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RESPONSE FROM COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PERSONNEL TO CITIZEN REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION ABOUT WILDLIFE (Poster Abstract)

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INTRODUCTION

With the increasing urbanization of rural areas, conflicts between homeowners and wildlife are becoming more common. County extension offices frequently receive telephone calls from individuals who are experiencing problems with wildlife. In most cases, extension staff provides assistance over the phone or by mail. However, there are no guidelines for the distribution of information nor is there training for extension personnel. Each county office collects and distributes information differently. Because there is no follow-up to inquiries, little is known about what the homeowners actually do or whether the problems were solved. With some wildlife species, there is a question of whether we should advise the homeowner to seek help from a resource professional directly, without trying control methods themselves.

METHODS

I requested the extension personnel in 11 county offices record the wildlife complaint inquiries they receive over the months of May, June, and July. I chose a sampling of rural and urban areas while also keeping a geographical cross-section of the state. A form to record all necessary information was provided. The date was recorded, along with the homeowner's name, address, and telephone number. The species of concern and a description of the type of damage or other problem also were recorded. The extension employee who answered the inquiry was asked to record the materials and recommendations that were offered.

ANALYSIS

I will analyze the survey information by problem type and species. I plan to calculate the percentage of calls that are associated with identified species, and

the percentage of calls in which no species could be determined.

A list of the materials that were sent to homeowners will be compiled. Because the materials will be from a variety of sources, they will be categorized by state of origin and by species. The number of counties that used each reference will be determined. Advice given by extension personnel will be categorized and compiled. I also will compile the number and direction of referrals because I predict that some inquiries will be directed to personnel in other agencies, wildlife rehabilitators, and nuisance wildlife control operators.

In addition to the types of control methods recommended by Penn State Cooperative Extension personnel, a list of the alternative methods used by homeowners will be compiled. This will consist of techniques other than those recommended by extension personnel and, if available, the sources of such information. The legality and perceived effectiveness of the methods will be ascertained

EXPECTED BENEFITS

This research will document homeowner adoption of extension information to control nuisance wildlife and the effectiveness of the extension system in alleviating wildlife problems. This will enable Penn State Cooperative Extension to evaluate the effectiveness of present recommendations, and identify materials that should be changed or added to its inventory. This study can be used to determine whether "self help" fact sheets are a viable means of reducing problems for all species, or whether we primarily should provide the public with sources of professionals who can treat the problem.