

“Who owns dogs and what do they do with them?”

Professor Rosalind Gaskell

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Following a tradition established some years ago, the December lecture was given to a full house by a member of the Society, Professor Rosalind Gaskell. She reported research funded by DEFRA that she has carried out with five collaborators. The aim of the research was to answer the following questions.

1. What are the characteristics of households that own pet dogs compared to those that do not?
2. How do humans and dogs interact with others in such households?
3. How much interactions do dogs have with other dogs when taken for walks on public footpaths etc?

Nearly 1300 households were visited and given questionnaires in an area of Liverpool that contained a park and other public areas. Of these, 260 households (24%) containing 327 dogs returned a questionnaire. The commonest reason given by 68% of the respondents for owning a dog was companionship. Another 42% said they had owned a dog previously. The most popular breeds were Labradors (15%) and Jack Russells (13%). Households with children over 6 years of age were the most likely to have dog.

Using a sophisticated system of social network analysis, the areas where dogs were most likely to meet and interact with other dogs were identified. This has important implications for disease prevention, e.g. for targeted vaccination.

On a lighter note, the speaker ended by reporting that that men were observed to be less likely statistically than women to ‘pick up’ after their dogs in public places or even in the garden.

The evening concluded with traditional refreshments being served where members interacted amicably without the help of canine friends.

Given at the Cirencester Parish Centre on 14 December 2011