Dog and Cat Counts in Sri Lanka, Daththa: An Innovative User-Friendly Digital Approach

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Number of dogs in Sri Lanka is estimated compared to the human population, for various national level programs, while there is no information available on cats. This estimate has proven wrong, at times with regard to various dog mediated lethal human health conditions. A reliable island wide estimate on dog and cat counts, would keep public health professionals and veterinarian at an advantage. We have developed a user-friendly mobile application, *"Daththa"* to be utilized in estimating total number of dogs and cats in any given administrative area. This software categorizes dogs and cats as (a) completely owned, (b) partially, communally, or collectively owned, or (c) completely unowned. An unowned (stray) dog is defined as any dog observed twice, once in the morning and once in the evening on the same day (sight-re sight method). Dogs seen either in the morning or evening, are considered to have some ownership. The software was tested in Udaperadeniya village. Counting started from a designated point, travelled on a predetermined route while using the mobile software and interviewing house owners. After surveying 58 houses, the route and GPS points were forwarded to a second person who counted dogs and cats encountered outside houses while traveling along the same route. The second person conducted counts in morning and evening on the same day, and on the subsequent Sunday. In 58 households, there were 30 owned dogs. There were 3 stray dogs, 14 partially owned/community dogs on the week day and on Sunday, 3 stray dogs and 12 partially owned/community dogs. A total of 13 cats with owners and 8 without owners were reported. Mobile data reception was the most significant logistic problem. Plans have already been made to test the software, after resolving problems, in four different administrative districts and subsequently in the entire country.

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