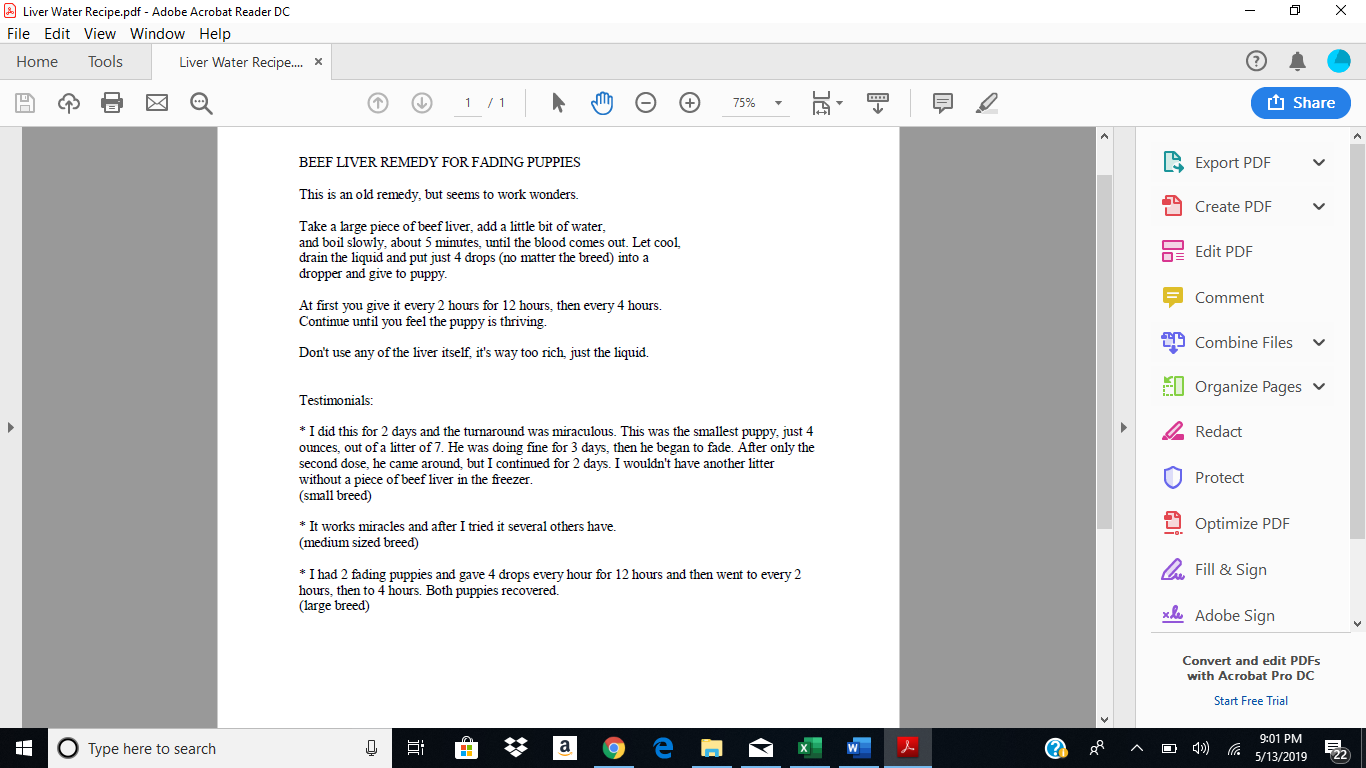
into a mush for tube feeding if they have a puppy struggling to gain weight. (do NOT allow the puppy

to eat this… ONLY for tubing). We have not tried this, but if we ever felt the need we would introduce

this extremely slowly to not create digestive issues. You will probably need a 10 french catheter tube

for this to avoid clogging. Please talk this over with a rescue representative before trying this.

