

FIGHTING HOMELESSNESS OF DOGS – EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGY ADAPTED BY THE CITY OF SIEDLCE

Małgorzata Bednarczyk-Szurmak, Elżbieta Bombik,
Teresa Bombik, Katarzyna Łagowska,
Izabela Szumigłowska, Marcin Różewicz

Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, Poland

Abstract. The aim of the study was to evaluate the strategy to combat homelessness of dogs in the city of Siedlce. The survey was based on questionnaires that included the following data: the number of dogs captured in 2010–2012, expenses incurred on the capture of the dogs and their boarding, procedures for dealing with homeless dogs, veterinary care, providing of full time care, the search for new owners for homeless dogs. The activities carried out by the municipality of Siedlce aimed at introducing compulsory registration and marking of dogs should be considered appropriate. Also the action of spaying/neutering dogs that get to shelters should be noted as positive. This action will significantly reduce propagation rates of dogs, and as a result reduce the number of animals brought to the shelter in future. As a result of the actions taken in Siedlce, a gradual decrease in the number of homeless dogs can be observed. Most homeless dogs have been spotted during summer holidays, which could have been caused by problems with the care of the animals; hence creation of hotels for animals seems a good solution. The shelter must be more active to increase the percentage of adoptions of dogs.

Key words: homeless dogs, homelessness combat methods

Corresponding author: Elżbieta Bombik, Department of Animal Reproduction and Hygiene, Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, Bolesława Prusa 14, 08-110 Siedlce, Poland, e-mail: ebombik@op.pl

© Copyright by Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Zachodniopomorskiego Uniwersytetu Technologicznego w Szczecinie, Szczecin 2015

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that there are 7 million dogs and eight million cats in Poland. In recent years homeless dogs have become a problem. This applies to both developed and developing countries. The number of homeless dogs in 2013 amounted to 106,267. The data were collected during the inspection conducted by the county veterinarians in 174 shelters [http://www.wetgiw.gov.pl/files/1946_Raport...pdf]. The actual size of dog homelessness in Poland is unknown, since the official figures do not include information about the number of dogs living in shelters and wandering around towns and villages. This applies also to feral dogs, which pose a big problem for hunting societies.

According to Polish law, local authorities (gmina, i.e. urban or rural municipalities) are responsible for capturing and providing care for homeless dogs. Due to economic reasons (costs of running the shelter, catching stray animals, care of animals, etc.) these local administrative units should be most interested in reducing the number of stray dogs. Polish animal shelters are some of the largest in Europe, costs related to catching stray dogs and caring for them are born by the municipalities.

Due to the need to step up measures aimed to protect animals, improve their quality of life, and ensure the welfare of animals [Sweklej et al. 2014], the lawmakers amended the Animal Protection Act [1997] on 16 September 2011. Both rural municipalities and cities are required to undertake a resolution adopting the program of care for homeless animals and to prevent animal homelessness [Bobrowicz 2012]. Shelters activities are legally based on the Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of 23 June 2004 on detailed veterinary requirements for the operation of animal shelters.

Poland lacks a coherent policy on the prevention of homelessness of dogs. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the activities carried out so far by the obligated agencies. The aim of the study was to evaluate strategy that combat homelessness of dogs in the city of Siedlce.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study is based on data contained in the documents obtained from the Municipality of Siedlce, the animal shelter in Ostrów Mazowiecka, from the Siedlce Police City Headquarters, interviews and statistical data available for the years 2010–2012. Questionnaires included the following data: the number of dogs captured in 2010–2012, expenses incurred on the capture of the dogs and their boarding, procedures for dealing with homeless dogs (catching stray animals in the urban area and their transfer to shelters), veterinary care and supervision (vacci-

nation, deworming, flea elimination, surgical treatment, boarding in the clinic), providing full-time care, veterinary actions (road accidents involving dogs, aggressive animals), acquisition of new owners for the homeless dogs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to reduce the population of stray animals, the Municipality of Siedlce adopts the following actions:

- spaying or neutering stray animal before placing in the shelter,
- electronic marking of all dogs in Siedlce,
- chip implanting before placing in the shelter,
- information campaigns about the obligation of electronic identification of all dogs in the city of Siedlce,
- providing data on new dog owners to the “Safe-Animal” international database,
- euthanasia of blind litters by contracted vets [Program opieki nad zwierzętami... 2012].

All actions related to detention of dogs in a shelter for homeless animals in Siedlce are recorded. Each dog has a card that contains the following data: date of admission to the shelter, the number of the microchip, the name of the municipality from which the animal comes, possibly date of euthanasia, in the case of adoption – the date of adoption and details of the person adopting a dog, if the dog escaped – date of escape. Dogs are under constant veterinary supervision.

