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PERSPECTIVES ON WILDLIFE NUISANCE CONTROL: RESULTS OF A WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL FIRM'S CUSTOMER SURVEY

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Abstract. Customers of Critter Control, Ins, offices were surveyed in 1990 and 1991 to examine their views and experience nuisance wildlife. Most of the survey respondents were having problems with raccoons *(Procyon lotor),* squirrels *(Sciurus* skunks *(Mephitis mephitis),* woodchucks *(Marmata monax),* and moles ('Talpidae). Approximately 25% of the respective attempted to control the nuisance situation themselves before contacting Critter Control. Most customers approved of the control of rats/mice (Muridae), moles, snakes, bats (Chiroptera), pigeons *(Columba livia),* and skunks. Most disapproves lethal control of deer *(Odocoileusspp.),* geese *(Branta canadensis),* woodpeckers *(Picoides spp.),* squirrels, and raccoons. E eight percent of the respondents described the humane treatment of nuisance animals as either "very" or "moderately" imI to them. The survey results are incorporated into a discussion of attitudes towards wildlife in nuisance situations, and hoW attitudes affect the control of such problems.

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"You don't send it to heaven, do you? I don't want to send it to heaven. Everything has its time to go to heaven, and this isn't its time." These statements by a person who called us concerning a skunk problem illustrates one of many attitudes toward wildlife. These attitudes, which are frequently baffling to wildlifeprofessionals,providethesociologicalcontextwithin which wildlife damage control, and wildlife management in general, must operate. In seeking to better define the subset of society that our company, Critter Control, Ins. (CC) serves, we initiated customer surveys in 1990. The results of these surveys mayprovidevaluableinformationformaintainingandimproving the quality of our service.

METHODS

Surveys were conducted during April and May 1990, and July 1991. Questionnaires (Appendices A and B) illicited responses concerning a customer's views and experiences with nuisance wildlife. The survey form was filled out by a CC technician who read the questionnaire to the customer, or handed ii to the customer to be filled out at his/her convenience. Participation in the survey was voluntary (all CC offices were not required to participate). The sample obtained is not statistically valid, so readers should cautiously interpret the results. However, major trends and concerns are apparent.

RESULTS

In 1990, 250 questionnaires were completed (Appendix A). In 1991,141 responses were received (Appendix B). Most (60.3%, *n = 391*) of the respondents lived in suburban situations, while fewest (13.5%) lived in rural areas. The remainder (26.2%) were city residents.

In the 1990 survey, most of the respondents had contacted CC about either raccoons (31.6%) or squirrels (26.8 %) (Appendix A). The problem animals were more diverse in the 1991 survey, with raccoons (20.5%), skunks (15.5%), woodchucks (14.8%), and moles (11.2%) being the most common. Other species listed by respondents were birds, mice, opossums *(Didelphis marsupialis),* snakes, bats, voles *{Microtus ;* muskrats *(Ondatra zibethica),* chipmunks *(Tamias strip* bees/wasps, rats, turtles (Chelydridae), domestic cats, gol (Geomyidae), and prairie dogs *(Cynomys spp.).*

Thirty-two percent (n = 80) of the 250, 1990 surve; respondents were currently using a pest control service in s capacity. Another 22% *(n = 55*) had contracted such service in the past. One hundred eighty-three respondents (73. approved of limited pesticide use by professionals. On: individuals (3.6%) disapproved of any pesticide use.
hundred-twenty (52%) of the customers indicated they we like to see more natural or biological control methods. H ever, the majority of customers (76.4%, n = 191), person used pesticides (i.e., insecticides, rodenticides, and herbicide

Sixty-two (44.3%) of the 1991 survey respondents I 141) stated that humaneness (reduction of pain felt by animal) was "very important," and that they would be will to pay additional costs to insure a humane approach for con (Appendix B). Sixty-one individuals (43.6%) described maneness as "moderately important" (desirable but not will to pay additional costs). Seventeen people (12.1%) considered humaneness to be "unimportant" (having little impact on approach to solving the problem).

When the 1991 respondents were asked to select preferred options for handling a nuisance complaint, the n commonly selected approaches were euthanasia of sick mall (24.5%, n = 35), relocation (24,5%, n = 35), lethal 1r (21.3%,n=30),androdentextermination (18.9%,n=27).1 respondents picked live-trap then euthanize (6.9%, n =10) live-trap then release on-site (3.5%, n = 5).