**Liver Water** – We ALWAYS have either liver or premade liver water in our freezers. It has been a life saver for puppies on many occasions. Please see recipe below:



**FEEDING:**

**ALWAYS MAKE SURE YOUR PUPPY IS WARM AND FORMULA ARE WARM BEFORE FEEDING! Feeding a cold puppy or feeding cold formula will shut down the digestive system and likely kill your puppy.**

**Potty the puppy first so you are not causing excitement and excessive movement after feeding; risking vomiting or spitting**

**We suggest always swaddling the puppy before feeding. It makes tube feeding much easier for you and the puppy. Swaddle and then give pup a few minutes to settle down, then tube.**

**ALWAYS warm the formula and test the temperature on your wrist. You want it slightly warm to your skin. Do NOT warm formula in microwave. Heat water and draw formula into a syringe and place syringe of formula in warm water until desired temperature.**

You start with weighing the puppy and finding out how many ounces it weighs. You then tube feed it slightly more than ½ ml per oz. Example... a 10 oz puppy will get 6 ml of formula for the first feeding. If that goes well, in 2 hours you will give 6 ml of formula and 2 hours after that you will give 7 ml of formula. You will then stay at 7ml for another feeding or 2 (feedings are every two hours apart). You then gradually increase, approximately a ½ ml more of formula every 2-4 feedings.

It kind of looks like this…

A 10 oz puppy first feeding at 6AM –

6AM feed 6 ml of formula

8AM feed 6 ml

10AM feed 7 ml

12PM feed 7 ml

2PM feed 7ml

4PM feed 7 ½ ml

6PM feed 7 ½ ml – also weigh and record weight

8PM feed 8 ml

10 PM feed 8 ml

12AM feed 8 ml

2AM feed 8 ml

4AM feed 8 ½ ml

6AM feed 8 ½ ml – also weigh and record weight

8AM feed 8 ½ ml

10AM feed 8 ½ ml

12PM feed 9 ml

2PM feed 9 ml

4PM feed 9 ml

6PM Ifeed 9 ml – also weigh and record weight

At this point, if all is well, you will stay at 9 ml for another 3 or 4 feedings then go up to 9 ½ ml for another 4-8 feedings and so on. Weigh the puppy using the guidelines in the weighing section of this protocol. Watching the weight of the puppy carefully will help you decide when to increase. Just make sure your increases are done slowly and you hold steady for a few feedings before increasing again.

You do not want to over feed and risk spitting up or vomiting BUT you also don’t want to under-feed and risk dehydration, low sugar levels, and improper nutrition. Tube slowly, stop halfway and burp the puppy. Usually you just have to put the puppy upright on your shoulder and very gently rub it’s back to produce a burp. Continue feeding and burp again when you finish tube feeding. I usually hold pup in upright position for a few minutes after the feeding and then prop on a blanket or stuffed animal in an upright position to try and prevent spitting up.

The goal most rescuers recommend is 1ml of formula per 1oz of body weight. Honestly, we rarely accomplish that. We’re usually 1-3 ml behind the goal and we have not had a problem with that. Most of the time we are behind because we have a puppy that spits up and we need to back off the amount a bit or hold steady with the same amount for a longer period of time. When they get older and bigger sometimes we are even further behind in that goal. The true key is watching the weight gain of the puppy, carefully watch for signs of dehydration and making sure you keep to the feeding schedule for proper sugar levels and nutrition.

Puppies feed almost continuously on their mother at first and this insures proper blood sugar regulation, proper hydration, and nutrition. Because of this, tube feeding should be done every two hours around the clock for at least the first 5 days. THIS IS DIFFICULT BUT WORTH IT!! When that alarm goes off, put your feet on the FLOOR! After your feet hit the floor, you’ll be ok and able to do this. Just get those feet on the floor before shutting off the alarm.

**Feeding Schedule Our Fosters Agree To Follow**

1st week (at least first 5 days)– every 2 hours around the clock

2nd and 3rd week – ONLY if the puppy is doing well, we feed every 2 ½ - 3 hours during waking hours and every 3 hours during the night. You need to carefully watch your puppy for signs of dehydration and proper weight gain.

Watch your puppy’s pee for signs of dehydration. You want to see a very light yellow pee. If the pee starts to look a deeper shade of yellow, you may need to increase your feedings or even consider sub q fluids. Please contact a rescue representative if you are concerned and need help making a decision to use sub-q fluids.