The campaign carried out by the city of Siedlce aimed at introducing compulsory registration and marking of dogs should be considered correct. Poland’s Supreme Audit Office, as stated in the “Information on results of audits of municipalities related to the protection of animals”, believes that the problem of animal homelessness cannot be resolved without the introduction of a statutory obligation of registration and marking of dogs.

The campaign of spaying or neutering of dogs that end up in shelters at the expense of municipalities also should be assessed positively. In the long term, this will significantly reduce propagation rates of dogs, and thus reduce the number of animals brought to the shelter [Kutzler and Wood 2006].

Animal homelessness is a complex issue and its sources must be sought in human behavior. The most common cause of homelessness is ill-considered decision to have a dog, as well as changing fashion for specific breeds. Without a change in people’s awareness, the struggle against animal homelessness is doomed to failure. Therefore, the city of Siedlce should intensify educational efforts (leaflets, lectures, etc.).

Data on stray dogs handling in the city of Siedlce in 2010–2012 are shown in Table 1. The data show that about 200 dogs per year (from 187 to 232 dogs)

were captured in these years, of which about 50% were handed over to the shelter. Shelters for homeless animals make temporary or permanent refuge for lost, abandoned, and unwanted dogs. All shelters for animals under supervision are subject to inspections by the District Veterinary Officer. A shelter for homeless animals is supposed to be their refuge. Unfortunately, many shelters are overcrowded, which provokes various kinds of diseases. Animals kept there, coming from different environments, are often sick, neglected, and emaciated [Romaniuk et al. 2004]. Research shows that dogs in animal shelters are affected by the invasion of various parasites [February and Mizgajska 1999, Golińska et al. 2002, Kornaś et al. 2002].

Most dogs in the analyzed period has been caught in the third quarter of the year; this could have been due to the summer break and the related problems with caring for dogs. In the summer, all animal shelters in Poland note an increasing number of abandoned dogs. The solution to this problem would be to develop pet boarding services in Siedlce.

In the analyzed period, the number of adopted dogs dropped by half, from 52 individuals in 2010 to 26 individuals in 2012. On average, about 25% of animals go back to the owner, usually thanks to the implanted microchip. The shelter must take action to increase the rate of dog adoptions, by increasing accessibility to animals in the evening hours and on holidays, engaging volunteers and providing them with proper working conditions, organizing meetings with animals for the people willing adoption, or by abolition of adoption fees.

The main parameters of animal shelter evaluation is the number of adoptions, the number of deaths and euthanasias. Analyzing the number of dogs euthanized or found dead in the city of Siedlce in relation to all dogs captured in the studied years, it should be noted that these were, depending on the year, from about 5% to more than 8% (Table 1). The number of animals euthanized is low, which means that in most cases decisions are made to treat and rescue the dogs. Mostly, these dogs are victims of traffic accidents, injured or seriously ill.

The total cost of care for homeless dogs in the city of Siedlce in 2012 amounted to PLN 278,124 (Table 2). The highest expenses were incurred on admission of dogs to the shelter, 58% of the total funds spent on stray dogs. Catching stray dogs, transportation to shelters, and cleaning up dead animals accounted for over 26% of the total expenditure. The costs of spraying and neutering of stray dogs in Siedlce in 2012 accounted for 7.3% of total costs, while microchip implantations – 6.0%.

The Supreme Audit Office in the report of 2013 criticized the execution of the statutory responsibilities regarding the protection of animals by the municipality and the shelters. More than one third of the public funds earmarked for the protec-

Table 1. Disposal of dogs captured in the city of Siedlce in the years 2010–2012, number of individuals

Tabela 1. Postępowanie z odłowionymi psami na terenie miasta Siedlce w latach 2010–2012, liczba osobników

