

Module 14

Companion Animal Management



This lecture was first developed for **World Animal Protection** by Dr David Main (University of Bristol) in 2003. It was revised by **World Animal Protection** scientific advisors in 2012 using updates provided by Dr Caroline Hewson.

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This module will teach you

**About the common welfare problems
with companion animals**

Why these problems arise

**How vets can help improve the welfare
of companion animals**

- ✦ **In clinical consultations in practice**
- ✦ **By helping to control overpopulation of dogs and cats, especially strays**

What are companion animals?

Domestic species kept primarily to provide humans with social contact and pleasure, rather than performing a task or producing (McGreevy & Bennett, 2010)

'Pets'

- ⌘ **Dogs and cats, including strays (i.e. roaming animals)**
- ⌘ **Also fish, birds, reptiles, small mammals (rabbits etc.) and horses**

Common welfare problems 1

Owned dogs and cats

- **Lack of regular care** ⇒ parasites, malnutrition, infectious disease, injuries, multiple litters
- **Undesirable behaviours because of poor animal-related education etc. Examples:**
 - Iran (Khoshnegah et al., 2011)
 - Most common reason for euthanasia in USA and other countries
- **Illnesses because of breed-specific genetic traits** (eg Asher et al., 2009; Summers et al., 2010)
- **Obesity (German, 2010)**
- UFAW Genetic Welfare Problems Database (UFAW, 2012)

Common welfare problems 2

Birds, fish, reptiles

- ❖ **Poor husbandry, e.g. diet, housing**
- ❖ **Behavioural needs not met**
- ❖ **Many not suitable as companion animals**
- Eg psittaciformes (parrots, etc.) not generally suitable (Engebretson, 2006)
- See Schuppli and Fraser (2000) for review.
- Eg small mammals (rabbits, hamsters, chinchillas, etc.)

Potential lifespan of pet rabbit is ~13 years, but average ~4 years (Schepers et al., 2009)

- Most health problems (dentistry, digestion) related to diet (Sayers, 2010)

Why do companion animals have poor welfare?

Pet ownership and marketing (McGreevy & Bennett, 2010)

Ignorance

Poverty

Uncontrolled reproduction

How vets can help: in clinical consultations (Yeates, 2011)

Health

Prevent and treat disease;
routine neutering and permanent
identification

Social needs

For example, housed with
conspecifics (eg rabbit) or solitary
(eg cat)

Nutrition

Suitable diet to avoid obesity,
dental problems, etc.

Environment

Space; stimulation

Behaviour

Training; species-typical
behaviours, eg flying

How vets can help: neutering

Recommend neutering of pets



How vets can help: permanent identification

Basis of registration

Proof of ownership

Veterinary certification

- Proof of vaccination status
- Hereditary disease control schemes

Recovery of lost pets

Pet owners need education and your encouragement; e.g. US study

- Most pets did not have identification
- Would go to vet for this (Slater et al., 2012)



Credit: Ray Butcher

Tattoos and microchips



Tattoos



Credit: Ray Butcher

Microchips

Tags?

Cats lose them easily

**Easy to read if no access to a scanner
or central database**

Case study: Hurricane Katrina, USA, 2005

<1 per cent of dogs had tags or microchips



Responsible ownership in communities

Community dogs

Culturally sensitive approaches

Kathmandu vs. northern Australia

(Donelan, 2005)



