

*Summary Statistical Guide**

Animal Services Department, Orange County, North Carolina

Introduction

This is the Animal Services Department's general statistical narrative, to accompany the monthly statistical reports. Each month a standard set of summary statistics are generated regarding our core or essential services and activities. These are essential for purposes of effective management and administration in different program areas, in both our Animal Control and Animal Sheltering Divisions. At the same time, these statistics are an invaluable tool in communicating to various stakeholders, the general public and our elected officials and County management the scope and extent of animal services.

Notably, our monthly statistics provide a basis for thinking about sheltering practices in a broader context and this narrative aims to look further into shelter practices and trends and how they relate to the monthly figures and statistics we see.

Adoption and euthanasia numbers must be understood in the context of a multitude of other influential factors, including the number of animals that come into Orange County's Animal Services Center and the availability of medical and behavioral resources. By far the greatest factor influencing sheltering practices in our own community and others is that of "pet overpopulation," a community-wide problem consisting of a large number of animals for whom there are no homes. As we continue to push forward to find better and more innovative ways in which to improve, we must remember that all of these factors work together to create the broader challenge we must address as a department, a county, and a community.

Standard Statistics

Each of our monthly reports contains various statistics that summarize the various activities of the County's Animal Services Department. These are standard statistics insofar as for a given month, they report on the same core or essential services. They are all presented at the end of the narrative portion of this report.

Some statistics capture the overall effort of all staff as they work together to provide integrated and coordinated animal services to the citizens of Orange County. These include:

1. *A.1 Monthly Demographics* (which shows from where and how animals arrived at Orange County's Animal Shelter).
2. *A.2 Monthly Shelter Activity* (which shows total animal intakes and dispositions).

* Last Updated May 2010.

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3. *A.3 Volunteer Hours* (reports volunteer hours and how they compare to previous months and years).

Other statistics are more specific in summarizing the services and activities of our department's Animal Sheltering and Animal Control Divisions. These include:

Animal Sheltering

1. *B.1 Monthly Dispositions* (which reports the dispositions of all animals sheltered in a given month)
2. *B.2 Live Release for Placeable and Recovered Animals* (discussed in detail in the following sections).
3. *B.3 Reasons for Euthanasia* (which reports the specific reasons for which animals were euthanized in a given month)

Animal Control

1. *C.1 Rabies Exposures Investigated and Positive Cases* (which reports positive rabies tests and related investigations conducted by Animal Control Officers).
2. *C.2 Rabies Statistics* (showing positive cases year-to-date and by comparison with previous years).
3. *C.3 Rabies Vaccinations* (which reports the number of vaccinations given by area veterinarians, at low-cost vaccination clinics organized by our department, and at Orange County's Animal Services Center).
4. *C.4 Year to Date Rabies Vaccination Clinic Numbers* (which shows the number of dogs and cats vaccinated to date during the current year at the County's low-cost rabies vaccination clinics)

Together, these monthly statistics provide a convenient summary of our critical services and activities. In a very transparent manner, they describe the efforts of our staff in delivering field services, sheltering animals whose dispositions they must ultimately decide, and programs such as our volunteer program that, among other things, is responsible for public outreach activities and dog walking.

Adoptions and "Lives Releases"

The placement of healthy and behaviorally sound animal companions is one of the foremost objectives of Orange County's Animal Services Department. The direct placement or "re-homing" of small animals, cats and dogs occurs through our own adoption program. In addition, many companion animals are transferred to "placement partners"—that is, non-breed as well as breed specific rescue organizations for cats and dogs (as well as other animals)—for their final placement on the basis of additional effort and evaluation by these various organizations.

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Adoptions and transfer are two of the three elements of what can be referred to as “live releases.” Animal companions recovered by their owners or a custodian—usually if not always “stray” animals brought to Orange County’s Animal Services Center either by one of our Animal Control Officers or a member of the public—form the third element of animals that are released alive.

Using this basic formula, it is possible to calculate the total (or absolute) number of animals that are released alive from Orange County’s Animal Services Center.¹ The figures needed to make this calculation are provided by table *B.1 Monthly Dispositions*.

