

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY VETERINARY SERVICES



STATUS & HEALTH OF ANIMALS IN REMOTE NORTHERN TERRITORY COMMUNITIES for 2012

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Aboriginal Community Veterinary Services

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About ACVS

Aboriginal Community Veterinary Services (ACVS) is a veterinary service provider to Aboriginal Communities throughout Australia, and developing nations in the Asia/Pacific region.

ACVS was formed in 2007 as an offshoot of Northern Territory Veterinary Services, a Katherine based veterinary practice that had been providing services to remote and indigenous communities for over 15 years. ACVS has strengthened their community animal services and developed resources for delivering dog programs to remote indigenous communities. ACVS continues to grow strongly helping communities to develop and deliver better and more effective dog programs.

The senior staff at ACVS have over 30 years combined experience in the delivery of veterinary services to remote and indigenous communities including extensive experience in setting up programs in communities that have not had one run before. ACVS has also helped many communities better design their dog programs to make them more cost effective and achieve better outcomes.

ACVS has provided a number of dog programs to a wide variety of communities in Australia ranging from Australia's coastal north to deep in central Australia. In fact, ACVS has performed over 250 multiday community programs throughout the Northern Territory in the past 5 years.

ACVS currently employs four full time Veterinary Surgeons, three full time Veterinary Nurses and two part time Veterinary Nurses.

About this Report

Since 2011, ACVS has increased the level of servicing to communities by providing detailed reports on the health status of animals in each community. As a result, we are able to produce a detailed report on the health status of animals in each remote community. From these reports, we can present a consolidated report on the status and health of animals in remote communities throughout the Northern Territory. This report compiles data from over 40 communities throughout the Northern Territory and is written by two of the leading experts in Animal Health Programs in remote Indigenous Communities, co-authors of the Community Dog Program Handbook (now available from Amazon Bookstores). We hope that you find this report of value and interest.

Sincerely,



Dr Alex Burleigh BSc(Vet)hons BVSc hons & Dr Samantha McMahon BVSc FAICD CMAVA

Animal Population Health & Status

Pet Household Densities

Even though household numbers of pet dogs in remote Indigenous Communities are generally quite high, the populations of dogs in the communities serviced by ACVS have been dropping steadily over the past 5 years (Figure 1). In fact, with regular veterinary animal health programs, dog populations have dropped by an average of 25% which anecdotally has led to healthier animals, reduction in pack formations and less attacks.

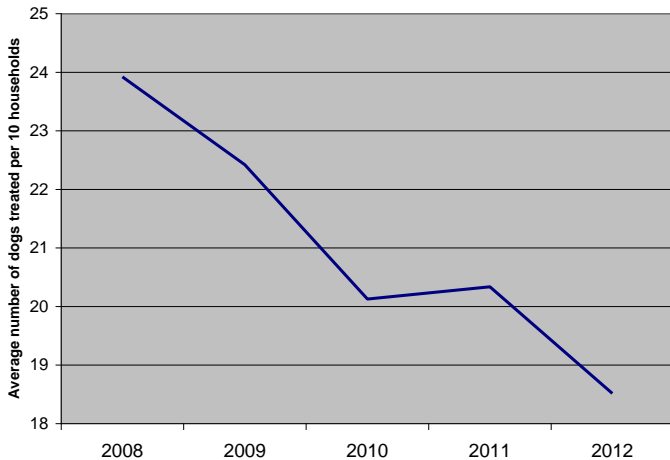


Figure 1. Yearly Average Household Density of Dogs in Remote Indigenous Communities in the NT © ACVS 2013

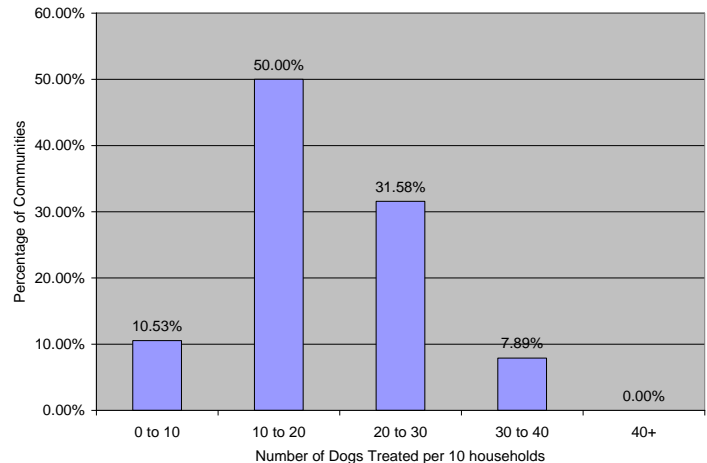


Figure 2. Household density of dogs in remote Indigenous Communities in the NT in 2012 © ACVS 2013