Specification Wyszczególnienie	Year Rok	Year quarter – Kwartał				Total Ogółem
		I	II	III	IV	
Capture Odłowienie	2010	49	46	60	53	208
	2011	65	38	74	55	232
	2012	56	36	41	54	187
Transfer to shelter Przekazanie do schroniska	2010	28	28	34	15	105
	2011	31	22	38	18	109
	2012	24	12	25	31	92
Adoption Adoptowanie	2010	11	8	12	21	52
	2011	14	3	8	16	41
	2012	7	6	7	6	26
Return to owner Zwrócenie właścicielowi	2010	10	9	7	15	41
	2011	17	9	22	14	62
	2012	21	14	6	13	54
Payment refusal Odmowa zapłaty	2010	no data brak danych	9	6	5	20
	2011	8	1	10	8	27
	2012	12	6	3	7	28
Settlement of payment Uregulowanie zapłaty	2010	no data brak danych	0	1	10	11
	2011	9	8	12	6	35
	2012	9	8	3	6	26
Euthanasia or death Poddanie eutanazji lub padnięcie	2010	0	1	7	2	10
	2011	3	4	6	7	20
	2012	4	4	3	4	15
Dead animals desposal Uprzątnięcie zwierząt padłych lub po eutanazji	2010	25	33	53	22	133
	2011	34	39	32	30	135
	2012	35	41	39	35	150
Body disposal, kg Utylizacja zwłok zwierzęcych, kg	2010	193	130	204	80.7	607.7
	2011	260.9	142	167.3	188.5	758.7
	2012	302.1	435.2	187	173.7	1098

tion of animals were spent in violation of law or with mismanagement [Informacja o wynikach kontroli... 2013].

Negative opinion of the activities of municipalities stems from not taking effective action to reduce the population of stray animals (and even the lack of any such actions) in 50% of the audited municipalities, disobeying bans of capturing stray animals without providing a place in shelters (61%), contracting unauthorized entities to capture stray dogs (67%), or without taking the relevant resolution

Table 2. Expenditures incurred for stray dogs in the city of Siedlce in 2012

Tabela 2. Wydatki poniesione na bezdomne psy na terenie miasta Siedlce w 2012 roku

Specification Wyszczególnienie	Unit cost – Koszt jednostkowy	Total – Ogółem	
		PLN	%
Admission to shelter Przyjęcie psa do schroniska	admission fee, PLN 1820 cena za przyjęcie psa, 1820 PLN standby monthly lump sum, PLN 1230 ryczałt miesięczny za gotowość, 1230 PLN	161 334	58.01
Catching stray dogs, transfer to shelter, disposal of dead animals Odlawianie bezdomnych psów, transport do schroniska, uprzążanie zwierząt padłych	on duty, PLN 2722.13 – dyżur, 2722,13 PLN aggressive dog, PLN 181.47 pies agresywny, 181,47 PLN catching a dog, PLN 151.23 wyłapanie psa, 151,23 PLN pup litter, PLN 80.65 miot szczeniąt, 80,65 PLN disposal of dead animals, PLN 60.49 uprzążanie zwierząt padłych, 60,49 PLN transfer to shelter, PLN 1.61 per km transport do schroniska, 1,61 PLN za km	73 890	26.57
Disposal of animal bodies Utylizacja zwłok zwierzęcych	PLN 5.40 per kg – 5,40 PLN za kg	5929	2.13
Spaying/neutering of dogs Sterylizacja i kastracja psów	dog castration PLN 66 kastacja psa – 66 PLN	20 273	7.29
Microchip implantation Czipowanie	PLN 10 per chip 10 PLN za sztukę	16 698	6.00
Total – Ogółem		278 124	100.00

by the municipal council (40%), spending illegally or inappropriately (36% of the budget) for entities that do not have the required permits or did not provide proper quality of animal care services, lack of control of public funds and care for animals in shelters and other places of detention (50%) [Informacja o wynikach kontroli... 2013].

CONCLUSIONS

The actions by the city of Siedlce aimed at introducing compulsory registration and marking of dogs should be considered correct. Also the action of spaying/neutering dogs that get to shelters should be noted as positive. This action will reduce significantly the propagation of dogs, and at the same time reduce the number of animals needing a place in a shelter. As a result of these actions taken in Siedlce, a gradual decrease in the number of homeless dogs has been observed. Most homeless dogs appeared during summer holidays, which could be caused by problems with the care of the animals; hence a good solution would be to create boarding facilities for pet animals. The shelter must take action to increase the percentage of adoptions of dogs.