At 3 ½ - 4 weeks, we usually start kibble. We put a small amount of kibble in a bowl and coat with formula or water. Let it stand for 5-15 minutes and completely drain. We place the puppy in a quiet place and do not allow any other dogs or puppies around it. Put the bowl in front of the puppy and encourage it to smell and taste the kibble. We find most start eating on their own. On occasion you will have to hand feed 1 piece at a time for a few days until it gets the hang of it. We placed one piece of kibble in the mouth and then allowed them to suck on your finger until kibble is swallowed. Again, most just start licking at the kibble and then eating it on their own. Note – the quiet space without other animals is so the puppy will not eat quickly and therefore is less likely to choke.

* Size of kibble matters!! Discuss kibble to be used with a rescue representative. This will depend on breed and size of pup and size of cleft palate. We choose kibble slightly larger than the cleft opening to help avoid it easily going up into the cleft and getting stuck.
* **Cleft puppies sneeze more than other dogs and may sometimes gag, cough, or make choking sounds. For all dogs, not just clefts... as long as a dog is making noise keep your fingers out of their mouths and allow them to work it out on their own. You can push something deeper into their throat and kill them. Only intervene if they can no longer make a sound and are unable to breath. We always suggest a dog CPR class but if you can’t do that, please watch reputable YouTube videos on how to help your dog.**
* Do NOT feed cleft palate puppies mushy or sticky (peanut butter type) food of any kind, at any age; it will go into their cleft and can cause aspiration. If your puppy accidentally gets into mushy food, immediately loosen the food that packed into the cleft with a Q-tips, soft bristle toothbrush or something similar using a forward motion as to not push it into their throat. Your goal is to loosen the impacted food, not actually clean the cleft, MOST of the time they will be able to clear it themselves after you loosen what is impacted.
* If an object is stuck in their cleft, we first allow them to try and work it out themselves. If they cannot, try using a Q-tip, soft bristle toothbrush or the tube to loosen what is stuck. Always use a back to front movement so debris is not pushed into the throat. You can also carefully attempt to flush the cleft with warm water if necessary. MOST of the time they will be able to clear it themselves.

At the same time as starting kibble, we also hang a water bottle on the puppy’s playpen and start encouraging the puppy to lick at it. We place the water bottle at a level the puppy can easily reach but also must tilt their head slightly upward. We use a rabbit water bottle but there are many kinds of bottles on the market to choose from.

**When starting kibble your common sense will be crucial.** It’s a balance of kibble, tube feeding, and water consumption. The puppy needs hydration and nutrition. You have your eyes on that puppy and need to make decisions based on what you are seeing. How much kibble is the puppy actually eating? Is the puppy drinking from the water bottle; if so, how much? When to give kibble and when to tube? These are all questions you need to answer based on your puppy. We feed kibble halfway between scheduled tube feedings to start. At first they are not eating much so we tend to tube feed normally. We don’t tube feed and kibble feed at the same sitting because we don’t want to risk over feeding, so we stagger those feedings. We offer kibble 4 times a day at this age. As the puppy starts eating more and using the water bottle consistently, we gradually decrease the tube feedings. The puppies in our care are usually completely weaned off tube feeding somewhere between 5 and 6 weeks old. Again, this is decided based on the puppy you are working with. Talk to a rescue representative about your puppy and allow them to help you make decisions about this transitional time.

If you are fostering an older puppy you will be expected to encourage 3-4 meals a day and can add pumpkin or full fat Greek yogurt (stirring completely with kibble). We also require the puppy has access to food all day long so please leave dry kibble in a bowl between meals. We also expect water to be provided all day. **No food or water restrictions are allowed by our organization.**

At approximately 7 weeks, we start introducing the water bowl. We want them to gradually start using that until they no longer need the bottle. Our puppies are only using the bowl to drink when they leave here. We don’t want to risk them not knowing how to drink normally if they should get away from their new owners.

**SUPPLEMENTS:**

Our puppies are normally on supplements recommended by our veterinarian. The supplements we most often use are Benebac Plus (when formula feeding), Standard Process Prosynbiotics (after kibble is started) and Epimedium Tea Pills and/or Thymex. If you have not been provided these supplements by 3 weeks of age, please remind a rescue representative.

