

The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review of the control of wild and stray animal nuisances by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD").

2. AFCD is responsible for the control of wild and stray animal nuisances. Wild animals may occasionally leave their natural habitats and enter urban areas. Domestic animals which have been abandoned or gone astray may also stray on the streets. The presence of wild animals and straying domestic animals in urban areas can cause nuisances (e.g. noise, hygiene and safety issues). It is the Administration's aim to contain such nuisances. AFCD received complaints involved animal nuisances relating to noise, hygiene and safety issues. Other complaints involved, for example, sighting of wild animals, wild bird nests found and requesting AFCD to catch stray animals. In 2018-2019, AFCD received 2 012 nuisance complaints about wild animals and 6 024 nuisance complaints about stray animals. In the year, the expenditure incurred in the control of wild and stray animals (including the control of wild and stray animal nuisances) was \$61.9 million.

3. The Committee noted the following findings from the Director of Audit's Report:

Control of wild animal nuisances

- according to AFCD guidelines, while on-site visits were needed for 1 553 nuisance complaints about wild animals in 2018-2019, AFCD staff did not conduct any on-site visits in 1 005 (65%) cases;
- Audit analysed 1 917 complaints and noted 49 (3%) cases with interim reply delayed and 398 (21%) cases with substantive reply delayed;
- during 2014 to 2019, the number of monkeys captured and sterilized by the contractor exceeded the specified minimum number by 15% to 63% every year. This might overly reduce the monkey population;
- of the 77 wild pigs nuisance blackspots<sup>1</sup> as at 31 May 2019, only 19 (25%) had been covered by "wild pig capture and

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<sup>1</sup> Nuisance blackspots comprised blackspots caused by feeding and environmental hygiene problem.

contraception/relocation programme" ("CCRP").<sup>2</sup> There was no records indicating that AFCD had laid down criteria for selecting sites for conducting CCRP operations;

- under CCRP, a vaccine was used to sterilize wild pigs and the contractor was required to recapture wild pigs for pregnancy tests. However, with only 9% of the wild pigs recaptured, enough samples had not yet been obtained to evaluate the vaccine's effectiveness;
- population surveys of wild pigs had not been regularly conducted. As at September 2019, AFCD was still figuring out the techniques on precise estimation of the total wild pig population;
- none of the 56 nuisance blackspots for wild pigs was located within Feeding Ban Area;<sup>3</sup>

#### Control of stray animal nuisances

- for nuisance complaints about stray animals, AFCD had not recorded the interim and substantive reply dates in the computer system. It could not be ascertained whether timely replies had been given to complainants as required;
- stray dogs/cats received by AFCD and not reclaimed after four days would be euthanized if they failed health/temperament assessment. Some of them had been observed for a short period (e.g. four days) and some others for a much longer period (e.g. 93 days) before euthanasia. Two dogs and one cat failing the temperament assessment had been euthanized within four days without reasons recorded;
- according to undertakings signed by animal welfare organizations ("AWOs"), rehomed dogs/cats (i.e. dogs/cats transferred from AFCD to AWOs for adoption by the public) should be neutered. However, in 2018-2019, only 27% of rehomed dogs and 49% of rehomed cats

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<sup>2</sup> CCRP was a means for addressing persistent wild pig nuisances in urban areas, as well as a population control programme for wild pigs. Under CCRP, wild pigs causing persistent nuisances and habituated to obtaining food from feeding were captured, sterilised, and relocated to remote countryside, where appropriate.

<sup>3</sup> Feeding Ban Area was made in 1999 for making wild animals revert to foraging food from the wild, rather than from people, slowing down the unnatural population growth of animals due to human feeding; and reducing the opportunities of close contacts between people and animals and thus the potential risk of transmitting diseases.

were sterilized at AFCD-engaged veterinary clinics. The percentage of rehomed dogs sterilized at AFCD-engaged veterinary clinics decreased from 56% in 2014-2015 to 27% in 2018-2019;

- under the Trap-Neuter-Return trial programme,<sup>4</sup> two AWOs recruited carers to feed stray dogs within specific sites and catch them for rehoming. In July 2019, the two AWOs were still running the programme with its effectiveness unknown;
- as at mid September 2019, AFCD had not yet started briefing relevant AWOs and stakeholders on the stray cattle management plan;
- while the number of pigeon nuisance complaints increased significantly in the past few years, AFCD only recently engaged a contractor to conduct a territory-wide pigeon population survey, scheduled for completion in March 2020;

#### Publicity, prosecution and other administrative issues

- the number of participants in school talks decreased by 8 515 (40%) during 2015-2016 to 2018-2019. The average number of participants in public seminars was also limited (e.g. fewer than 10 per seminar on average in 2018-2019);<sup>5</sup>
- as at 31 May 2019, only 66 (86%) of the 77 wild pig nuisance blackspots and only 71 (43%) of the 166 pigeon congregation spots<sup>6</sup> had banners put up reminding people not to feed the animals;
- in two cases, prosecution action had not been taken within six months from the date of offence (i.e. time-barred); and

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<sup>4</sup> AFCD had assisted two AWOs to implement a Trap-Neuter-Return trial programme for stray dogs between January 2015 and January 2018. Under the trial programme, stray dogs found within two specific sites (i.e. Cheung Chau and Tai Tong of Yuen Long) were caught, neutered and then returned to the sites. According to AFCD, it would assist and facilitate interested AWOs to implement similar programmes in other locations.

<sup>5</sup> School talks and public seminars (held at private housing developments) aimed to promote responsible pet ownership. According to AFCD, from 2019-2020 onwards, school talks on refraining from feeding wild animals would also be organized.

<sup>6</sup> According to AFCD, a location would be classified as a congregation spot of pigeons if frequent complaints were received.

- AFCD would run a pilot programme for enhancing the surveillance of African Swine Fever in local wild pigs between November 2019 and January 2020 and subject to reviews, would roll out a surveillance programme for African Swine Fever later.

4. The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject. Instead, it asked for written responses regarding control of wild and stray animal nuisances, publicity, prosecution and other administrative issues, and the surveillance of African Swine Fever in local wild pigs. The consolidated replies from **Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation** and **Secretary for the Environment** are in *Appendix 35*.

5. The Committee wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by Audit.