



Department of **Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions**

Domestic Cat Survey Program – October 2018

Prepared by

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Background

To mitigate the environmental and social impacts of cats on Christmas Island, a “Cat Management Plan” was commissioned. The plan (Algar and Johnston 2010) proposed a strategy to eradicate cats entirely from the island as the de-sexed domestic population died out. As part of this plan, amendments to the Local Cat Management Laws (*Shire of Christmas Island Local Law for the Keeping and Control of Cats 2004 (WA)*) under the *Local Government Act 1995 (WA)* were endorsed in August 2010. These revisions require that all domestic cats in the Shire of Christmas Island are now legally bound to be de-sexed, tattooed, microchipped and registered with the Shire. The revisions were designed to limit domestic and stray/feral cat impact on the native fauna, promote responsible cat ownership, compliance and enforcement of cat management laws and prohibit the importation of new cats. To guarantee all domestic cats are registered, a survey of domestic cats is conducted annually. Surveys for domestic cats were conducted prior to veterinary programs in October 2010 (Algar *et al.* 2011a) at the commencement of the “Cat Management Program” and again in May 2011 (Algar *et al.* 2011b). A third veterinary program was conducted in May 2012 following the survey that year (Algar and Hamilton 2012; Algar *et al.* 2014). Subsequent surveys have been conducted each May in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 (Algar and Hamilton 2013; 2014; Parks Australia 2015; Algar *et al.* 2016). In 2016 prior to the domestic cat survey, it came to our attention that a number of un-registered cats were being kept as pets. It was decided by the “Cat Management Steering Committee” that a short-term amnesty on pet cat ownership be invoked so that these animals could also be de-sexed and registered. A final veterinary program was endorsed and fines were to be issued to those residents who wanted their cat to be de-sexed and registered, otherwise unregistered cats could be handed in and destroyed without charge. A further survey was conducted in May 2017 where 74 cats were recorded as registered pets (Algar 2017).

Methodology

Domestic cat survey

The survey for domestic cats is conducted across the entire residential area. The survey process involves door-knocking at each permanent residence (n= 500+) and questioning the adult inhabitants as to whether they have any domestic cats. All residences are surveyed and, as added insurance, neighbours are also asked whether domestic cats are present in adjoining houses. All surveyed people are informed of the risk of not declaring the presence of a domestic cat and it not being subsequently registered. The survey records the number of owned cats per household, the sex, age and coat colour. Accordingly, the database of registered cats can be updated annually with addresses and cat deaths noted. During the domestic cat survey, residents are also asked about recent sightings of stray cats. These stray cat data, including sighting locations, were recorded and emailed to Parks Australia.

Results

Domestic cat survey

One hundred and fifty-two cats (72 females, 80 males) were recorded during the initial survey in October 2010 of which 136 were registered as domestic pets (Algar *et al.* 2011b). Since October 2010, 184 cats have been registered following the various veterinary programs. The total number of domestic cats registered each year, the sex population structure, the number of new registrations and number deregistered are presented in Table 1. The number of registered cats present each year is also presented in Figure 1. The survey for domestic cats conducted this year revealed that there were 66 domestic cats registered, of these, two cats had no official owner. Of the 74 cats registered in 2017, eight (2 females, 6 males) died prior to the conclusion of the October 2018 survey. Of these animals, seven died from natural causes associated with old age and one as a vehicle fatality. One un-registered cats was located during the survey, which was removed by the Shire Ranger. Twenty-one stray cats were reported by local residents around the town-site area during the domestic cat survey.

Table 1. Total number of domestic cats registered each year, the sex structure, the number of new registrations and number de-registered.

Date	No. registered			New/re-registers			De-registers		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
October 2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	136	66	70	N/A	N/A	N/A
May 2011	138	69	69	18	10	8	16	7	9
May 2012	135	66	69	12	5	7	15	8	7
May 2013	111	53	58	0	0	0	24	13	11
May 2014	101	50	51	0	0	0	10	5	5
May 2015	87	45	42	0	0	0	14	5	9
May 2016	75	41	34	2	1	1	14	5	9
June 2016	93	49	44	18	8	10	0	0	0
May 2017	74	38	36	1	0	1	20	11	9
October 2018	66	36	30	0	0	0	8	2	6

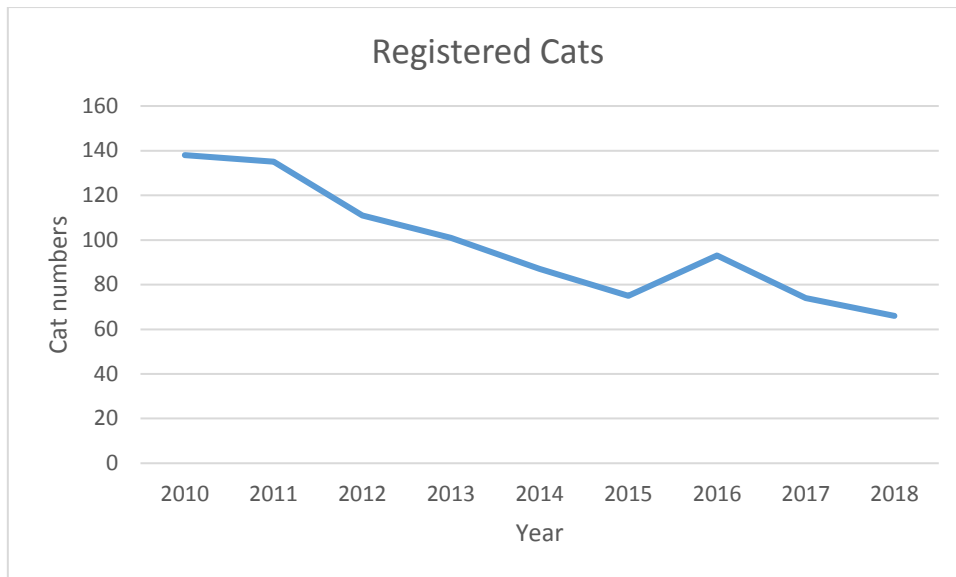


Figure 1. Number of registered cats present each year.

Discussion

At the conclusion of the domestic cat survey this year, there were 66 registered cats present on the island. In addition to the domestic cats, the town-site, at the time of this survey, appears to be harbouring a sizeable stray cat population. I strongly recommend that when stray cats are reported, immediate effort as a matter of priority and urgency should be provided to remove these animals; this will ensure that:

- 1) trap placement is focussed on areas where cats had recently been sighted and probably still present. The less efficient alternative of locating traps across the town-site at a later date would likely prove less effective and more time consuming;
- 2) community support for the eradication program is maintained, as it is necessary to be seen to follow-up on stray cat sightings; otherwise residents will be less inclined to report these detections and an invaluable surveillance asset will be lost;
- 3) removal of stray cats within the town-site will reduce the likelihood these animals or their offspring being concealed as illegal pet cats. This outcome will compromise the domestic cat surveys and likely early success of the eradication campaign.

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