
FREE-ROAMING DOGS AND CATS IN CENTRAL ITALY: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

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A telephone survey of randomly selected households was conducted in central Italy. The purpose was to obtain data on the locations, numbers and problems associated with free-roaming dogs and cats in the area. The response rate was 74% (397 households). Ninety percent of respondents reported that free-roaming dogs and cats were a problem. Personal safety was the most commonly reported concern, followed by animal welfare, public health and environmental sanitation. Sixty nine percent of respondents actually saw free-roaming dogs or cats in the areas they live. Dogs were most commonly seen, but cats were seen in greater numbers. Overall, 10% and 5% of respondents cared for free-roaming cats and dogs, respectively. These results confirm the presence of large numbers of free-roaming dogs and cats in the area. They also indicate concerns about animal welfare, which is consistent with legislation making it illegal to euthanize healthy animals. Respondents believed that the government had primary responsibility for these animals. Using the information from this study, research on the underlying causes of abandonment of dogs and cats or failing to sterilize them should undertaken to begin to address this problem. Funding for existing laws and new, carefully considered interventions are needed to address the sources of free-roaming dogs and cats and to handle existing homeless animals.