

Georgia Voters for Animal Welfare (GVAW)

Survey of Animal Services in Georgia

REPORT OF FINDINGS

September 1, 2009

Georgia Voters for Animal Welfare Survey of Animal Services

Introduction

Georgia Voters for Animal Welfare (GVAW) is a grassroots network of Georgia advocates for animals. The organization was founded in 2008 to support laws and lawmakers working for a safer, healthier and more humane Georgia. GVAW's organizational structure is informal – no governing board, bylaws, website or funding source. The only requirement for membership is a commitment to use one's voice and one's vote to effect positive change for the voiceless in Georgia.

Statement of the Problem

Georgia has a companion animal overpopulation *crisis* due to uncontrolled breeding of cats and dogs in our communities. Managing the surplus of unwanted stray and abandoned animals is a formidable challenge for taxpayers and government leaders at every level. Georgia taxpayers want fewer tax dollars spent on animal control. The general public wants safe neighborhoods free of “nuisance” cats and dogs. Animal advocates want humane population control strategies that dramatically reduce shelter admissions and kill rates as well as a place at the table to help develop solutions.

Purpose of the Study

A major obstacle in resolving the overpopulation crisis is the lack of information regarding animal control services in Georgia's counties and municipalities. Specifically, there is not a statewide collection of information or statistics, from public and private shelters, that is maintained in a comprehensive database readily available to the public.

Without reliable baseline data, progress cannot be measured. Recognizing the critical need for such a database, GVAW chose to conduct, as its first project, a statewide survey to determine what animal services were available in the 2007 calendar year. Survey findings will be used to create as accurate a database as possible, given the limitations of the study, and a “snapshot” of animal services in Georgia.

Methodology

The project was initiated by GVAW Co-founders, Chamblee Abernethy of Dekalb County and Hannah Tostensen of McIntosh County, and launched in May of 2008. Georgia's 159 counties were divided into 12 regions and Open Records Act cover letters with questionnaires were mailed to every county and to 88 additional animal control departments, shelters and/or humane societies that are funded totally or partially by taxpayers. Follow-up phone calls were made afterwards in an attempt to increase the survey return rate. Abernethy and Tostensen were assisted in this phase of the project by 10 additional volunteers:

- Bonnie Klawitter in McIntosh County
- Ashley Woods in Glynn County
- Staci Hutsell, UGA DVM candidate in Athens-Clarke County
- Anna Smith, UGA DVM candidate in Oconee County
- Kathy Wright in Oglethorpe County
- Cheryl Iski in Jackson County
- Sarah Vaughn in Morgan County
- Shari Johannes in Floyd County
- Louise Stewart in Gwinnett County
- Steve Brooks in Gwinnett County

A total of 247 letters and questionnaires were mailed to each of Georgia's 159 counties and to 88 cities, towns and humane societies identified in the Georgia Department of Agriculture's (GDOA's) 2007 roster of licensed animal control departments and/or shelters. The Year 2007 data requested included, but were not limited to, questions regarding local animal ordinances, shelter operations where applicable (i.e., shelter location, capacity, staffing, budget, holding periods, adoption and foster programs, hours open to the public, method of euthanasia and disposal of dead animals); number of animals annually admitted, reclaimed, adopted and/or agency-transferred; temperament testing; availability of low-cost sterilization; existence of breed-specific legislation; and number of abuse/neglect cases recorded.

The project was completed approximately 12 months later, in May of 2009, when attempts to collect outstanding questionnaires were exhausted. At that point Abernethy and Tostensen began to assess expenditures of time and money, analyze the data and prepare study findings for publication.

It is modestly estimated that the 12 volunteers spent an aggregate **600 hours** on all phases of the study and an estimated **\$550** on postage, office supplies and fees charged by some municipalities for gathering the requested data. Fortunately, most of the participating counties and cities did not charge fees for supplying information. As an unincorporated organization of voters without tax-exempt status, GVAW is not permitted to raise funds or accept donations. Consequently, all study expenses were paid out-of-pocket by the volunteers.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study is that, despite the enormous amount of time, energy and expense invested, GVAW is unable to produce a complete data set, a testament to the need for state-mandated collection of and public access to comprehensive shelter data. For example:

- **45 counties (28%) of the total 159 surveyed did not respond;**
- **63 animal control units and/or shelters (32%) did not respond;**
- **5 animal control units and/or shelters refused to complete the questionnaire citing O.C.G.A. 50-18-70(e)¹; and,**
- **19 animal control units and/or shelters did not provide intake and/or euthanasia numbers.**

In all, 84 animal control units and shelters either didn't respond at all or didn't provide intake and exit numbers as requested.

