Introduction and Research Goals

In order to inform community cat management strategies and guide community outreach and education efforts, the Guelph Cat Population Taskforce surveyed Guelph residents to learn about community cats, determine attitudes and opinions about cats, and determine acceptable actions to address cat population concerns.

We investigated:
A. General opinions on community cats and their prevalence
B. Views and values concerning community cats: nuisance, public health, welfare, wildlife
C. Preferences for community cat management

Background

‘Community’ (free-roaming stray and feral) cats are ubiquitous in North American communities, but their presence and management can lead to conflict. There are often strong opinions on the acceptability of competing approaches such as trap-neuter-return and euthanasia. Community-specific engagement and consensus is required in order to draft policy and implement actions that are both humane and accepted by the community. Very little research has been conducted on community cats in the Canadian context.

Methods

The survey was administered in person in November 2014. Participants were recruited by volunteers at locations such as the Guelph Farmer’s Market, The Guelph Public Library, and several retail locations around the City. 116 participants completed the survey.

A qualitative analysis was completed to obtain the descriptive statistics of the data set. A qualitative analysis of open-ended questions was completed to evaluate participants’ perceptions, values, and preferences concerning community cats.

“Treat community cats humanely in the process”
“Cats are not the problem - owners are” (study participants)

COMMUNITY CATS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

Guelph Cat Population Taskforce Survey

The Guelph Cat Population Taskforce (http://www.guelphcats.org/) was founded in 2014 by stakeholders of the City of Guelph, the Guelph Humane Society, several departments at the University of Guelph and Ontario Veterinary College, a number of smaller animal rescues, and other interested organizations such as Nature Guelph. The GCPT is a collaborative, community-based initiative which aims to: support research on community cats; promote outreach, education, and community involvement; and eliminate the euthanasia of healthy cats.

Research Findings

Key findings from the survey include:
- There are an estimated 29,579 (95% CI: 22,089-39,610) owned cats in Guelph
- Approximately 8,054 (95% CI: 4,408-11,699) households in Guelph feed community cats
- 41% of respondents believe community cats are a problem in Guelph
- 53% of respondents believe the role of the Guelph Cat Population Taskforce should be to decrease the number of community cats
- 89% of respondents support Education as a tool to manage cat populations
- 81% of respondents support Trap-neuter-return as a tool to manage cat populations
- Only 21% of respondents support Euthanasia as a tool to manage cat populations
- “Always support prevention; euthanasia does not prevent” (participant)
- “Decrease only through adoption” (participant)

Conclusions

- 86% of participants indicated that the role of the Taskforce should be to decrease or stabilise the number of community cats
- Proactive strategies such as education and trap-neuter-return were well supported, while euthanasia or doing nothing were not
- Some participants were concerned with the nuisance impacts of cats, or their effects on wildlife/songbirds
- Many participants were concerned for the welfare of cats, and favoured humane management strategies

Researchers

Lauren Van Patter, Department of Geography (lvanpatter@uoguelph.ca)
Tyler Floodhart, Department of Integrative Biology (tfloodhart@uoguelph.ca)
Shane Batteman, Ontario Veterinary College: Clinical Studies (sbatteman@uoguelph.ca)