
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Compatibility of Stray Cats and Socio-economic Development

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| ABSTRACT

As the economy grows, an increasing number of people are getting pet cats, which adds a lot of fun to their lives. However, the lack of responsibility of some people has led to the emergence of a large group of stray cats. This group not only affects the appearance of the city but also poses a hidden danger to public social safety, which in turn affects social and economic development. There are no applicable laws and regulations related to the management and protection of stray animals in China. The current management of stray cats basically adopts the traditional Command and Control protection and management policy, which ignores the living needs of local residents and is not conducive to the formation of a positive attitude of residents toward animal protection. Economic incentives play an important role in improving residents' enthusiasm for protection. Currently, the economic incentives generally used in domestic and foreign conservation and governance work mainly include direct economic compensation, rescue funds, and animal protection lotteries.

| KEYWORDS

Stray cats; Command and Control policy; economic incentives

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

With the rapid increase in the number of domestic pets, stray cats have caused many problems. With stray cats as the example, relevant data show that the abandonment of stray cats in our country mostly happens in cat houses. Cats with poor condition, physical defects, serious genetic diseases, and unsellable cats will be abandoned after breeding and selection. The stray animal issue will not be cut off by the non-standard upstream and downstream industrial chains of the pet sector. A large number of stray animals will pollute the environment, spread diseases, cause human injury, occupy urban living spaces, etc., which will have negative effects on the social economy. How to formulate stray animal management and protection policies has also become a priority of society. We need to learn from domestic and foreign research results and successful cases in practice and overcome the existing problems in managing and protecting stray animals in China. There are two common approaches around the globe: one is the Command and Control policy, which directly controls the negative behavior of the perpetrator; the second is establishing interest-based policies to incentivize actors.

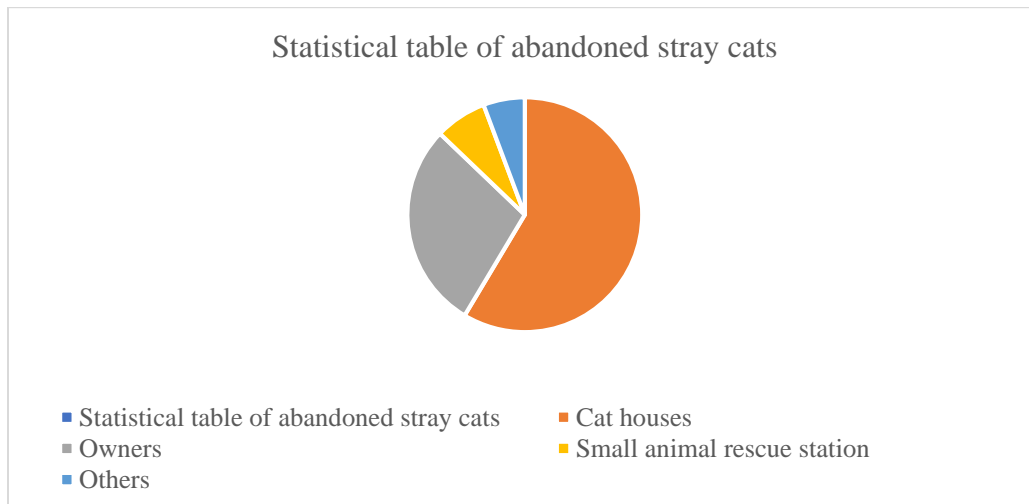


Figure 1. Statistical table of abandoned stray cats

2. Analysis of the protective effect of Command and Control policy and its causes

2.1 The protective effect of the Command and Control policy

Although the Command and Control policy started with good intentions, its limitations have also been exposed in its implementation. Many managers and stray animal conservationists firmly believe that the governance and protection of stray animals are difficult to maintain without a strict management system. For this reason, the government departments have adopted the Hunting and Killing or Sending to the Pound method to manage stray animals. The essence of the Hunting and Killing or Sending to the Pound governance is limited only to control and suppression, with the annual routine comprehensive rectification action as the main means to control and restrict stray cats.

Of course, the number of stray cats will drop sharply after culling, but it will rise rapidly after a short period of time, causing even more trouble for local residents. According to the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), in some cases, the mass killing of stray animals has led to the surviving animals moving into new areas, and increased mobility has increased the risk of uncertainty. Moreover, mass killing of stray animals results in the surviving animals getting more food, which enhances their ability to survive and reproduce, so that they can live into adulthood. So within a few years, the number of stray animals in the area will go up to its original level.



