Reviewer's report

Title: Potential and Actual Rabies Exposure in People and Domestic Animals, Upstate South Carolina, 1995-2003: A Surveillance Study

Version: 2 Date: 12 January 2009

Reviewer: Millicent Eidson

Reviewer's report:

The changes help tremendously to clarify the results. I have a few final recommendations:

Major compulsory revisions:
1) p. 3, Background, insert ‘some’ in "South Carolina, like [some] other states” because not all states mandate reporting of human victims
2) p. 4, “Domestic exposure animals were categorized according to ownership status (stray, pet).” It is not clear how or where livestock were included.
3) p. 5, “Animal victims, predominantly dogs, were reported in 2.7% of all incidents . . .”
   Unless I am reading Table 1 incorrectly, cats were 505 of the victims, whereas dogs were 41 of the victims, so ‘dogs’ should be changed to ‘cats’.
4) p. 6, “. . . while in owned cats, that proportion was only a third (33.3%)”
   The percentage is slightly different (32.3%) in the table.
5) Tables 1 and 4 appear to be similar, except that table 4 restricts to rabid animals only. So comparing them would be easier if they were similarly formatted. Currently the structure with lines is slightly different. Also, Table 4 includes livestock as an exposure animal but Table 1 includes ‘other’. Both tables would benefit from footnotes to explain what species are included in ‘other’, both for the exposure animal and the victim. The footnote in Table 1 that is not in Table 4 about exclusion is confusing.

Minor essential revisions:
1) Figure title is confusing, recommend “Distribution of ownership status (owned vs. stray) among cats and dogs implicated as the exposure animal in incident reports, Upstate South Carolina, 1994-2004.”

Discretionary revisions:
1) Consider using the plural noun in a few places, such as ‘exposures’ in the title, and for species such as skunks, foxes.
2) p. 7, Recommend breaking for new paragraph with “Animals were far more commonly exposed to rabid animals . . .”
3) p. 8, The mention of ‘bat’ at the top of the page is confusing because bats
have been excluded.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.