Summary so far

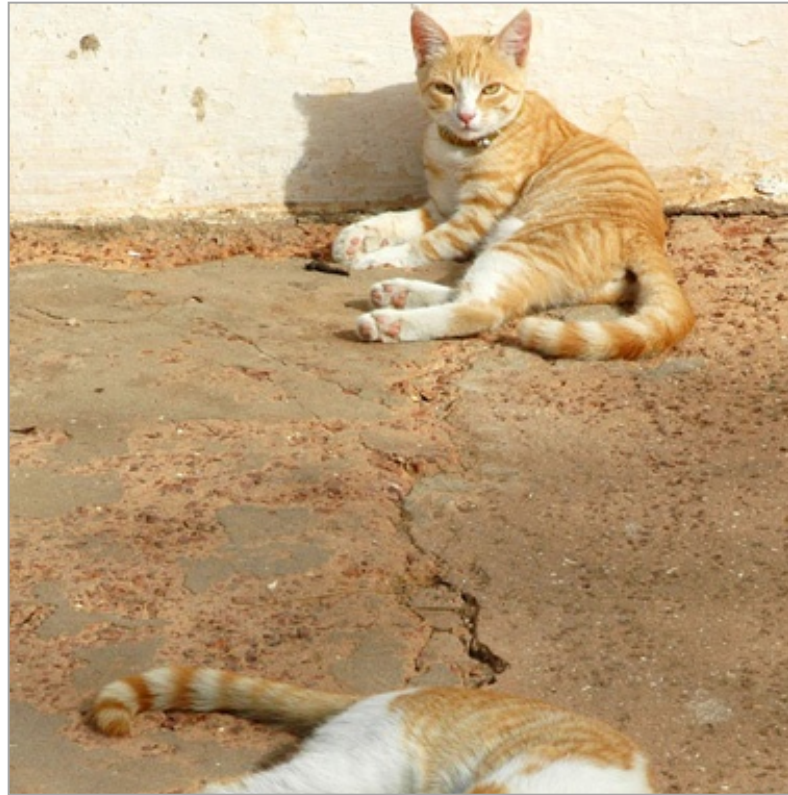
The common welfare problems with companion animals

Why these problems arise

How vets can help improve the welfare of companion animals

- ⌘ In clinical consultations in practice
- ⌘ Helping to control the overpopulation of dogs and cats, especially strays (cf. OIE study - Stafford & Mellor, 2009)

The welfare of strays



The welfare of strays

Possible lack of food and water

Parasitic and infectious disease

Injury

Fear and distress



Wider problems with stray dogs and cats

Direct physical injury to humans, their pets or their livestock (eg Lunney et al., 2011)

Indirect injury as a result of road traffic accidents

Reservoir of disease to humans and their pets

- ▣ Rabies
- ▣ Leishmania (HIV sufferers)

Pollution from faeces, urine, etc.

General nuisance, eg noise

The size of the problem

Estimates of dog population worldwide are variable but usually around 10 per cent that of the human population in Asia and Africa (Knobel et al., 2007)

A large majority of these dogs are roaming dogs



Added pressure in areas where rabies is endemic

Loss of human and animal life

Fear of the disease

Dogs responsible for ~90 per cent of human deaths from rabies (Knobel et al., 2007)

Cost / availability of vaccination

Cost / availability of post-exposure therapy



Stakeholders in resolving the problem of strays

Direct stakeholders

- ❖ Stray dogs or cats
- ❖ Pet animals / owners
- ❖ Those in contact with wild animals
- ❖ Those in contact with domestic animals / farmers
- ❖ Those working with human society in relation to health

Indirect stakeholders

- ❖ Municipalities
- ❖ Human and animal health ministries
- ❖ Veterinarians
- ❖ Animal protection societies
- ❖ Educators

The role of vets

Helping manage overpopulation of strays

Leadership with regard to mass killing



Why mass killing is ineffective

The population density that a particular environment can sustain is related to the availability of food

Killing large numbers of dogs will increase the relative amount of food available to the survivors

- ❖ **Leads to increased fertility and survival**
- ❖ **Attracts dogs from other areas**

Other problems with mass killing

Often inhumane methods

❖ **Makes inhumanity 'normal'**

Indiscriminate

Risks to pets and humans

Alienates sections of society

Ignores some 'stakeholders'

Encourages inhumane treatment?



Mass killing: links to violence

**Strong link between animal abuse
and violence to humans (Benetato et al., 2011)**

Mass killing encourages violence in society



The role of vets: a practical stray control programme

Accurately assess the nature of the problem

Balance the need for retaining the benefits of pet ownership while addressing the stray animal problem

Take account of all 'stakeholders'

Coordinate the activities of all appropriate groups and providing advice

Employ humane methods only

Change attitudes by education

Assess the nature of the problem: population studies

**Essential to estimate the population
accurately *before* selecting the protocol**

**Methodology must be standardised
to allow comparison of results**

**Most important use of studies:
which animals are owned and
which are not owned**

**Monitor your programme by
repeating the population surveys**

Populations of strays (i.e. roaming dogs)