Moreover, it is possible to determine the rate of live release for placeable animals and animals that have been recovered for a given month. Placeable animals do not include animals surrendered by their owner for euthanasia (usually due to illness, infirmity or a behavior problem); feral cats (as these are typically not placed); animals that died before arriving at the shelter or in our custody as a result of an “untreatable” injury or illness; or animals that are being held for a bite quarantine or court case. The number of placeable animals is determined by subtracting animals surrendered for euthanasia, feral cats, deceased animals, and court and bite holds from the total number of animals dispositioned in a given month.

When we remove the animals on bite and court holds, animals surrendered for euthanasia, the feral cats and those animals that arrived dead or died of an untreatable injury while at the shelter, we are left with the number of “placeable” animals. To find the “live release rate,” we must then divide the total number of “live releases” by the total number of potentially placeable animals whose disposition was decided in the month—and this number can be seen in Table *B.2 Live Release for Placeable and Recovered Animals*.

Pet Demographics and Overpopulation

It is often said that pet problems are people problems, and that pet overpopulation is a community problem. These insights very much apply to our own circumstances and they help create a broader perspective in which to understand our own sheltering statistics.

More specifically, the number of animals that are sheltered in a given period of time is itself not caused by or a direct function of our sheltering operations and practices. The number of unwanted animals in our communities (sometimes referred to as “surplus” pets); the extent to which cats, rabbits and dogs alike are spayed or neutered rather than

¹ It should be said that we are using “live release” rather than “placement” for two very specific reasons as well as because it has become a convention in the field of animal welfare since the appearance of the Asilomar Accords (<http://www.asilomaraccords.org/>). One reason is that it includes all animals that are not euthanized, i.e., transfers to placement partners and returns to owners and custodians as well as direct adoptions. The other reason is that it does not presume that an animal transferred to placement partners is, in fact, “re-homed.” In the absence of feedback data from these organizations, there is no way to know what decision they have ultimately made about the disposition of a particular animal.

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allowed to remain intact and reproduce; the strength of norms and customs of responsible pet ownership; the scope and strength of animal regulations and their effective enforcement; and other such “variables” are what affect the number of animals that are sheltered in our own and other communities.

Monthly and Seasonal Variations

Month by month there are significant changes in the numbers of cats, dogs and other animals that are sheltered at Orange County’s Animal Services Center. In very general terms, there is a significant “spread” in the number of animals that are sheltered each month, which reflect the seasonal nature of pet demographics and animal sheltering in our own and other communities. During the winter months, the numbers are traditionally much lower than in other months of the year. Conversely, peak summer months usually show the highest intake numbers for the year.

Moreover, it should be underscored that the “live release rate” for a given time period is determined by the number of animals that are sheltered as well as the total number of animals that are adopted, transferred, or recovered by their owner. It may well be that there is a very high percentage of animals that are released alive in a given month but that the absolute number is lower than in other months because of the number of animals that come to the shelter.

Addressing Pet Overpopulation

To work toward the desideratum of ending euthanasia as a means of population control, it is necessary to positively impact the number of animals that come into Orange County’s Animal Services Center during the course of the year. Essential to this is progressive legislation that is enforced in an effective, fair and reasonable manner. A starting point is what is sometimes referred to as “differential licensing”—that is, licensing or registration fees that are significantly lower for spayed and neutered animals than for intact animals. Orange County has had differential licensing for many years, and in 2007 that differential became \$5 for sterilized dogs and cats and \$30 for reproductive dogs and cats.

The increase in this differential went into a Community Spay/Neuter fund, which is being used to promote responsible pet ownership and provide low-cost spay and neuter surgeries for pets of qualifying households in the County. Animal Services partnered with AnimalKind’s The \$20 Fix to provide this service, and also paired with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to offer no-cost pet surgeries to recipients of certain DSS programs.

