OPINIONS FROM THE FRONT LINES OF CAT COLONY MANAGEMENT CONFLICT

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OUTLINE

• Introduction
  - Free Roaming Cats
  - Cat Colonies
  - The Advocacy Battle
  - THE Conflict

• Methods
  - Survey Design and Execution

• Study Results
  - Group Demographics
  - Findings of Common Ground
  - A Difference of Opinion

• Discussion
INTRODUCTION – MANAGEMENT OF THE “FREE” ROAMERS

• 600 million cats globally (50-150 million in North America)

• Wildlife Mortalities in the Millions to Billions

• Bird Predation of Great Concern

• Cat “Colonies” at Center of Controversy
INTRODUCTION –
UGA “KITTY CAM” ESTIMATES ON MORTALITY

- "Kitty Cams" put on 60 pet cats
- Cats averaged 2.1 animals/week
- Reptiles most common, followed by small mammals
- Ate what they killed 30 percent of the time.
- 50% of time, left prey to rot
- 21% of time, brought their kill home
INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS A CAT COLONY?

- A noticeable group of feral cats (>2) living together in a specific location with the use of a common food source.
INTRODUCTION - THE ADVOCACY BATTLE

Feral Cats
• Alley Cat Allies
• Feral Cat Coalition
• Various local organizations
• Etc...

Bird Conservation
• Nature Conservancy
• American Bird Conservancy
• Audubon Society
• Professional Societies
• Etc...
INTRODUCTION - THE CONFLICT...

• Treatment of Feral Cats
  - What is their “Designation”?
  - Are they Pests?

• Management through Cat Colonies
  - TNR or Euthanasia?
  - Property Rights?

• Impacts on Other Species
  - Vectors for Disease?
  - Are they filling a niche in the environment?
  - Are they actually contributing to species decline?
INTRODUCTION – THE CONFLICT (CONTINUED)

- What are each group’s intentions and opinions?
- Social roots to the conflict… What are they?
- Patterns may exist in opinions about management… What are they?
METHODS – THE GROUPS

• Cat Colony Caretaker (CCC)
  - Someone that provides food, shelter, and/or vaccinations and/or medical care to a groups of feral cats (>2)

• Bird Conservation Professional (BCP)
  - Someone that works in the academic or scientific capacity as an ornithological expert
METHODS – SURVEY DESIGN AND EXECUTION

• Purposive, Snowball Sampling

• Minimum of 3 CCCs and BCPs per State

• Group ID and Awareness example questions:

  1. ) Are you a Feral Cat Colony Caretaker/ Work in Field of Bird Conservation?

  2.) Do you Consider Yourself a Cat Person/ Bird Person/ Both?

  3.) Do you think conflict can be resolved through discussion between stakeholders?
METHODS – QUESTIONS OF AGREE/ DISAGREE

• Normative Statements (Value Judgment) –

  1.) Feral cats should be treated as protected wildlife

  2.) Feral cats should be treated as pests

  3.) Feral cat colonies should be managed using euthanasia

  4.) Feral cat colonies should be managed using TNR
Empirical Statements (Data Judgement) –

1.) Feral cats fill a natural role as predators

2.) Feral cats are a reservoir for disease

3.) Feral cats ONLY harm wildlife on islands

4.) Feral cats contribute to the decline of native birds

5.) Feral cats are eventually eliminated by TNR
METHODS – SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC

• Gender
• Age
• Marital Status
• Education
• Race/ Ethnicity
RESULTS - RESPONSES

• 577 total responses (239 BCPs and 338 CCCs)

• <3% of cases where either group held opinions different from National average

• No difference in distribution of opinion when responses were high versus low
RESULTS – GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS

- CCCs slightly older (41.8) than BCPs (39.6)

- More Female CCCs (92%) than BCPs (39%)

- CCCs less likely to be University graduates (58%) than BCPs (95%)
  - Employment Requirements?

- CCCs less likely to be Married (53%) than BCPs (72%)
RESULTS – GROUP ID AND CONFLICT AWARENESS

- Both CCCs (79%) and BCPs (80%) were aware of THE Conflict

- Both Groups identified with cats & birds
  - “Cat People” - BCPs (57%) and CCCs (94%)
  - “Bird People” – BCPs (97%) and CCCs (68%)
  - Owned Cats – BCPs (45%) and CCCs (97%)
RESULTS – STATEMENT RESPONSES

• Responses to management, impacts and treatment were polarized

• By Group:
  - BCPs: accept euthanasia, consider as threat, treat as pests, and doubt TNR
  - More CCCs thought conflict resolution possible (80%) compared to BCPs (50%)

• By Sociodemographic:
  - Male CCCs: Treat as pests (7x) and Manage with Euthanasia (4x)
  - Male BCPs: Also more likely to support treat as pests and euthanasia
  - Education: Statement of “filling natural role as predator” affected
    - Definition of “natural predator”?
DISCUSSION – CONFLICT RECAP

• Management of feral cats a contentious issue

• Discussions polarized and lack collaboration

• BCPs: Low acceptance of collaborative solutions and expansion of decision space
DISCUSSION – IDENTITY CONFLICT

• Activity of group united around injustice (Identity Politics)

• What is role of identity politics in feral cat management?

• Group Membership trumps “Cat” or “Bird” person membership
  - Alternate personal vs. group identity (normative statements)
  - Pursuance of policy detrimental to cats/ birds

• Dialogue and Debate
DISCUSSION – DATA CONFLICT

• Opposing opinions (despite empirical statements)

• Data Conflict
  - Lack on information
  - Misinformation
  - Data relevance
  - Interpretation

• Solution: Engage stakeholders in prioritizing, collecting and judging data!

• Frame by observable phenomenon (“Cats kill wildlife” statement)
  - Cats kill wild animals vs. cats cause global decline in songbird population...
DISCUSSION – VALUE CONFLICT

• Different ways of life and criteria for evaluating ideas and goals

• Apparent with gender and age responses

• Tendency of females to oppose euthanasia/ pest treatment rooted in social structure?

• Socialization Theory
  - Caring/ nurturing nature accounts for response

• Structural Theory
  - Experience with oppression accounts for response in females
  - Older individuals take egalitarian approach for cat treatment
CONCLUSIONS

• Development of innovative/collaborative management
  • Moralistic vs. Utilitarian Orientation

• Value Conflict –
  • Create “Spheres” of Influence
  • Local vs. Global
  • Identify Shared Superordinate Goals (i.e. care of animals)

• Both groups need:
  - Sense of control
  - Sense of Belonging
  - Promotion of Positive Self Image
ROOM FOR DISCUSSION

• Where can line be drawn for defining “Spheres of influence”?

• How do we define the decision space for this issue?
  • No Cats on Public Property? Private Property? Where?
  • “Violators” taken to nearest shelter?
HERE AT HOME – NC

- NC particularly vulnerable to problem... WHY?

1.) Favorable “Human Proximate” Environment/ Sprawl
   - Sprawl includes large viable wildlife habitat

2.) NC rapidly moving from “Rural” to “Urban” Demographic
   - Utilitarian vs. Moralistic
   - Anthropomorphic View – Response More Difficult Over Time

3.) Hospitable Climate
FOR MORE INFORMATION -

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