

POSITION STATEMENT: Dog and cat population management and changing resource availability

Roaming dogs and cats need access to several resources to survive, including food, water and shelter. Many roaming dogs and cats will be owned roaming and hence will access these resources at home, however some will be unowned and will be reliant on finding these resources for themselves.

It is the reduction/manipulation of *food* resources that is sometimes proposed as a valid part of population management. Hence, this position statement focuses on changes in food resources for roaming dogs and cats. Changes to food resources may be proposed through the following 3 methods:

1. Improvement of organic solid waste management, thereby reducing overall food resources
2. Discouragement of feeding roaming animals, thereby reducing overall food resources.
3. Changes to local waste sources and feeding, which can change access and location of food resources rather than reducing the overall amount of resource. Including the creation of 'cat cafes'¹ and 'dog managed zones' and the opening/closing of food sources such as restaurants, abattoirs and food markets.

ICAM position:

- An improvement in organic solid waste management is an inevitable part of human development, driven by environmental and public health motivations. It is not appropriate nor necessary to demand improved organic solid waste management for the purpose of dog or cat population management.
- It is the role of dog and cat population management to ensure that roaming animals are not reliant on waste for their essential nutrition as waste management improves. This can be achieved through improving responsible ownership of owned animals and responsible care of community animals, including feeding, and a reduction in roaming dog and cat density through sterilisation and prevention of abandonment.

¹ Here we use the term 'cat cafes' to describe a feeding station for cats, rather than a cafe where people come to eat/drink and pet the cats that live there.

- Most waste has minimal nutritional value. However, there are specific situations where waste provides high value nutrition, most importantly protein, such as offal from slaughterhouses, butchers and fish markets. Where these are identified to provide an essential food resource for roaming dogs or cats, any reduction in this waste must be preceded with establishing alternative food resources. This is to avoid malnutrition, increased mortality, dispersal to other areas or changes in behaviour of roaming animals including increased defensive aggression over limited resources, and predatory behaviours.
- Feeding of roaming dogs and cats is an expression of compassion for animals and is a strongly defended action by many people. Feeding should not be discouraged.
- However, conflicts within communities over feeding can occur and should not be ignored. ICAM supports the responsible feeding of dogs and cats, including expectations of what, how and where animals are fed:
 - What
 - Feed nutritious and safe food (i.e. not contaminated or 'off').
 - How
 - Feed in containers. Do not place food directly on the floor.
 - Remove uneaten food within 2 hours.
 - Refresh water every day to prevent contamination and mosquitoes breeding.
 - Where
 - Feed in areas that are safe for the animal and minimise conflict with community members
 - Obey requests to feed in designated feeding areas and not in areas where feeding is prohibited (e.g. some nature reserves)
 - And...
 - All roaming animals should be vaccinated against rabies (this is not required in those countries with no risk of rabies²). Ideally, these animals are also vaccinated against other diseases and given regular parasite treatment.
 - All roaming animals should be sterilised, if these are owned animals, this must be with the consent of the owner.
 - Signs of medical distress require the prompt attention of a veterinarian or qualified animal health professional.

² UK Government list of rabies risk in terrestrial animals by country - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rabies-risks-by-country/rabies-risks-in-terrestrial-animals-by-country>

- Identification of individual animals helps with tracking these management actions and helps feeders communicate with each other about individual animals.
- ICAM acknowledges that this represents the ideal situation and individual feeders may not be able to fulfil all these requirements. However, for roaming animals that are fed by more than one person these may become possible if feeders act as a collective.
- Where more than one person is providing food, we recommend communication between feeders to coordinate feeding and management efforts, to ensure animals' needs are met.
- *Manipulation* of food resources can be used to reduce conflict with people, not by reducing waste or feeding, but by identifying low conflict and safe areas for feeding. This includes the use of feeding stations such as 'cat cafes'. These are combined with population management measures including sterilisation, vaccination and parasite control to reduce further conflict, improve animal welfare and reduce risks to public health (for example, 'dog managed zones').