A secondary limitation of the study is that all 12 of the persons who worked on the project are unpaid volunteers, most with full-time jobs. Several are full-time students and all are deeply involved in volunteer activities and/or family responsibilities. Consequently, finding time to work on the survey project was difficult for all volunteers.

Findings

Salient findings from this study, drawn from the 162 questionnaires that were completed and returned, include:

- **50 counties (31%) have no form of animal control;**
- **Total number of 2007 shelter admissions reported was 245,034;**
- **Total number of 2007 euthanasias reported was 152,297, representing an overall 62% kill rate;**
- **Based on the average number of animals killed per shelter, GVAW estimates there were at least an additional 105,000 animals killed in the non-reporting shelters, for an estimated total of 260,000 animals killed in Georgia shelters in 2007²; and,**

¹ O.C.G.A.50-18-70(e) states, "No public officer or agency shall be required to prepare reports, summaries or compilations not in existence at the time of the response."

² Intake and euthanasia numbers reported include wildlife, but the numbers of those animals are negligible compared to the numbers of cats and dogs.

- **Only 51 counties and cities answered the question, “How many neglect/abuse complaints did you receive, and how many of those involved dogs living tethered (chained) outdoors?” Of a total 2,345 reported complaints, an average of 50% involved chained dogs; 27% (or 14 respondents) said 100% of their neglect/abuse complaints were chained dogs, and 4 respondents said “most,” “the majority,” or “maybe all” of their neglect/abuse complaints involved chained dogs.**

Conclusions

Georgia is killing more than its share of companion animals in “shelters” that are funded by taxpayers. National figures on shelter kill rates are reported as low as 4 million and as high as 11 million per year. Using 2008 Census Bureau statistics, Georgia’s human population represents 3.2% of the national population. Factoring Georgia’s estimated annual kill rate of 260,000 shelter animals into a nationwide per person equation, Georgia’s pro rata share is 128,000 animals. **Using this formula, Georgia is killing twice the national average.**

Using another formula, i.e., dividing the lowest estimated national kill rate of 4 million animals by 50 states yields an annual per state average of 80,000 euthanasias. **At this rate, Georgia is killing 3.25 times the national per-state average, or 1/16th (6.5%) of the estimated 4 million animals her year!** Computed this way, **Georgia is killing its allotted share as well as the share of 2 additional states.** These reported shelter kill rates do not even take into consideration the unknown number of unsheltered animals who die annually in Georgia of disease, starvation, abuse and injury, far too often chained to a tree in someone’s back yard.

Georgia can do better, but not without accurate, accessible-to-all baseline data; the enforcement of animal laws already on the books; and, a strong emphasis on humane education. *Georgia can – and should – end the shameless killing of shelter animals and use tax payers’ dollars to address the causes of overpopulation rather than the symptoms!*

This study clearly demonstrates how unreasonable, if not impossible, it is for one or more private citizens to annually gather data, via Open Records Act requests to 159 counties and 88 additional shelters, in order to compile a statewide, comprehensive database. Technically, all 197 animal control departments and/or shelters could have refused to participate in the survey, citing O.C.G.A.50-18-70(e) as their reason for not participating, which would have required the volunteers to travel to all 197 counties and cities to review thousands of pages of raw data in order to compile the requested information. Therefore, it is *incumbent* upon Georgia’s Legislators to ensure this task is completed annually by the GDOA or another designated state agency.

Recommendations

In order of priority, GVAW recommends:

- **A requirement that all public and private shelters in Georgia submit accurate entry and exit statistics, separating cats and dogs, to the GDOA upon annual renewal of their licenses; and that the GDOA, or another designated state agency, be responsible for maintaining a comprehensive and current database of these statistics that is easily accessible to the public;**
- **Enforcement of animal-related laws already in the Georgia Code, including but not limited to, 1984 Spay/Neuter (O.C.G.A. 4-14-3); 1990 Humane Euthanasia Act (O.C.G.A.4-11-5.1); 2000 Felony Cruelty Bill (O.C.G.A. 16-12-4); Rabies (O.C.G.A. 31-19); GA Animal Protection Act (4-11-1 thru 4-11-18);**
- **Dramatic improvements to the Georgia Dog and Cat Sterilization Program so that funds are increased and *targeted* to pet owners who need it most; and,**
- **Consideration of a statewide anti-tethering law.**

Contact Us

For more information about GVAW or detailed and/or specific information regarding the study, please contact GVAW Co-Founders. GVAW does not yet have a website.

