

## Reports and Comments

### New Zealand Veterinary Association release research Report to address cat population

Cats — whether feral, stray, or companion — may have a significant impact through predation of wildlife in New Zealand. Animals killed by cats include non-native bird and rodent species, reptiles and invertebrates, as well as native birds which may be threatened or endangered.

New Zealand has a high cat-ownership rate, at 1.4 million pet cats, and it is estimated that they alone prey on between 19–44 million animals per year. On the other hand the stray cat population of New Zealand is thought to be around 196,000 individuals preying on between 15–33 million animals per year.

A poorly managed cat population also has an impact on the cats themselves: stray cats may be cared for by members of the public but most are unlikely to receive veterinary care or regular feeding, and so tend to have shorter lives and reduced welfare due to disease, injury and malnutrition.

The New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA) has released a literature review to help develop workable, evidence-based solutions to address the country's issues around cat management. The review looked at peer-reviewed publications in New Zealand and overseas concerning cat predation and population management.

While current strategies to manage the cat population and to protect our wildlife are helpful, the review concludes that further actions are needed to dramatically decrease the number of stray cats in New Zealand.

There is no national strategy for cat management in New Zealand. When it comes to stray cats, a common solution is removal and adoption or euthanasia. However, the number of households willing to adopt is a limited resource; given that 48% of them already own cats. Some organisations, such as the Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RNZSPCA) or smaller local cat rescue groups, have been employing a strategy of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) in order to lower or eliminate the rate of euthanasia of healthy animals.

Feral cats, ie cats that live far from centres of human habitation and have none of their needs provided by humans, are managed by lethal means including trapping, shooting and poisoning. Lethal management of feral cats is generally supported by the New Zealand public (far more than lethal control of stray cats), as necessary to protect native wildlife.

The review's authors suggest that Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) can work in very specific and localised circumstances but is unlikely to present a viable option for long-term cat population management at a regional or national level. It is expensive, does not slow predation on wildlife, and does not prevent the spread of disease.

The review also suggested that the economic burden of managing unowned cats may outstrip the capacity of charitable organisations. NZVA considers that many veterinary

clinics are already playing their part, regularly providing veterinary care for stray cats, and often for free.

A range of options are suggested in the Report including existing strategies such as adoption and where appropriate euthanasia which it acknowledges will be controversial.

Other possible options outlined include stricter regulation, better identification measures, such as microchipping, collars and registration, the promotion of partial or complete indoor-cat lifestyles, and de-sexing. Current research suggests cats in New Zealand are unlikely to be provided with a collar, and even less so one with an attached bell.

The NZVA is supporting a collaborative, national approach to the issues, beginning with a national forum of key parties this year.

**A Systematic Review of the Impacts of Feral, Stray and Companion Domestic Cats (*Felis catus*) on Wildlife in New Zealand and Options for their Management** (October 2013). A4, 86 pages. Available at: <http://www.nzva.org.nz/sites/default/files/domain-0/NZVA%20Report%20Cat%20Predation.pdf>.

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### Monitoring and evaluating dog population management interventions

Managing dog populations is of concern to communities across the globe and there are many approaches. This document, put together by the International Companion Animal Management Coalition — a group of animal-orientated NGOs — is a welcome addition to the field as it addresses the neglected aspect of monitoring and evaluating the impact of an intervention and deciding whether it has met its targets. The Report argues that a scientific, evidenced-based approach to managing dog populations, allows for better strategy and policy decisions.

The guide does not prescribe the nature of an intervention, nor what the target for success should be (For guidance on such, a previous publication *Humane Management of Dog Populations ICAM Coalition* [2008] should be consulted). Rather, it details the indicators that could be used to measure impact, whatever its nature; eg sterilisation, vaccination, parasite control, sheltering, adoption or euthanasia.

Split into five sections, the guide begins by laying out the case for monitoring and evaluating the impact of an intervention and the need to collect data routinely and systematically to ensure that interventions are effective at controlling dog populations and that they meet the communities' needs.

Section two addresses the indicators that can be used to measure eight common impacts targeted by common dog population management interventions. These include: improving dog welfare; improving care/resources provided to dogs; reducing dog density/turnover; improving public perception; and reducing the negative impact of dogs on wildlife.

For each of the eight impacts, a number of different indicators of success are detailed. Those which have been well-used, tested and validated are listed as '*recommended*', others that are more novel but which offer the possibility of effectively measuring impact are '*suggested*'.

As an example, 'Impact 1: Improving dog welfare (Animal-based indicators)' *recommends* using 'Body condition score' and 'Skin condition score' as physical health indicators, and *suggests* using 'Measuring specific disease or injury', 'Female:male ratios', and 'Culling of dogs by authorities'. For emotional well-being indicators, there are no recommend indicators but 'Dog-dog interactions' and 'Human-dog interactions' are *suggested*. For each indicator, there are a few paragraphs outlining what they assess and how they could be used.

Section three deals with 'Methods of measurement' and gives detailed descriptions and protocols for measuring the indicators previously outlined. These are split into seven different approaches: questionnaire surveys; participatory research; street surveys; secondary sources of information; clinical records; behavioural observation; and vaccination coverage, and aim to allow those new to the method to understand the reasons for its use and its limitations and scope. The guide directs those using a method to other resources, where they exist, eg database packages, etc, that may prove of help.

The fourth section is on 'Making your impact assessment robust' and highlights other factors that need to be kept in mind

when analysing the data collected to ensure that the conclusions drawn from the impact assessment are as robust as possible. As with the other sections, this one encourages engagement with and use of academics, veterinarians and others in the monitoring and evaluation of the intervention.

Finally, the last section contains references to support the recommendations given, with examples of questionnaires and recording sheets to use with the methods detailed in section three.

In that it allows those new to dog population management interventions, and those that are more experienced, to understand the need for effective monitoring, this guide is a welcome addition to the literature. It should improve practice, help identify those interventions that are most successful, and encourage the better identification of end-points, ie when an intervention has met its goal. The authors are keen however that the guide be seen as a working document and that those who take on board its advice and suggestions give feedback on their utility, through the Coalition's website.

**Are we making a difference? A Guide to Monitoring and Evaluating Dog Population Management Interventions. International Companion Animal Management Coalition (ICAM)** (March 2015). A4, 129 pages. Available at: [http://www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/ICAM\\_Guidance\\_Document.pdf](http://www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/ICAM_Guidance_Document.pdf).

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