We do encourage our adopters to continue use after adoption at least until they see their vet.

**WEIGHING:**

**Documenting weights in a notebook is REQUIRED according to the schedule below.**

Weigh the puppy often, it’s important to know your puppy is gaining.

1st week - Weigh 2 times a day

2nd week – eating kibble - Weigh 1 -2 times a day depending on how pup is doing.

After kibble is introduced we weigh every day for the first 5-7 days and then every other day and gradually move toward weighing once a week. Get yourself a notebook and record all weights; the rescue reserves the right to ask to see your notes.

**WORMING, PUPPY CHECK UP AND VACCINES:**

**Documenting wormings are required in your weight notebook.**

We worm using pyrantel at 2 weeks and worm using Panacur at 4 weeks and 6 weeks. (It is the fosters responsibility to let a representative know if they have not received the wormer.)

Heartworm prevention is started the 1st of the month after turning 8 weeks old. Heartworm medication will be provided and must be given monthly. Please remind a representative if you did not receive heartworm medication.

First puppy appointment is usually scheduled between 7-8 weeks of age. At this appointment, we have a full exam and give a puppy vaccine which does NOT include leptospirosis. We also do NOT give the Bordetella vaccine. Puppy’s heart should be carefully listened to because we have had quite a few heart murmurs detected. We also do preliminary blood work during this visit. (a rescue representative will discuss all this before your puppy visit so your vet will know exactly what we want to have done)

**SINUS INFECTIONS OR ASPIRATION:**

As puppies, they are more likely to have sinus infections and possibly get things stuck in their cleft. If something is stuck in their cleft we first allow them to try and work it out themselves. If they cannot, try using a Q-tip, soft bristle toothbrush or the tube to loosen what is stuck. Always use a back to front movement so debris is not pushed into the throat. MOST of the time they will be able to clear it themselves. If you suspect a sinus infection (yellow or green snot is being seen or a bad odor) please contact a rescue representative so they can schedule a vet appt. We usually use either amoxicillin or clavamox for sinus infections.

If the puppy aspirates, you may need a stronger antibiotic. Breathing treatments work well by using your nebulizer and saline tubes.

**THINGS TO KNOW**:

As puppies, clefts are more likely to have sinus infections and possibly get things stuck in their cleft but often these tendencies are outgrown.

Most cleft puppies/dogs never need cleft surgery. If you are being told surgery is required, seek an experienced second opinion. Both our local vet and a vet we’ve seen at NC State believe “If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.” In other words, if there aren’t chronic infections or other complications, leave it alone. The puppies do not know they are different and most often adjust to their deformity by the time they are full grown. Many cleft surgeries fail and that can make matters worse than they were before. Please seek an experienced vet(s) or have your vet call either one of mine for advice. They would be more than happy to talk to your vet. Our rescue’s adoption contract has a clause stating one of our experienced vets have final say if surgery is actually needed. This prevents our adopters from being pressured into unnecessary surgery and risking the pups health further.

**ADOPTION:**

Adoption is usually between 10-14 weeks old. (It can be as early as 8 weeks but we do not say that to potential adopters because these babies rarely are adopted that early.)

Our fosters often have first right to adopt the puppy in their care (this is a case by case basis) and we also give our fosters the ability to assist with the screening of potential adopters for the puppy but the final decision will be made by a rescue representative. Foster adoption policies are listed in your foster agreement.

Depending on the breed, we normally do have a waiting list

Home visits, vet references and personal references are required.

**Questions or Problems? Never hesitate to reach out to a rescue representative... Jodi can be reached at 704-287-4845 please text or call no matter the time. You will also be given other helpful numbers when you get started.**

We would like you to join the group “Cleft Palate and Cleft Lip Pups Help & Rescue” on Facebook. There are many experienced cleft rescuers in the group. **Our rescue’s protocol is to be followed and not confused with other’s opinions but if you can’t get a hold of one of our representatives please reach out to one of the Admins in that group.**

Please always consult our veterinarian or an approved veterinarian for medical advice.

Thank you for choosing life for a cleft puppy! #worthsaving #savetheclefts