

SCIENCE & POLICY NEWSLETTER

Updates on BC SPCA science and academic initiatives, animal policy, legislation and current events



New Research — Preliminary Dog Bite Data in B.C.

The latest research coming from UBC's Animal Welfare Program and Dr. Sasha Protopopova, Chair in Companion Animal Welfare, aims to analyze dog bite data provincially to support municipal bylaw decision-making. Through an initiative led by the Local Government Compliance & Enforcement Association of B.C. (LGCEA), 13 municipalities voluntarily contributed data on dog bite cases that occurred in 2023 and 2024 in their jurisdictions. The data has been aggregated and summarized in order to encourage more B.C. municipalities to report their data, with goals to improve the database. Below are some preliminary highlights from 361 reports on dog bites across 13 municipalities; however, it is important to note that this data is preliminary and cannot yet be used for policy recommendations.

- Male dogs had more bite reports than female dogs and young adult (~2 years old) dogs had more reports compared to other ages.
- Most cases involved dogs without a previous bite history and recently obtained dogs (within 1-2 years) had more reports than others.
- While most cases do not provide data on where the dog was acquired, of those that did, dogs rescued/adopted did not represent the majority (majority came from breeders).

- When it comes to breed, dogs reported as “Other”, “Shepherd”, and “Small breed” had the most bites to humans, while dogs reported as “Bully breeds”, “Other”, “Shepherd”, and “Retrievers” had the most bites to other dogs.
- In most cases, if the owner was present, the offending dog was off-leash and the bitten dog was on-leash. Overall, 80% of reported bite cases involved a minor bite or no bite evidence, and in 87% of cases where humans were reported to be harmed, there was a minor bite or no bite evidence.
- If the offending dog was on-leash, the most frequent cases with people involved bites to adults. A common scenario may be a person petting a stranger’s leashed dog.
- If the offending dog was on-leash, and a dog was bitten, the victim was also on-leash. This can result from two owners bringing their dogs together for a leashed greeting.

While preliminary, these new insights offer deeper understanding of what dog bite report data looks like in B.C. and we look forward to more updates as this work progresses.

Government Relations

Protecting animals in mobile petting zoos

In January, Port Moody City Council unanimously voted to develop a corporate policy prohibiting mobile live animal programs (MLAPs) in Port Moody. The motion was introduced by Councillor Knowles out of concern for the animals being transported to events where they are displayed to, handled by and/or sold to the public. The BC SPCA and the Vancouver Humane Society supported the motion and noted serious animal welfare and public health and safety concerns associated with MLAPs:

- **Animal welfare** – animals are typically subjected to noisy crowds of people in unfamiliar places with little opportunity to hide or rest. They can be handled improperly by visitors and untrained staff or volunteers. Transport, public display and handling are particularly distressing for undomesticated exotic and wild animals. Visitors and organizations that host MLAPs at events are not able to determine how animals are treated outside of the event or during transit, or where they are sourced from.
- **Zoonotic diseases** – even healthy-looking animals can transmit harmful pathogens like E. coli, Salmonella and Avian flu to people and other animals. Stressed animals are more likely to shed pathogens, and public health agencies recommend that young children should not handle reptiles as they are at a higher risk of infection and serious illness.
- **Injuries** – Stressed animals are more likely to bite, scratch or exhibit other defensive behaviours. Some of the animals frequently displayed at MLAPs, such as large snakes and reptiles, could inflict serious harm.

In the absence of provincial regulations and minimum standards of care for MLAPs, anyone with animals in their possession can display them for sale or public handling. While MLAPs can provide fundraising opportunities for non-profits that care for rescued animals, using photos, videos, stories and interactive media does not inflict stress on animals. Many organizations, including the BC SPCA’s Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre (Wild ARC), promote wildlife education and generate donations without the stressful public display and handling of sensitive animals.

Farm Animal Welfare

Backyard hens: humane end-of-life care

What happens when the time comes? Laying hens are most productive in their first two years of life, after which egg production drops. The BC SPCA believes humane care for backyard hens should extend beyond their most productive years. Hens who have slowed or stopped laying eggs can still live happy, healthy lives and provide benefits like insect control, consuming kitchen scraps, natural fertilizer and companionship.