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Counties, Cities, Towns and Humane Societies Surveyed

GEORGIA COUNTIES (159)

ADDITIONAL SHELTERS SURVEYED (88)

Appling County – City of Baxley Animal Control: 452 intakes, 175 euthanized (39%)
Athens-Clarke County: 1907 intakes, 472 euthanized (25%)
 Athens Area Humane Society: 1155 intakes, 507 euthanized (44%)
Atkinson County: no animal control
Bacon County: no animal control
 City of Alma Animal Shelter: no response
Baker County: all animals transferred to Albany Humane Society (see Dougherty County)
Baldwin County: 1485 intakes, 1015 euthanized (68%)
Banks County: no response
Barrow County: 3121 intakes, 2056 euthanized (66%)
Bartow County - Cartersville Animal Control: 7600 intakes, 5207 euthanized (69%)
Ben Hill County – Fitzgerald Animal Shelter: 955 intakes, euthanasia numbers not provided
Berrien County: 923 intakes, 760 euthanized (82%)
 City of Nashville Dog Pound: 485 intakes, 393 euthanized (81%)
Bibb County: no response
 Macon Police Animal Control: no response
Bleckley County – City of Cochran Animal Shelter: 90 intakes, 75 euthanized (83%)
Brantley County: no animal control
Brooks County: no response
 City of Quitman Animal Shelter: no response
Bryan County: no response
Bulloch County: 3213 intakes, 1858 euthanized (58%)
Burke County: no animal control
 City of Sardis: no records of euthanasia in 2007
 City of Waynesboro Animal Shelter: 23 intakes, 20 euthanized (87%)
Butts County: 1335 intakes, 907 euthanized (68%)
Calhoun County: no animal control
Camden County: all animals transferred to Humane Society of Camden County
 City of Kingsland: all animals transferred to Humane Society of Camden County
 Humane Society of Camden County: 4037 intakes, 2838 euthanized (70%)
Candler County - City of Metter Animal Shelter: 515 intakes, 291 euthanized (57%)
Carroll County: 8443 intakes, 5900 euthanized (70%)
Catoosa County: no response
Charlton County: no response, no animal control³
Chatham County: 4948 intakes, 3537 euthanized (71%)
 City of Tybee Island: all animals transferred to county shelter
Chattahoochee County: no response, no animal control
 City of Cusseta: 238 intakes, 231 euthanized (97%)
Chattooga County: 2500 intakes, 700 euthanized (28%)
Cherokee County: 7784 intakes, 3069 euthanized (40%)
Clay County: no animal control
Clayton County: refused to complete questionnaire pursuant to O.C.G.A. 50-18-70(d)
Clinch County: no response, no animal control
Cobb County: 13,820 intakes, 6058 euthanized (44%)
Coffee County: all animals transferred to Douglas-Coffee County Humane Society
 City of Douglas: all animals transferred to Douglas-Coffee County Humane Society

³ Counties that did not respond and are not included on GDOA's 2007 list of licensed animal control units are identified herein as "no response, no animal control."

Douglas-Coffee County Humane Society: 8681 intakes, 7213 euthanized (83%)

Colquitt County: all animals transferred to Moultrie-Colquitt Humane Society

 Moultrie - Colquitt Humane Society: 5316 intakes, 4780 euthanized (90%)

Columbia County: 6059 intakes, 2544 euthanized (42%)

Cook County: no response, no animal control

 City of Adel: intake numbers not provided, 363 euthanized

 City of Sparks Animal Shelter: 102 intakes, 99 euthanized (97%)

Coweta County: 3911 intakes, 1475 euthanized (38%)

 City of Grantville Animal Shelter: refused to complete questionnaire pursuant to O.C.G.A. 50-18-70

 City of Newnan: all animals transferred to county shelter

 City of Senoia: all animals transferred to county shelter

Crawford County: no animal control

Crisp County: no response

 City of Cordele Animal Shelter: no response

Dade County: no animal control

 City of Trenton Animal Shelter: no response

Dawson County: all animals transferred to Hall County Humane Society [Dawson Humane opened 4/2008]

Decatur County: all animals transferred to Bainbridge-Decatur County Humane Society

 Bainbridge - Decatur County Humane Society: 2500 intakes, 1400 euthanized (56%)

Dekalb County: 5673 intakes, 3828 euthanized (67%)