We recognise the following as relevant to our position:

Waste

- Solid waste management has a significant impact on many important issues other than dog/cat populations; including air pollution, water contamination, soil erosion and greenhouse gas emissions. An improvement in solid waste management is a target of SDG 11 (sustainable cities) and has implications for SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 13 (climate action). An improvement in solid waste management is therefore an inevitable part of human development, in particular for urban environments. Waste management improvements will be driven by many powerful human development motivations and require no further motivations, such as a proposed impact on dog or cat populations.
- To the best of our collective knowledge, there are no publications, grey literature or anecdotes of solid waste management being improved for the purposes of population management of dogs or cats with a resulting impact on their numbers. Should such evidence exist, we would welcome the opportunity to learn more.
- Most waste available to roaming animals has low nutritional value and will be unable to support good welfare and successful reproduction. Animals reliant on such waste are likely to have poor visible welfare and to live short lives (1). Roaming animals in a reasonable welfare state, but seen feeding on such waste, will be accessing most of their nutrition through purposeful feeding. Either feeding by owners in the case of owned roaming animals, or from compassionate community members in the case of community animals. Cats may also gain nutrition from hunting, but dogs to a lesser extent as they are less proficient predators.

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- Even when waste has minimal nutritional value, dogs and cats will still forage as this is a highly motivated behaviour. Hence they are foraging to fulfil a desire not to meet their nutritional needs.
- In some cases, waste will be of high nutritional value. This is usually related to offal and carcass disposal outside slaughterhouses, butchers and fishing ports. In these situations, dogs and cats reliant on these food resources may be able to survive and breed successfully.

Carrying capacity

- *Carrying capacity* is the maximum number of roaming animals a given area can support with the resources it has available, including food, water, shelter and people's tolerance of roaming animals.
- A population at carrying capacity does not grow in size, although numbers may fluctuate about a central point, their reproduction and immigration will be approximately matched by mortality and emigration. Without limits on their reproduction (for example, through sterilisation programmes) this population will be stabilised through relatively high mortality and dispersal, which will be visible as a proportion of animals in poor welfare and relatively few puppies/kittens surviving to adulthood.
- If food resources are reduced, the carrying capacity is reduced and hence the maximum number of animals that can be supported in the area decreases. The population would then respond with increased mortality and emigration (if options to go elsewhere exist) and reduced reproductive output (smaller litter sizes and fewer litters). This increased mortality would be visible as a high proportion of animals with visibly poor welfare and nearly all puppies and kittens dying before they reach adulthood. There may also be behaviour changes in the roaming animals, including defensive aggression over the remaining limited resources, as they become more desperate for food.
 - Examples from COVID lockdowns (Humane Society International *pers comm*)
 - In India, COVID lockdowns led to a reduction in edible waste and feeding of dogs in market areas, tourist places, bus depots and railways stations. Roaming dogs were seen continuing to search for food in these areas, a greater proportion of these dogs appeared to be in emaciated body condition. Community members in other areas reported seeing new dogs in their areas, presumed to have dispersed from their usual territories in search of food.
 - In Nainital, COVID caused restaurants to close leading to a reduction in food waste previously provided to a local population of dogs. These dogs moved into forested areas in search of alternative food sources. Their behaviour was reported to then become more predatory and aggressive.

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Feeding

- As domesticated species, both dogs and cats typically depend on the resources provided by people to thrive. 'Feral' cats are an exception, having reverted from their domesticated state over some, or many, generations to be able to live independently of people and preferring to avoid human interaction to which they are unsocialised.
- Feeding of roaming dogs and cats can be an expression of compassion for animals, a way of experiencing a valued positive interaction with animals, a cultural norm and a religious practice. Requesting, and even legislating, that people stop feeding roaming animals is likely to be ineffective as this practice is likely to be strongly defended.
- Within communities, attitudes to roaming animals will be varied and conflict over feeding animals is not uncommon. These conflicts have the potential to lead to animal cruelty and social stress and should not be ignored.
- Examples of responsible feeding include:
 - o [Responsible feeding of stray cats in Singapore from the Cat Welfare Society](#)
 - o [Responsible feeding of stray dogs in Singapore from the Animal Welfare Groups \(AWGs\)](#)
 - o [Responsible feeding of stray cats and dogs in the Philippines](#)