In 2012, average household dog numbers in remote indigenous communities continued to drop from 20.3 to an average of 18.51 dogs per 10 households. This is still significantly larger than the Australian average of 3.6 dogs per 10 households^{1,2}. The graph in Figure 2 shows that 50% of communities lie between 10 to 20 dogs per 10 households.

Cat populations are also quite important in remote indigenous communities with over 80% of communities having pet cats. Still, these individual populations remain quite low.

It is important to understand and monitor household pet densities in remote communities as the number of pets per household has an impact on human health³, the likelihood of pack dog formation, and the health of the pets themselves. Veterinary Animal Health and Control Programs, improving housing and yard design, and implementation of appropriate By-Laws are still seen as the major way to gradually reduce household densities to a generally accepted level.

Health of Animals in Remote Communities

The health and welfare of the animals in Remote Communities is not only a concern of the general public, but a concern for many owners too.⁴ In 2012, the general health of animals in remote communities that have had active programs was actually quite good and has improved significantly compared to 12 months earlier.

The average body condition of dogs in remote communities was generally very good with over 97% of communities' dogs being of a healthy weight to slightly overweight (Figure 3). This is a major improvement compared to 12 months ago where 88% were in a very healthy weight range. Cats were generally in good body condition.

Interestingly, approximately 55% of communities now do not have flea problems, which is a great improvement from 12 months ago where only 43% of communities were flea free (Figure 4). Sadly only 18% of communities were tick free, but nevertheless this is still an improvement from 12 months earlier where approximately 11% of communities were tick free. Ticks continue to be the main issue in most communities with 43% of communities having a low burden of ticks and 29% of communities having a moderate to high burden of ticks. Fleas are a major issue in approximately 15% of communities in the NT. Canine lice remains to be only a minor problem in remote communities

Mange in dogs is often a concerning issue amongst residents and visitors in remote indigenous communities⁴. One of the more common signs of mange is hair loss. However, other causes of hair loss include flea infestations, lice infestations, allergies, bacterial infections and fungal infections. Most interestingly is that the majority of dogs owned in remote communities do not have any signs of hair loss or mange at all.

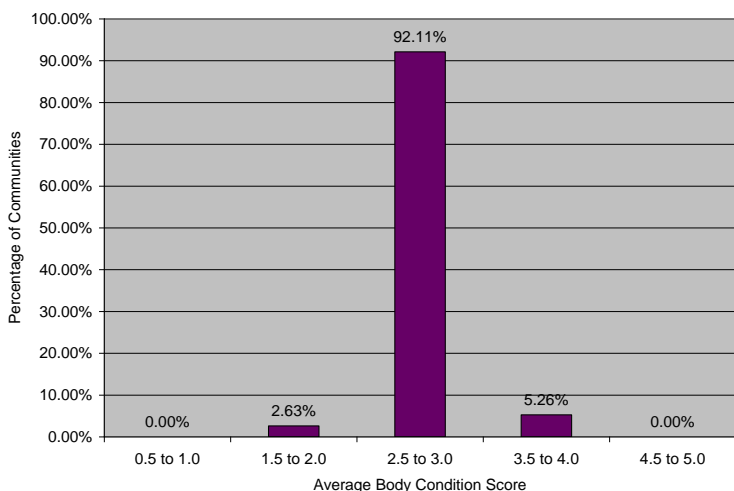


Figure 3. Average Body Condition of dogs in remote Indigenous Communities in the NT(1 = poor, 3 = ideal, 5 = Obese) © ACVS 2013