REFERENCES

- Bobrowicz, J. (2012). Kwalifikacja aktu normatywnego jako aktu prawa miejscowego – na przykładzie uchwały w sprawie programu opieki nad zwierzętami bezdomnymi i zapobiegania bezdomności zwierząt [Qualification of the normative act as an act of local law – by example of the resolution on the program of care for homeless animals and prevention of animal homelessness]. *Administracja: teoria, dydaktyka, praktyka* 4 (29), 23–45. [in Polish].
- Golińska, Z., Bany, J., Palec, S., Zdanowska, D. (2002). Występowanie pasożytów jelitowych u psów wojskowych [Prevalence of intestinal parasites in military dogs]. *Med. Weter.*, 58(3), 227–229 [in Polish].
- http://www.wetgiw.gov.pl/files/1946_Raport%20roczny%20z%20wizytacji%20schronisk%20dla%20zwierz%C4%85t%20za%20rok%202013.pdf, date of access: 10 Feb., 2015.
- Informacja o wynikach kontroli. Wykonywanie zadań gmin dotyczących ochrony zwierząt [Information on the results of the audit. Execution of tasks of municipalities regarding the protection of animals] (2013). NIK Delegatura w Białymstoku [in Polish].
- Kornaś, S., Nowosad, B., Skalska, M. (2002). Zarażenie tęgoryjcami psów w schroniskach dla bezdomnych zwierząt [Hookworm infection in dogs in stray animal shelters]. *Med. Weter.*, 58(4), 291–294 [in Polish].
- Kutzler, M., Wood, A. (2006). Non-surgical methods of contraception and sterilization. *Theriogenology*, 66(3), 514–525.
- Luty, T., Mizgajska, H. (1999). Występowanie *Toxocara spp.* oraz innych pasożytów jelitowych u psów i kotów [Prevalence of *Toxocara spp.* and other intestinal parasites in dogs and cats] *Med. Weter.*, 55(11), 759–761 [in Polish].
- Program opieki nad zwierzętami bezdomnymi oraz zapobiegania bezdomności zwierząt na terenie miasta Siedlce w 2012 roku (załącznik do Uchwały nr XVII/356/2012 Rady Miasta Siedlce z dnia 24 lutego 2012 r.) [The programme for care of homeless animals and animal homelessness prevention in the city of Siedlce in 2012 (Annex to Resolution No. XVII/356/2012 by the Siedlce City Council of 24 February 2012)] [in Polish].
- Romaniuk, K., Sokół, R., Michalski, M. (2004). Występowanie pasożytów wewnętrznych u psów i kotów w schronisku dla bezdomnych zwierząt [Incidences of internal parasites in dogs and cats in an animal shelter]. *Med. Weter.*, 60(8), 839–840 [in Polish].
- Sweklej, E., Horoszewicz, E., Niedziółka, R. (2014). Utrzymanie i dobrostan psów – akty prawne [Maintenance and welfare of dogs – acts of laws]. *Życie Weter.*, 89(10), 829–832 [in Polish].
- Ustawa z dnia 21 sierpnia 1997 r. o ochronie zwierząt (DzU nr 111, poz. 724, z późn. zm.) [Act dated 21 August 1997 regarding animal protection (Journal of Laws, No. 111 Item 724, as amended)] [in Polish].

OCENA STRATEGII WALKI Z BEZDOMNOŚCIĄ PSÓW NA TERENIE MIASTA SIEDLCE

Streszczenie. Celem pracy była ocena strategii walki z bezdomnością psów na terenie miasta Siedlce. Oceny dokonano w oparciu o przygotowane ankiety, które uwzględniały między innymi: liczbę odłowionych psów w latach 2010–2012, wydatki poniesione na odłowienie psów oraz ich utrzymanie, procedury postępowania z bezdomnymi psami, nadzór weterynaryjny nad odłowionymi zwierzętami, zapewnienie całodobowej opieki, poszukiwanie nowych właścicieli dla bezdomnych psów. Działania prowadzone przez miasto Siedlce mające na celu wprowadzenie obowiązku rejestracji i znakowania psów należy uznać za prawidłowe. Również pozytywnie należy ocenić prowadzoną akcję sterylizacji/kastracji psów, które trafiają do schroniska. Działanie takie ograniczy w znacznym stopniu rozmnażanie się psów, a zarazem zmniejszy liczbę zwierząt trafiających do schroniska. W wyniku podjętych działań w Siedlcach obserwuje się zjawisko stopniowego zmniejszania się liczby bezdomnych psów. Najwięcej bezdomnych psów stwierdzono w okresie wakacyjnym co mogło to być spowodowane problemami z opieką nad zwierzętami, dlatego dobrym rozwiązaniem byłoby powstanie hoteli dla zwierząt. W schronisku należy podjąć działania zmierzające do zwiększenia liczby adopcji psów.

Słowa kluczowe: bezdomne psy, metody walki z bezdomnością

Accepted for print: 11.03.2015

For citation: Bednarczyk-Szurmak, M., Bombik, E., Bombik, T., Łagowska, K., Szumiągłowska, I., Różewicz M. (2015). Fighting homelessness of dogs – evaluation of the strategy adapted by the city of Siedlce. *Acta Sci. Pol. Zootechnica*, 14(1), 25–32.