In early 2010, Animal Services completed “Managing Pet Overpopulation: A Strategic Plan for Orange County, NC.” This plan, which was presented and well received at the Board of County Commissioner’s January 28th, 2010 Work Session, outlines objectives and initiatives for reducing the number of animals coming into the Animal Services Department over the coming years. Initiatives include partnerships such as the one with

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The \$20 Fix, that will eventually make a difference in the number of animals euthanized as a means of population control.

The strategic plan is available in full format on the Department's webpage at www.co.orange.nc.us/spayneuter.asp.

This plan and the programs and objectives included in it are the beginnings of positive and proactive approaches that are needed to address the problem of pet overpopulation as a community problem. In working to reduce the number of unwanted animals that must be sheltered in our own communities, we would also expect improvements in some of the outcomes of our sheltering practices. We should all look forward to the day when there are very good numbers of adoptions and "live releases" but no less notable ongoing decreases in the number of animals that come to our shelter.

Rabies Cycle, Rabies Prevention and Rabies Control

With respect to rabies control—historically a core function of animal control—there is a continuing concern about positive rabies tests based upon public reporting and our surveillance of possible exposures of people and/or their pets. Tables *C.1 Rabies Exposures Investigated and Positive Cases* and *C.2 Rabies Statistic* show the number of positive rabies tests in Orange County in a given month or in the year-to-date. In Orange County, there were twelve (12) positive tests in 2009, twenty (20) positive tests in 2008, and nineteen (19) positive rabies tests in 2007.

Our own public education activities stress that pet owners not only need to be sure that their pets are vaccinated and licensed but that a dog or cat with a current rabies vaccination must receive a booster shot within one hundred and twenty hours (5 days) of any exposure to rabies. Unless an exposed pet with a current vaccination receives a booster shot within that time frame, the requirements of North Carolina law is the same as for an unvaccinated animal—namely, euthanasia or a six (6) month quarantine. In this regard, staff stresses the immediate reporting of any possible rabies exposure to animal control and/or public health authorities to ensure the health of all members of a household—human and pet alike.

The figures also show the number of cases investigated by our Animal Control Officers in a given month. Usually, these are cases involving known or suspected contact between a domestic small animal such as a dog or a cat and a wild animal such as a raccoon, as well as whether there is indirect contact between a human and pet member of a household in these situations. But our Animal Control Officers are also responsible for bite reports involving dogs and cats (as well as other animals) and a human victim. In these cases, it is a legal requirement and public health precaution that a dog or cat biting a human being be contained and observed for a period of ten (10) days—thereby ensuring that the bite victim was not exposed to the rabies virus.

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Efforts to ensure current vaccination, for the welfare of pets and the people with whom they come into contact, are ongoing. Activities in this area are captured by vaccination statistics compiled by our Animal Control Division, and presented in Table *C.3 Rabies Vaccinations*.

Ten low-cost rabies vaccination clinics were held in 2009 and a total of 1084 animals were vaccinated at those clinics. There are ten low-cost clinics scheduled for 2010 and all but two are being held at the new Animal Services Center. Details are provided in Table *C.4 Year to Date Rabies Vaccination Clinic Numbers*. For information about upcoming clinics, visit <http://www.co.orange.nc.us/animalservices.rabies.asp>.

All of these activities—public education and outreach, investigations and enforcement, and providing low-cost vaccination clinics—are critical given that Orange County continues to be affected by the epidemic of “eastern raccoon rabies” that began in the latter half of the 1990s.

Conclusion

Animal Services continues to develop new ways in which to better serve the animals and citizens of the county. With the opening of the new Animal Services Center in June of 2009, the department expects to be able to better meet the needs of the community and more effectively and efficiently in the long run. The creation of the new facility has been a priority in the planning and time of the department since its creation, and this realization will finally allow other activities to move further into the front as the department fine tunes and adapts to meet the needs of the county and community.

Pet overpopulation continues to be a problem in Orange County and beyond, and one that the Animal Services Department is dedicated to addressing on a long-term basis. As suggested in our discussion of pet overpopulation, there are a number of initiatives that must be taken to effectively address the underlying problem. Steps are now being taken toward that goal by the department in coordination with the Animal Services Advisory Board.