Figure 2. Relationship between the number of stray cats and their killing in a certain city

2.2 Analysis of the reasons why the Command and Control policy is ineffective

From the perspective of the government's public management model, our government is a regulatory government that adopts rigid management methods. The evaluation standard is simply pursuing immediate benefits, which lacks awareness of serving the public as well as comprehensive and long-term management plans. Even though there is a clear long-term goal, it will be difficult to achieve due to the absence of cooperation and collaboration between government departments. As a result, the administrative effectiveness of stray dog governance is limited, and economic resources are wasted by the administrative agencies. It is also an approach of ignoring the service and security functions of modern administration, the participation of social members, and public needs, and going against the development trend of modern administration. This traditional single management model with Command and Control at the core can no longer meet the needs of an increasingly diverse society.

2.2.1. Residents' attitude towards stray cats

Researchers have learned about the local community's attitudes over the past 20 years. The importance of needs and aspirations has received increasing attention from researchers, conservation agencies, and protected area authorities. Research on attitudes is widely used to assess public understanding—acceptance and the impact of protective interventions.

A growing body of literature shows that support for stray animal protection tends to diminish in situations where people's interests and livelihoods are at stake. The interest-based approach is widely used to reduce opposition and ensure local support for protection. Incentives are the most important measures for local people to improve their attitudes towards supporting stray animal management and protection and align their actions with our protection goals. However, the interest-based approach has not had the desired effect in practice in some regions. Possible reasons are insufficient benefit (ratio of protection cost), uneven distribution, unfulfilled promises and expectations, lack of or limited community engagement, insufficient socio-economic data for effective design, and unclear critical links between development and conservation.

2.2.2. Factors affecting residents' attitudes towards stray cats

In addition to governance protection costs and benefits, socio-demographic factors are essential indicators of attitudes towards protection, such as age, education level, economic income, ethnicity, gender, family size, and occupation.

Studies showed that the age of residents has a significant impact on the attitude towards stray animal management and protection. The younger generation believes that protection efforts should be increased to protect more stray cats, while older respondents are less willing to support conservation efforts for these stray animals. The main reason is that older people are more likely to have suffered the adverse effects of stray animals than younger people. Some surveys have also suggested that the formal education level of respondents also affects their attitudes towards wildlife. Younger residents tend to have higher levels of education than older residents because the former has easier access to education. Educated people may have more knowledge and information about conservation and have a positive attitude towards stray cat management and protection. The negative attitudes towards stray animal protection decrease with increasing education levels.

3. Economic incentives in the governance and protection of stray cats

3.1 Economic incentive mechanism in the management and protection of stray animals

The reasons for the rising number of stray animals are manifold, among which mass abandonment by humans and unreasonable governance are the main causes. Thus, rectifying and regulating the human use of stray animals is undoubtedly one of the key measures for stray animal management and protection. If the economic activities of human beings are ignored, the protection of stray animals cannot achieve the expected results. The protection of stray animals in practice is not only a biological problem but also an economic issue. Economic incentives have played an important role in environmental protection, especially pollution control in developed countries. In the early 1990s, biological conservation economists began introducing economic incentives into biodiversity conservation, drawing on successful experiences in environmental protection, which could also be applied to the management and protection of stray animals. The economic incentive mechanism for stray animal management and protection refers to the use of various economic incentives to affect the costs and benefits of resource protection and development, promote the overlap and correspondence between private costs and social costs, personal benefits and social benefits in economic activities, and guide the rational use of stray animal resources, thereby achieving a socially and ecologically sustainable operating system of economic development. It can correct the external diseconomy in the resource consumption of stray animals.

The characteristics of economic incentives and the positive role they play in stray animal protection compared to traditional Command and Control policy are: (i) The market affinity of incentive mechanism and the enhancement of which will reduce the social cost caused by institutional friction during implementation. Using economic means to promote local stray animal resources protection and development, the realization of this goal largely depends on the affinity and compatibility of the adopted economic incentive mechanism and legal and administrative mechanisms; the economic incentive mechanism emphasizes the use of economic means with Cost-Benefit at their core, and its mechanism of action is more suitable for the market. (ii) The economic

incentive mechanism is tempting and guides the behavior of community residents. The economic incentive mechanism promotes the protection of stray animals and their habitats, and its actual operation is fundamentally tempting, mainly because, instead of relying on administrative orders to adjust the behavior of stray animal protectors, the economic incentive mechanism guides them to protect stray animals through improving the protector's income actively. The protector is not only a natural person but also an economic person. Survival is the instinct of a natural person, and the pursuit of interests is the characteristic of an economic person. Economic incentives reduce resistance and antagonistic behavior among stray animal advocates.