 City of Chamblee Animal Control: all animals transferred to county shelter

 City of Decatur: all animals transferred to county shelter

 Doraville Animal Control: all animals transferred to county shelter

Dodge County: no animal control

 City of Eastman: no response

Dooly County: stated it doesn't have an animal shelter

 City of Unadilla: stated all animals transferred to "Dooly County Animal Shelter"

 City of Vienna Animal Shelter: no response

Dougherty County: all animals transferred to Albany Humane Society

 Albany Police Animal Control: all animals transferred to Albany Humane Society

 Albany Humane Society: 4785 intakes, 3966 euthanized (83%)

Douglas County: 4400 intakes, 1922 euthanized (44%)

Early County: no animal control

 City of Blakely Animal Control: 175 intakes, 173 euthanized (99%)

Echols County: no response, no animal control

Effingham County: no response

Elbert County: questionnaire not completed due to volunteer's inability to pay requested amount of \$31.79

 City of Elberton Police Department: no response

Emanuel County: all animals transferred to Emanuel County Humane Society

 Swainsboro Police Department: all animals transferred to Emanuel County Humane Society

 Emanuel County Humane Society: 1051 intakes, 663 euthanized (63%)

Evans County: 94 intakes, 81 euthanized (86%)

Fannin County: no response

Fayette County: 1466 intakes, 570 euthanized (39%)

Floyd County: 6474 intakes, 4234 euthanized (65%)

Forsyth County: 4040 intakes, 2158 euthanized (53%)

Franklin County: 3333 intakes, 1875 euthanized (56%)

 City of Lavonia Animal Control: no response

 City of Royston: no response

Fulton County: 7978 intakes, 3072 euthanized (39%)

 City of College Park Public Works Department: all animals transferred to county shelter

Gilmer County: no response

Glascocock County: no animal control

Glynn County: 3574 intakes, 2384 euthanized (67%)

Gordon County: 4399 intakes, 3376 euthanized (77%)
 City of Calhoun: questionnaire not completed due to volunteer's inability to pay \$150.00

Grady County: 2513 intakes, 1508 euthanized (60%)

Greene County: 953 intakes, 655 euthanized (69%)
 City of Greensboro: no response

Gwinnett County: 8953 intakes, 5590 euthanized (62%)

Habersham County: no response
 Town of Alto: no response
 Town of Mount Airy: no response

Hall County: all animals transferred to Humane Society of Hall County
 Humane Society of Hall County: 13,062 intakes, 8818 euthanized (68%)

Hancock County: no animal control

Haralson County: no response

Harris County: 439 intakes, 183 euthanized (42%)

Hart County: no response
 City of Hartwell: no response

Heard County: 1142 intakes, 157 euthanized (14%)

Henry County: 6028 intakes, 3226 euthanized (54%)

Houston County: 1686 intakes, 1278 euthanized (76%)
 City of Centerville Animal Control: no response
 Perry Animal Shelter: 671 intakes, 182 euthanized (27%)
 Warner Robins Animal Shelter: 2668 intakes, 1852 euthanized (69%)

Irwin County: no response, no animal control

Jackson County: 925 intakes, 220 euthanized (24%)
 City of Commerce: numbers included in county numbers
 Jefferson Police Department: no response

Jasper County: refused to complete questionnaire pursuant to O.C.G.A. 50-18-70(e)

Jeff Davis County: no animal control
 City of Hazlehurst Animal Shelter: 189 intakes, 176 euthanized (93%)

Jefferson County: no animal control
 City of Wadley: no response
 City of Wrens: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided

Jenkins County - City of Millen Animal Shelter: 252 intakes, 252 euthanized (100%)

Johnson County: no animal control
 Town of Kite: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided

Jones County: 1581 intakes, 1334 euthanized (84%) [only April-December numbers provided]

Lamar County - City of Barnesville Animal Shelter: 922 intakes, 897 euthanized (97%)

Lanier County: no response, no animal control until 6/2008
 Lakeland Animal Shelter: no response

Laurens County: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided

Lee County: 1471 intakes, 60 euthanized [%NA, majority of animals transferred to Albany Humane Society]

Liberty County: 1923 intakes, 949 euthanized (49%)

Lincoln County: no response, no animal control
 City of Lincolnton: no response

Long County: no animal control

Lowndes County: no response

Lumpkin County: no response

Macon County: no animal control
 City of Montezuma: no response

Madison County: 2541 intakes, 1198 euthanized (47%)
 Madison-Oglethorpe Animal Shelter: no response

Marion County: refused to complete questionnaire pursuant to O.C.G.A. 50-18-70(e)