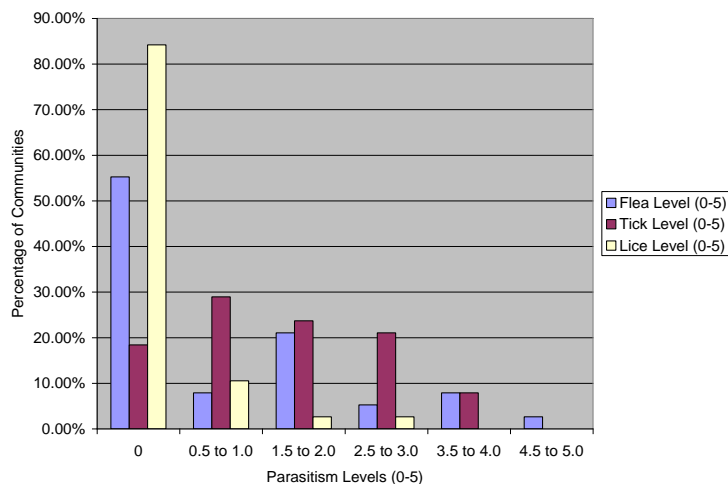


Figure 4. Average External Parasite Levels of Pets in remote Indigenous Communities in the NT (0=None, 1= Very Low, 3 = Moderate, 5 = Extremely High) © ACVS 2013

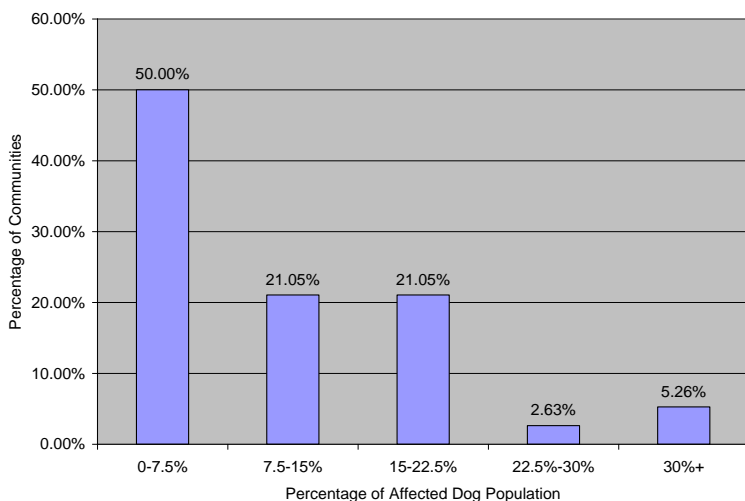


Figure 5. Percentage of dogs with hair-loss in remote Indigenous Communities in the NT © ACVS 2013

In 2012, in the NT, the average percentage of remote community dogs with symptoms of hair-loss was at 9.3% of the dog population which is a great improvement from the 2011 level of 12.3%. Amazingly 24% of communities had no signs of mange or hair loss in their dogs compared to 2011 where just under 15% of communities had no hair-loss in their dogs. Roughly 50% of communities had an incidence of less than 7.5% of their dogs with signs of hair loss, which is a credit to the success of the animal health programs in these communities.

Parasite control through animal health programs, and by owners is extremely important in remote communities and we believe the parasite levels should continue to reduce and improve in the coming year.

Conclusion

There have been great improvements in the health and population size of dogs in remote communities in the NT serviced by ACVS. Whilst the health and welfare of some animals in remote communities continues to be a cause of concern, the majority of animals are in good health in communities with active programs. Continuing Veterinary Animal Health and Control Programs, Owner Education, Improved House and Yard Designs and eventual creation and implementation of By-Laws will be the way forward in improving animal health and welfare, and in reducing animal associated problems.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006-2007. Family Characteristics and Transitions, Australia. Cat no. 4442.0

² Australian Companion Animal Council. 2006. Contribution of the Petcare Industry to the Australian Economy. 7th Edition

³ Senior, K., Chenhall, R., McRae-Williams, E., Daniels, D. & Rogers, K. (2006) Dogs and people in Aboriginal communities: Exploring the relationship within the context of the social determinants of health. *Environmental Health*. 6(4) 39-46

⁴ Crawford, S. (2011). Dog of a problem our eternal Shame. 29 August, 2011. NT News