Owned dogs

- ❖ **Accidentally lost, or**
- ❖ **Allowed to roam freely, or**
- ❖ **Abandoned**

'Community' dogs

Feral dogs



Credit: Ray Butcher



Credit: Ray Butcher



Credit: Ray Butcher

International Companion Animal Management Coalition Guidelines (2009)

Legislation

Registration and identification

Garbage control

Neutering

- ❖ **Owned animals**
- ❖ **Non-owned animals**

Control of breeders / sales outlets

Education



Legislation

Realistic, practical and clear

Balance the need for penalties with education

Enforcement

- ▣ **Generally requires clear proof of ownership, i.e. identification**

Registration and identification

Basis for legislation

Allows instant differentiation of owned and non-owned animals

- ⌘ Rapid return of lost pets
- ⌘ Recognition of abandonment
- ⌘ Monitoring of vaccination

Improved population census



Credit: Ray Butcher



Ear-notching



Credit: Ray Butcher

Ear-tagging

Garbage collection

Availability of food determines population size

Poor hygiene in slaughterhouses, butchers and food outlets increases public health risk

Private contractors

- ▣ **More effective?**
- ▣ **More expensive**



A role for feeding stations?



Neutering

Owned animals

Non-owned animals

- ❖ Neutering prior to re-homing
- ❖ ‘Neuter and release’ programmes for community or feral animals



Neuter and release programmes: the rationale

- ❖ **Involves the capture, neutering, identification and vaccination of strays and their release to the same site**
- ❖ **Popular where the environment and culture are such that a population of strays is inevitable**
- ❖ **Replacement of an uncontrolled, potentially dangerous population with a smaller, non-breeding and vaccinated one**
- ❖ **Generally more accepted and feasible for cats than dogs**

Neuter and release programmes: the requirements

- ❖ **Part of an overall agreed programme**
- ❖ **The support of the local authority and community**
- ❖ **Ensure food availability**
- ❖ **Capacity to deal with sufficient animals in the locality**
- ❖ **Not suitable in all situations**
- ❖ **Welfare is a consideration at all stages**





Credit: Ray Butcher



Credit: Ray Butcher



Credit: Ray Butcher

Paediatric neutering?

6–14 weeks old

Needs appropriate anaesthesia and knowledge

Young animals are more sensitive to drugs

Limited cardiovascular compensation

Not suitable for many shelters

See Griffin (2005a); Joyce and Yates (2011)

Non-surgical neutering?

Chemical castration (Griffin, 2005a)

- ❖ **Neutersol®: zinc compound**
- ❖ **Intra-testicular injection (using insulin syringe)**
from 3 to 10 months old; also adults
- ❖ **Sclerosis of testes, permanent sterility**

Contraceptive vaccines (Levy, 2011)

- ❖ **GnRH**
- ❖ **Zona pellucida**

Review

Control of markets / pet shops

Uncontrolled sales outlets likely to result in overproduction

Increased risk that animals may be abandoned in the future

Sale of pets should incorporate some education to encourage responsibilities

Control is essential



The pet trade: basic requirements

- ❖ **To help the potential pet owner select the most appropriate pet, considering his or her individual needs and circumstances**
- ❖ **Provide him or her with all the information necessary to be a responsible pet owner**



Education: promotion of responsible pet ownership

- ❖ The major challenge for a successful programme
- ❖ All agencies have a role to play
- ❖ All agencies should give the same message





Credit: RSPCA



Credit: Ray Butcher

Your role as a vet (Griffin, 2005b)

To promote responsible ownership

- ❖ Neutering, permanent identification
- ❖ Education regarding husbandry
- ❖ Education regarding whether an animal is suitable as a pet
- ❖ Promotion of humane methods of dog training and behaviour modification

To provide behavioural counselling

To work with shelters, public officials, etc. to devise and implement control programmes for strays

Feedback:

Please let us know what you think

- ❖ How have you used this module?
- ❖ What did you like about it?
- ❖ What did you not like?
- ❖ Do you have any tips to share?

Please take part in our 10 minute survey here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BKP3D6H>

Your feedback will help other teachers like you

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