City of Buena Vista: 30 intakes, 23 euthanized (77%)
 McDuffie County – Thomson Animal Shelter: no response
 McIntosh County: no response
 Meriwether County: 693 intakes, 199 euthanized (29%)
 Manchester Animal Shelter: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided
 Miller County: no response, no animal control
 City of Colquitt: 70 intakes, 62 euthanized (89%)
 Mitchell County: 1584 intakes, 1336 euthanized (84%)
 Monroe County: no response
 Montgomery County: no response, no animal control
 Morgan County: 956 intakes, 756 euthanized (79%)
 City of Madison Animal Shelter: no response
 Murray County: no response
 Muscogee County - Columbus Animal Control Center: 7783 intakes, 6093 euthanized (78%)
 PAWS Columbus – Muscogee County Humane Society: no response
 Newton County: 5206 intakes, 4149 euthanized (80%)
 Oconee County: 1631 intakes, 785 euthanized (48%)
 Oglethorpe County: no animal control
 Paulding County: 6181 intakes, 2372 euthanized (38%)
 Peach County: no animal control
 City of Byron Animal Shelter: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided
 Fort Valley Police Department: 281 intakes, 281 euthanized (100%)
 Pickens County: no response
 Pierce County: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided
 Blackshear Animal Control: no response
 Pike County: no animal control
 Polk County: 3573 intakes, 2959 euthanized (83%)
 Pulaski County: no response, no animal control
 City of Hawkinsville: no response
 Putnam County: 805 intakes, 584 euthanized (73%)
 City of Eatonton: no response
 Quitman County: no animal control
 Rabun County: no animal control until 2008
 Randolph County: no animal control
 City of Cuthbert: no response
 Richmond County: no response
 Augusta Animal Services: no response
 Rockdale County: 2975 intakes, 1607 euthanized (54%)
 Schley County: no animal control
 City of Ellaville: 100 intakes, 95 euthanized (95%)
 Screven County: no response
 Seminole County: no response, no animal control
 Spalding County: 3716 intakes, 1294 euthanized (35%)
 Griffin Police Department: all animals transferred to county shelter
 Stephens County: no response
 Stewart County: no animal control
 Sumter County: all animals transferred to Sumter County Humane Society
 City of Americus: no response
 City of Andersonville: no response
 City of Plains: no response
 Sumter County Humane Society: 2335 intakes, 1798 euthanized (77%)
 Talbot County: no response
 Talifero County: no animal control

Tatnall County: 473 intakes, 417 euthanized (88%)

Taylor County: no animal control

Telfair County: no response, no animal control
 City of McRae: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided

Terrell County: no response

Thomas County: no response

Tift County: 3943 intakes, 3361 euthanized (85%)

Toombs County: no response, no animal control
 Lyons Animal Shelter: no response
 Vidalia Police Animal Control: no response

Towns County: no response, no animal control

Treutlen County: no animal control
 City of Soperton Animal Control: all animals transferred to Dublin-Laurens Humane Society

Troup County: all animals transferred to LaGrange-Troup Humane Society
 City of LaGrange Animal Control Center: 2346 intakes, 1705 euthanized (73%)
 City of Hogansville: no response
 LaGrange-Troup Humane Society: volunteer failed to send Open Records Act request

Turner County: no animal control
 City of Ashburn: 240 intakes, 200 euthanized (83%)

Twiggs County: no animal control

Union County: no response

Upson County - Thomaston Animal Shelter: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided

Walker County: no response

Walton County: 3457 intakes, 2870 euthanized (83%)

Ware County: all animals transferred to Okefenokee Humane Society
 Okefenokee Humane Society: 3248 intakes, 3047 euthanized (94%)

Warren County: no response, no animal control
 City of Warrenton Animal Control: no response

Washington County - Sandersville Animal Services: 2117 intakes, 1647 euthanized (78%)

Wayne County: no response, no animal control
 City of Jesup: no response

Webster County: no animal control

Wheeler County: no response, no animal control

White County: no response

Whitfield County: 3901 intakes, 3572 euthanized (92%)

Wilcox County: no animal control

Wilkes County: 1023 intakes, 305 euthanized (30%)
 Town of Tignall: all animals transferred to county shelter
 City of Washington: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided

Wilkinson County: no animal control

Worth County: intake and euthanasia numbers not provided
 City of Sylvester Dog Pound: refused to complete questionnaire pursuant to O.C.G.A. 50-18-70
 City of Warwick: all animals transferred to county shelter