Combining both years, 24.8% (97 of 391 respondents) attempted to control the nuisance problems on their own be contacting CC. Of these, 26.3 % (n = 26) attempted too repel animals, 25.8% (n = 25) tried to live-trap, 20.7% (n = 20) r

poisons, and 16.4% (n = 16) attempted lethal traps. Based on the 1991 survey, only 16.7% (24 of 141 respondents) tried to exclude the problem animal.

Most of our survey respondents (n = 391) approved of the lethal control of rats/mice (95.2%), moles (78.5%), snakes (74.3%), bats (71.2%), pigeons (59.9%), and skunks (56.5%). However, the majority of respondents disapproved of lethal control for deer (69.8%), geese (66.7%), woodpeckers (65.2%), and squirrels (59.0%). Respondents were equally divided on approval/disapproval of lethal control for raccoons (55.1% disapproval), and woodchucks and opossum (52.2% disapproval).

DISCUSSION AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Humane treatment of the nuisance animals was important to nearly 90% of the 1991 respondents. Different people, however, tendtohavedifferentinterpretationsofwhatconstitutes humaneness. For example, many people equate humaneness with nonlethal control. Field technicians must be prepared to respond to individuals with awiderangeofvalues,and stronglyheld beliefs concerning animal welfare. An approach that pleases one customer may anger the next. Communication and negotiating skills are equally, if not more important, than technical expertise.

Effective communication is vital at both field and organizational levels, especially when making policy decisions. In April 1991, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources placed a permit restriction on the relocation of wildlife trapped in the metropolitan Detroit area. The restriction called for mandatory euthanasia of all nuisance species trapped. However, strong public opposition and an appeal to the Michigan Natural Resources Commission, resulted in a compromise whereby only sick and/or diseased animals will be destroyed. While the state had legitimate concerns about the possible spread of disease caused by relocating animals, they underestimated the public's reaction to mandatory euthanasia. There has been no opposition to the euthanasia of sick and diseased animals.

CONCLUSION '

The CC customer surveys can be viewed as a pilot project. Methodology must be refined and expanded to provide more statistically reliable information and feedback on our company's effectiveness in nuisance wildlife problem-solving. Because environmental sensitivity is at an all time high, the information may also be useful to government agencies involved in policymaking decisions.

Appendix A. 1990 Critter Control customer questionnaire and 1990 sum-wary statistics (°k), (n = 250).

1. Do you use a pest control service?
   - 32.8% - Yes.
   - 22.0% - Not now (used to).
   - 45.2% - Never have had 1'C service.

2. What is your attiude towards pesticides? (Check all that apply.)
   - 3.6% - Don't approve of any pesticide use.
   - 73.2% - Approve of limited use by professionals.
   - 20.0% - Approve of more regulations in agriculture pesticide use.
   - 17.6% - Approve of more regulations in pest control operator pesticide use.
   - 52.0% - Would like to see more natural or "biological" control methods.

3. Do you use any over the counter pesticides (insect sprays, rodent baits, garden dusts)?
   - 76.4% - Yes.
   - 23.6% - No.

4. Do you object to the extermination of rodents (mice, rats, etc.)?
   - 4.8% - Yes.
   - 95.2% - No.

5. What animal did you call Critter Control about?
   - 31.6% - raccoon
   - 2.4% - snake
   - 6.0% - skunk
   - 2.0% - bat
   - 5.6% - mole
   - 6.8% - mice
   - 8.4% - bird
   - 2.8% - opossum
   - 26.8% - squirrel
   - 7.6% - other (voles, groundhogs, muskrats, chipmunks)

6. Did you attempt control of this problem on your own?
   - 20.0% - Yes.
   - 80.0% - No.

   If yes, what method did you attempt?
   - 6.4% - repel
   - 4.8% - live-trap
   - 4.8% - poison
   - 2.8% - kill-trap

Appendix B. Critter Control customer survey questionnaire and **1991** summary statistics (%) (n =141).

1. What animal did you call Critter Control about?

Animal	Overall	_QX	Suburb	RAUL
Squirrels	7.0	2.7	9.4	5.3
Bats	9.1	16.2	5.9	10.5
Moles	11.2	8.1	11.8	15.7
Raccoons	20.5	16.2	24.7	10.5
Skunks	15.5	10.8	16.5	21.1
Birds	4.8	10.8	2.3	5.3
Woodchucks	14.8	16.2	14.1	15.7
Opossum	2.0	2.7	1.2	5.3
Mice/Rats	3.4	8.1	2.4	0.0
Snakes	2.7	0.0	4.8	0.0
Bee/Wasp/Hornet	4.8	2.7	5.9	5.3

2. Did you attempt control of the problem on your own?

Yes/No	Overall		Suburb	R101
Yes	33.3	55.5	24.7	26.3
No	66.7	44.5	72.9	73.7

If yes, what method did you use?

