

Free-roaming dogs and cats in central Italy: public perceptions of the problem.

[Slater MR](#), [Di Nardo A](#), [Pediconi O](#), [Villa PD](#), [Candeloro L](#), [Alessandrini B](#), [Del Papa S](#).

Department of Veterinary Integrative Biosciences, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-4458, USA.
mslater@cvm.tamu.edu

A cross-sectional telephone survey of randomly selected households examined the extent and types of problems associated with free-roaming dogs and cats in the Teramo province of Italy. The households were sampled randomly within each municipality; municipalities were combined into coastal, central hills and mountain regions for analysis. The survey was conducted in May and June of 2004 with a response rate of 74% (397/536). Ninety percent of respondents (N=356) believed that free-roaming dogs and cats were a problem. They were most commonly concerned about personal safety, followed by animal welfare, public health and environmental sanitation. Sixty-nine percent of respondents (274) actually saw free-roaming dogs or cats where they live. While dogs were most commonly seen, cats were seen in greater numbers. Overall, 10% (39/297) and 5% (21/397) of respondents cared for free-roaming cats and dogs, respectively. Two-thirds of the respondents (251/397) believed that animals were abandoned because the owners lost interest. About 2/3 of respondents (251/397) reported that the community government should have the responsibility for dealing with free-roaming dogs and cats. The respondents supported the idea of building more shelters and controlling the birth rate as control measures rather than euthanizing dogs and cats. The results suggest that free-roaming dogs and cats are a very common sight in this part of Italy with substantial concerns by the residents. However, concerns about the animals' welfare were clearly raised, supporting the laws that make it illegal to euthanize a healthy dog or cat in Italy. Using the information from this study, research on the underlying causes of abandonment of dogs and cats or failing to sterilize them should be undertaken to begin to address this problem. Further, national and regional funding must be provided to support existing laws which should help protect and eventually decrease the numbers of free-roaming and homeless dogs and cats.