

Session 23

Theatre 2

Characterisation of the size, origin and fate of un-owned pets in the United Kingdom: results of a 2010 census

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The pet population is in a constant state of flux, with estimates suggesting that 14-25% of pets are removed from their home every year, and only one third remain in their original home throughout their lives. Many of these animals are either abandoned or relinquished to the care of charitable organisations. Little data exists regarding these animals. The aim of this study was to characterise this population, and to document its origin and fate. A sampling frame was formed by searching the databases of registered charities for England, Scotland and Wales, registers of breed rescues and internet searches of animal welfare websites. Overall, 2,556 contacts for 1,420 organisations were identified. All were sent a questionnaire asking for data on the number of dogs and cats housed, their origins and fates, and details of husbandry during 2010. For those which were registered charities (582), their financial records for this period were also obtained. A total of 739 questionnaire responses were obtained, representing 502/1,420 (35.4%) of the organisations identified. These respondents cared for a total of 89,516 dogs in 2010. Most dogs (39%) were relinquished by their owner, or found straying (27.4%). Data were available for the eventual fate of 83404 dogs (93.2% of the total). The majority were rehomed (74.5%) or reunited with their owner (7.2%); however, 10.5% (8,864) dogs were euthanased. Respondents cared for a total of 157,163 cats, of which a similar proportion (9.4%, 14,800), were euthanased. Financial records were available for 525/582 (90.2%) of the registered charities. Their total expenditure in 2010 was £205,877,158. This study shows the scale of the un-owned pet problem, with considerable implications for the welfare of this population. The substantial numbers euthanased, despite the resources expended, suggests that further understanding of how and why pets become un-owned is essential.