Method	Overall	Chi	Suburb	Rural
Live-Trap	26.7	18.2	33.3	16.7
Repellent	13.3	13.6	15.2	0.0
Poison	13.3	18.2	12.1	0.0
Exclusion	16.7	18.2	9.1	49.9
Kill-Trap	16.7	13.6	18.2	16.7

3. How frequently do you have nuisanceldamage problems with wild animals?

Fry Frequency ncv	Overall	"y	Suburb	Rural
Often	15.2	25.7	10.6	15.8
Occassionally	45.6	42.9	44.7	52.6
First Time	39.2	31.4	43.5	31.6

4. In general, do you approve or disapprove of lethal control of the following animals when they are damaging property or posin a risk to human health and safety?

Animal	Overall (Approve/Disapprove)	(Approve/Disapprove)	Suburb (Approve/Disapprove)	Rural. (Approve/Disapprove)
Deer	30.2 - 69.8	32.4 - 67.6	26.5 - 73.5	42.1- 57.9
Geese,	33.3 -66.7	33.3 - 66.7	33.7 -66.3	31.6 - 68.4
Snakes	74.3 - 25.7	67.6 - 32.4	72.6 - 27.4	68.4 - 31.6
Moles	78.5 - 21.5	81.1 - 18.9	78.6 - 21.4	78.9 - 21.1
Pigeons	59.9 - 40.1	68.6 - 31.4	56.0 - 44.0	63.2 - 36.8
Raccoons	44.9 - 55.1	52.8 - 47.2	40.5 - 59.5	47.4 - 52.6
Bats	71.2 - 28.8	73.9 - 27.0	72.3 - 27.7	63.2 - 36.8
Squirrels	42.0 - 58.0	44.4 - 55.6	37.8 - 62.2	55.0 - 45.0
Woodchucks	47.8 - 52.2	48.6 - 51.5	46.0 -54.0	52.6 - 47.4
Woodpeckers	34.8 - 65.2	38.9 - 61.1	30.1 - 69.9	47.4 - 52.6
Opossum	47.1 - 52.9	50.0 - 50.0	46.4 - 53.6	47.4 - 52.6
Skunks	56.5 - 43.5	56.8 - 43.2	54.9 - 45.1	63.2 - 36.8

S. What should be the role of humaneness (reduction of pain felt by the animal) in solving a wild animal problem?

Very orv tant - I would pay additional costs to insure humane treatment. Should control the approach to solving the problem.

Overall - 44.3 City - 42.1 Suburb - 42.2 Rural - 44.4

Moderately orv taut - humane treatment is a priority, but I would not be willing to pay additional costs.

Overall - 43.6 City 39.5 Suburb - 42.9 Rural - 55.6

unimportant rQO rant - I would prefer the most cost effective alternative regardless of the impact on nuisance wild animals. Low priority, having little impact on the approach to solving the problem.

Overall - 12.1 City - 18.4 Suburb - 12.0 Rural - 0.0

6. Property Location.

City - 26.2% Suburb - 60.3% Rural -13.5%

7. Which of the following options) would you prefer in the disposition of a nuisance wildlife complaint? (Check all that apply.)

Lethal Control

Lethal capture when appropriate (i.e., safety or health hazard)

Overall - 21.3 City - 23.2 Suburb - 20.0 Rural - 22.8

Euthanasia of sick animals (to limit the spread of disease)

Overall - 24.5 City - 25.0 Suburb - 25.2 Rural - 21.5

Use of poisons and kill-traps (i.e. on rodents)

Overall - 18.9 City - 17.9 Suburb - 18.1 Rural - 22.8

Live-TTCIUUlnY

Live trap and relocate

Overall - 24.9 City - 25.0 Suburb - 26.0 Rural - 21.5

Live trap and release on site

Overall - 3.5 City - 2.7 Suburb - 3.7 Rural - 3.8

Live trap then euthanize

Overall - 6.9 City - 6.2 Suburb - 7.0 Rural - 7.6