The BC SPCA encourages those interested in backyard hens to be prepared for their lifelong care. However, some may choose not to keep their hens long-term, so it's important that information is available to ensure end-of-life decision-making is informed and humane.

Establishing a relationship with a veterinarian who is comfortable with poultry before acquiring birds is critical. Should hens experience illness or injury from which they are not expected to recover, a veterinarian can perform euthanasia. Veterinarians should be prepared to support those in their community who inquire about euthanasia services.

The BC SPCA recommends that disposal of deceased hens and the slaughter of hens on-site be prohibited in backyard hen bylaws. Burial of carcasses can pose risks in the form of environmental contamination and disease transmission. Deceased hens should be delivered to a veterinarian, an abattoir, or another lawful disposal facility. Slaughter for processing, if chosen, should be performed at a licensed facility to ensure humane treatment. Many municipal bylaws outline the permissance of backyard hens and any requirements, such as zoning restrictions, hen limits, enclosure specifications, and other care necessities. However, end-of-life management is not always detailed – the BC SPCA advocates that this information should be included for backyard hen owners.



It's important for backyard hen guardians to plan for their end-of-life care. This can be supported by making the provision of veterinary care an essential component of backyard hen bylaws. Municipal bylaws and veterinary professionals can be valuable sources of information to ensure their well-being.

AnimalKind

Humane dog collars = safer communities

How can a dog's collar make a community safer? A majority of behaviour and welfare research has shown that aversive training collars (prong, choke and electronic "shock") are associated with increased dog aggression and less successful training outcomes. These collars are also associated with negative dog welfare, for example, shock collars cause dogs to yelp and show stress-related behaviours. Sadly, a recent BC SPCA commissioned poll* confirmed that approximately 10% of B.C. dog guardians reported regularly or sometimes using prong, choke or electronic ("shock") collars.

Painful collars can make things worse for fearful and aggressive dogs and at least 12 countries have banned one, if not all, of these collars. Safety risks to the community increase with human-dog bites and inter-dog aggression, which also damages dog-guardian bonds and

often results in surrenders to animal shelters and rescues. Unfortunately, collar sales and dog training are unregulated in Canada. Dog trainers do not require licensure nor have standardized trainer qualifications or training methods. Therefore, addressing harmful collar use at the municipal level presents a novel way to protect companion animals, their guardians and others in the community.



For example, the City of Montreal's 2021 bylaw on dog collars states, *"In order to ensure public safety, no person may put a choke collar, spike collar, electrical collar or any other collar on an animal that may cause it pain"*. Collar bylaws can be enforced through monitoring already in place for off-leash areas, dog licenses and community patrols. Sales of harmful collars can also be addressed through business bylaws. Education and resources about alternate training tools and methods are available through the BC SPCA's AnimalKind program www.animalkind.ca.

*Stratcom poll conducted for the BC SPCA May 23-28, 2024 (n = 1,002 B.C. residents, margin of error +/-3.1%, 19 times out of 20)

Companion Animal Welfare

Meet the Science & Policy team: Companion Animal Welfare & Policy

The BC SPCA's Science and Policy Team welcomed Kahlee Demers as the Manager of Companion Animal Welfare & Policy in January 2025.

Kahlee originally joined the BC SPCA in January 2020 within the Animal Services department and recently transitioned from her role as the Community Animal Centre Manager in Maple Ridge. There, she oversaw daily operations and led an animal control team, all while fostering strong relationships within the community. Prior to joining the BC SPCA, Kahlee gained valuable experience participating in a variety of animal welfare research projects while studying towards her B.Sc. in Animal Biology at the University of Guelph. She went on to complete her M.Sc., focusing on factors influencing reproductive success in Vancouver Island marmots.

She now draws on her background in leadership, communications, and research to support the planning, implementation, and evaluation of companion animal welfare science, policy, advocacy, and prevention-focused initiatives. Driven by a root cause approach, Kahlee is committed to improving companion animal welfare across B.C. so that animals and people can thrive together.

