

MOTIVATION FOR CHASING BEHAVIOR DISPLAYED BY COMMUNITY DOGS

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Many dogs are living as stray animals due to the difficulties in dog population management. Some of these dogs are recognized by the community and receive care from local residents and may be called community dogs. Some Brazilian cities are maintaining a Community Dog Program to improve both the welfare of the free-ranging dogs and their reproductive control, with positive public health benefits. One challenge of this strategy is the occurrence of chasing behaviour. Dogs that exhibit chasing behaviour are in greater risk of suffering mistreatment, such as being kicked, stoned or beaten. Furthermore, the behaviour may be harmful to other animals, including humans. The purpose of this research was to study the behaviour of chasing objects or individuals by community dogs, to understand its motivation. Six mixed breed dogs were observed and recorded for three chasing events. Four male dogs, three of them neutered, and two spayed females were studied. Dogs were aged between three and ten years old and have been living in the study area from three to eight years. Three videos of each dog, obtained during 6-h daily field observations per animal, were analysed by descriptive statistics considering body language, aspects of the context and other behaviours relevant to the identification of the motivation. The dogs exhibited chasing behaviour motivated mostly by territorialism in all studied events. In 72% of the events, the dogs presented offensive body language, and in 28% of the events their behaviour suggested that they may have experienced fear and discomfort in addition to territorialism, since there was defensive body language. The existence of fear as a motivation for chasing was evidenced by the hesitation during chasing, the exhibition of appeasement signals and the avoidance of contact with the target. In 56% of the events, the chasing started in front of the caretaker's house and none of the community dogs chased beyond the street where the caretaker lives. Therefore, the results suggest that the motivation for chasing behaviour in those occurrences was territorialism, which may be associated to fear. Our results on the territorialism aspect of the motivation coupled to further research detailing the reasons behind fear may shed light on the development of successful intervention strategies to mitigate chasing behaviour and its associated risks to the welfare of animals and humans.

