

Preliminary Results From a Survey of Working Dog Veterinary Visits

Nick Cave

Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Biomedical Sciences, Massey University,
Private Bag 11-222, Palmerston North

New Zealand has around 200,000 working farm dogs, which may be more than any other country, and pastoral farming would be virtually impossible without the working dog so it is of paramount importance to the industry. Despite that, little research has been performed on any aspect of working dogs and their working conditions, with the exception of a few enthusiastic practitioners.

It is not assumed that NZ working farm dog problems are the same as those of companion animals, but knowledge on the frequency of specific traumatic events, or diseases, is only anecdotal. It is possible that certain diseases are unique to working farm dogs (e.g. cutaneous or abdominal Nocardiosis), or have a regional distribution. It is also possible that diseases, previously thought to be uncommon, are much more common (e.g. hip dysplasia). It is also likely that a better understanding of the conditions affecting working farm dogs will enable more focused research into cause and prevention, whether the conditions are traumatic, medical, or behavioural in nature. Thus it was proposed that a survey of reasons for presenting working farm dogs to veterinary practices across New Zealand would be an important foundation for future study.

Practices were recruited in a non-random manner on the basis of geography, rural location, size, and willingness to participate. A request to participate was sent to 66 practices across the entire country by mail. Participating practices were given survey forms, with the request that one form be completed for each working farm dog presented. The survey form used is presented as an appendix below. The survey was conducted from March 2008 to April 2009.

A total of 32 practices agreed to participate, covering all the major rural areas of New Zealand. A total of 2657 dog visits were reported from all regions of the country, but with a heavy bias towards Gisborne/East Coast, Manawatu/Wanganui, Canterbury, and Southland. This bias reflected a combination of the distribution of working dogs, and the location of strongly participating practices.

Summary statistics are presented in the tables below. Not surprisingly, musculoskeletal disease was the largest category of presenting complaints, and trauma was the most common cause of musculoskeletal disease, being a reason for 858 visits (38% of total visits). A more detailed analysis of some aspects of the survey will be presented at the conference.

Table 1. Geographic distribution of veterinary visits

| Region | Percentage of total visits |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| East Coast | 28.2% |
| Manawatu-Wanganui | 19.6% |
| Canterbury | 15.3% |
| Southland | 12.4% |
| Hawkes Bay | 8.7% |
| Marlborough | 5.0% |
| Central Plateau | 3.2% |
| Taranaki | 2.8% |
| Otago | 1.7% |
| Wairarapa | 1.1% |
| Auckland | 1% |
| Waikato | 0.6% |
| Northland | 0.4% |
| West Coast | 0.1% |

Table 2. General categorisation for the presenting conditions

| Disease category | Percentage of total visits |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Musculoskeletal | 27.1% |
| Dermatology and ears | 24.0% |
| Miscellaneous | 17.2% |
| Gastrointestinal system | 8.1% |
| Reproductive system | 7.3% |
| Special senses | 3.7% |
| General systemic diseases | 3.4% |
| Respiratory system | 2.7% |
| External ear disease | 2.6% |
| Urinary system | 1.4% |
| Nervous system | 0.8% |
| Haemopoietic and Lymphatic | 0.7% |
| Cardiovascular system | 0.5% |
| Behaviour | 0.3% |
| Endocrine system | 0.2% |

Table 3. Causes of trauma to working farm dogs

| Cause of trauma | Percentage of total trauma-related visits |
|------------------------|--|
| Unknown | 28.8% |
| Automotive | 17.9% |
| Injured by stock | 17.8% |
| Fence | 15.2% |
| Dog bite/fight | 10.7% |
| Fall (no vehicle) | 1.9% |
| Gunshot | 0.5% |



Date: / /

Veterinary Practice:

Patient Details

Breed: Heading dog Huntaway Beardie
Australian Heeler / Mearle Smithfield Cross-breed
Other (specify):

Age: Date of birth: / /

Sex: Entire male Castrated male Entire female Spayed female

Weight (if known):

Farm Type

Dairy Sheep and/or Beef Other (specify):

Visit Details

Final diagnosis (if known):
If diagnosis not known, give presenting problem(s).
.....
.....

Outcome of visit: Returned to work Euthanased / Died Retired

Is reason for visit related to trauma? Yes No

Location: Stock yards Farm race Paddock
Fence Milking shed Public road

Automotive: Tractor Quad bike
Motorbike Car

Other traumatic injury:
Human: Stock - kicked etc (specify species):
Other (specify):

Is this a revisit? Yes No Date when last seen: / /