3.2 Discussion on the current economic incentive measures for the protection and management of stray cats

Currently, the economic incentive measures applied in protecting and managing stray animals at home and abroad include direct economic compensation, establishing special relief funds, the creation of a stray animal protection lottery, etc.

3.2.1 Direct economic compensation

The most direct indemnity for damage caused by stray animals is to provide financial compensation to the injured party. Initiatives to provide financial compensation to mitigate the loss of livestock caused by stray animals have begun, with studies suggesting that direct financial compensation can improve residents' attitudes towards and increase their tolerance towards stray animals. Research suggests that direct financial compensation has the greatest impact on individual conservation-related behavior and can produce more cost-effective conservation outcomes than other methods. As far as the current research and practice on compensation for stray animals causing accidents are concerned, formulating reasonable compensation methods is the premise of handling stray animals causing trouble, but we need to be cautious about the possible negative effects of compensation. Moreover, China has not yet established a legal remedy mechanism for damage caused by stray animals, so the issue of the source of funds for compensation will also become a problem in the process of establishing a legal remedy mechanism. Apparently, resolving conflicts between residents and stray animals is a long haul, but the intensity of conflicts can be reduced through direct compensation.

3.2.2 Establishment of a dedicated rescue fund for stray cats

The fines imposed on violators of the animal protection law and the funds donated by caring people from all walks of life can be pooled to establish a special protection fund for stray cats, which can be used for the operation of an independent stray cat protection agency and some public welfare activities to promote the protection of stray cats. For example, citizens who adopt stray cats can be given a special medical discount card for their cats. And appropriate discounts will be given for the medical expenses of their adopted cats. We can also provide free ligation, microchip registration, and vaccination programs to encourage citizens to adopt stray cats. Certain discounts will also be given to these three items for other stray animals or non-stray animals to reduce the number of stray cats and other stray animals in the future, thereby avoiding their needless deaths. Free breeding training for those who apply for pet breeding licenses.

3.2.3 Creation of a lottery for stray animal protection

A lottery is a document of value issued by a specialized agency licensed by a country as a monopoly to support social welfare. Participants can voluntarily select and purchase and have the right to win a bit of the jackpot per pre-declared rules. The lottery industry, with huge popularity and widespread acceptance, is not new to most people. It is part of animal protection to ensure the victims get due compensation after stray animals cause damage to people. As we may imagine, if a victim cannot get due legal remedies, it is bound to cause hostility and hatred between humans and animals, whether light or heavy. Hence, it is reasonable for a country to assume responsibility for the damage caused by stray animals. China should create an animal protection lottery for the purpose of protecting animals. At the same time, the right to issue lottery tickets can be granted to local people's governments. Funds can be obtained through the sale of lottery tickets, and a certain percentage of them can be used to solve the problem of compensation funds in the legal remedy for damage caused by stray animals, which is more likely to develop an awareness of stray animal management and protection among people.

4. Conclusion

The protection of stray animals has become a consensus in today's society, but how to protect them is a difficult problem that requires an objective analysis of the actual situation of stray animal protection in China and rational decision-making. The attitude of local residents, as the direct protectors of these stray animals, towards their protection determines the fate of these stray animals to some extent. Even if the public's awareness of protection is enhanced, a large amount of money is invested in stray animal protection, the law enforcement team is expanded, and protection agencies at all levels are gradually perfected, their roles in stray animal protection are limited if the interests of the residents in the distribution areas of stray animals are ignored. As far as our current stray animal protection force is concerned, we do not have sufficient funds to fully compensate the residents around the distribution areas of stray animals, nor do we have sufficient forces to keep a close watch on the residents around the distribution areas of stray animals. Suppose we have the ability to compensate in full and monitor closely; such protection is passive, unscientific, and unreasonable. So, it is necessary to continuously explore new ideas and strategies for the in-situ protection of

stray animals and formulate strict management systems and measures to minimize or eliminate their negative impacts while exerting in-situ protection strategies for stray animals. Finally, a virtuous circle of mutual promotion between the community economy where stray animals are located and the management and protection of stray animals will be formed. To this end, we should focus on this current development direction of stray animal protection.

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