



**CENTRE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED VETERINARY MEDICINE**  
Putting research into practice

# How many dogs and cats are there in the UK?



The University of Nottingham

School of Veterinary Medicine and Science

Marnie Brennan and Rachel Dean

Steering Group: Vicki Adams, Lucy Asher, Dave Brodbelt, Karen Coyne, Martin Downes, Tim Gruffydd-Jones, Lisa Morrow, Jane Murray, Tim Parkin, Graham C. Smith

Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine, School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, The University of Nottingham, UK

Email: [marnie.brennan@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:marnie.brennan@nottingham.ac.uk)

## The issue

- The size of the dog and cat population in the United Kingdom is unknown
- Studies in various countries have tried several methods to estimate population size, including telephone surveys (Downes et al. 2009; Murray et al. 2010), postal questionnaires (Teske et al. 2002) and door to door interviewing (Westgarth et al. 2007)
- Many of these studies focus on the owned cat and dog population, and do not take into account unowned feral animals or animals in shelters. In addition, the methods used in some of the studies can be non-transparent, and potential biases unexplained or ignored
- Subsequently, the range of animals estimated can differ by several million and it is unknown how accurate these estimates are

## Why is it important?

- It assists us in determining a population baseline for calculating prevalence and incidence of diseases in the pet population – this was highlighted as important by the recent Bateson report on dog breeding ([www.dogbreedinginquiry.com](http://www.dogbreedinginquiry.com))
- It assists us in determining the possible impact of the introduction of exotic diseases, such as rabies, into the UK
- It assists organisations such as pet insurance companies to further determine disease risks and subsequent premiums

## Timeline: April 2008

- Meeting at BSAVA Congress in Birmingham instigated by Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) as part of the research on the potential impact of rabies in the UK
- Attended by representatives from veterinary research, pet charities, practicing vets, pet food manufacturers, pharmaceutical companies and pet insurance companies



## September 2009

- Follow-up meeting organised by the Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine at the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, The University of Nottingham
- Attended by representatives from Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), practice management software companies, pet charities, veterinary researchers, Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW), Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS), pharmaceutical companies and FERA
- Presentations by Dr Vicki Adams (Consultant Epidemiologist), Dr Jane Murray (University of Bristol), Dr James Aegerter (FERA), Mr Martin Downes (University College Dublin), Dr Susan Dawson (University of Liverpool) and Ms Jennifer Summers (Royal Veterinary College)
- Formed focus groups to discuss 3 main issues:

### Possible Methods?

- The Census (Office for National Statistics)
- Telephone surveys
- Capture-recapture
- Doorstep questionnaires in small areas
- Observational studies (non-owned population)
- Pet charity databases
- Pet food manufacturer databases
- Supermarket information on pet food sales
- Survey of school students

### Population structure and effect on knowns and unknowns?

- Owned animals:
  - Vet-visiting – Well known compared to other groups?
  - Non-vet visiting – What percentage of owned animals?
- Unowned animals:
  - Unowned/stray animals – Definition of unowned?
  - Feral animals – Definition of feral?

### How to move forward?

- Review the methodologies previously used
- Form a consortium/steering group
- Bring in other interested parties or stakeholders
- Engage the general public
- Increase awareness within the media

## November 2009

- Pet population steering group formed; it was decided that:
  - A methodological review and consolidation of the current research was required
  - Further exposure of the issue was needed and required a combined approach with several institutions involved

## February 2010

- Methodological systematic review started at the Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine by Dr Vicki Adams
- Press release planned for circulation in April 2010



## References

- Downes, M., Canty, M.J. and More, S.J. (2009) Demography of the pet dog and cat population on the island of Ireland and human factors influencing pet ownership. *Prev Vet Med*, **92**: 140-149
- Murray, J.K., Browne, W.J., Roberts A., Whitmarsh, A. and Gruffydd-Jones, T.J. (2010) Number and ownership profiles of cats and dogs in the UK. *Vet Rec*, **166**: 163-168
- Teske, E., van Knapen, F., Beijer, E.G.M. and Slappendel, R.J. (2003) Risk of infection with *Leishmania* spp. in the canine population in the Netherlands. *Acta vet scand*, **43**: 195-201
- Westgarth, C., Pinchbeck, G.L., Bradshaw, J.W.S., Dawson, S., Gaskell, R.M. and Christley, R.M. (2007) Factors associated with dog ownership and contact with dogs in a UK community. *BMC Vet Res*, **3**: 5