



Global Synergy for Animal Welfare: From Research to Impact Abstracts

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19th June 2024 (Day 1)

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Veterinarians for Animal Welfare Aotearoa (VAWA), New Zealand

Farm animal welfare: ‘Wickedness’ and why it stymies progress

There are many, widely variable barriers to implementation of animal welfare science knowledge. These include genuine gaps in understanding, a wilful disregard of knowledge, welfare-washing, vested interests, bank-lending criteria, government policy and regulatory capture. For farmed animals, a lack of long-term, strategic leadership may preclude implementation of new knowledge. Animal welfare may also be deprioritised in favour of the environment and/or economics. Financial and farm consultants’ advice and industry narratives can remain stubbornly unchanging despite evidence that alternative systems and practices with better welfare are profitable. These barriers to change are perhaps particularly evident with farmed animals, but apply to other animals, such as companion and research animals and ‘pests.’ There can be stark contrast between knowledge and welfare that are underpinned by our value and belief systems. Any progress to implement new knowledge needs to consider human behaviour change science. In making progress, an holistic One Health | One Welfare | te ao Māori/indigenous approach needs to be used. This means the welfare of Papatūānuku (Mother Earth) is ensured, and in turn, she can support the welfare of our animals, and our people.



Nathalie Cornée

Overton, UK

Understanding the influence of animal welfare research within policy using Overton

Understanding the influence of research within the policy sphere has been one of Overton's main priorities and we've learnt a lot over the last 5 years. In this talk, we will introduce how Overton supports the scientific community to demonstrate the significance of their research beyond academia. We will spotlight research outputs related to animal welfare and analyse the dynamics around publication and citation patterns within the policymaking process based on Overton's data universe. Across many academic disciplines, it is common for research to be cited first by knowledge brokers rather than directly by policymakers, and we will highlight how Overton can help animal welfare research experts uncover those trends. We will also examine how long on average it takes for these scholarly publications to be cited for the first time by key policy stakeholders. With this, we hope to help academics uncover new pathways to disseminate their findings, by enhancing their understanding of how their research fits into the debates shaping real world policy. Also, we will explain how researchers can go an extra step by proactively engaging with policymakers through calls for evidence and similar.



Farhana Chowdhury¹, Rowe, C.¹, Evans, E.² & Araujo-Soares, V.³

¹ Newcastle University, UK; ² Durham University, UK; ³ Heidelberg University, Germany

Human behaviour change for mouse welfare

The housing and handling of laboratory animals involved in research can affect their welfare, and potentially the quality of scientific data produced. Whilst there have been substantial evidence-based improvements to laboratory practices to help improve animal welfare, adoption of new practices can be slow and inconsistent. Improvements in laboratory animal welfare require a better understanding of factors driving people's decisions to implement animal welfare interventions in this setting. We used mouse-handling methods as a case study to examine this process by applying approaches and methods from health intervention sciences. Low-stress methods are not consistently adopted despite evidence demonstrating reduced anxiety and depression in mice, improved research outcomes, and increased exploration and performance in standard behavioural tests. We conducted an online survey study to explore the identified issues for those who work in laboratories. Responses particularly highlighted the complex relationship between organisational and individual level factors. The results revealed numerous barriers to low stress handling, ranging from the practicality of the method, problematic mouse behaviour, and the perceptions of methods can impact mouse welfare. This research sheds light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in improving laboratory animal welfare through behaviour-focussed interventions.



Kelly Forsythe & Hecht, L.

Wild Animal Initiative, UK

Funding animal welfare science on neglected species

One of the biggest challenges faced by wild animal welfare science is the lack of support from funders in both the private and public sectors. Animal welfare science has historically focused on captive animals, while ecological research tends to focus on species of conservation concern and anthropogenic threats to their persistence. The fundamental gaps in scientific understanding of wild animal welfare have contributed to a vast underrepresentation of these concerns at the policy level. In order to inform policy and intervention, several questions regarding the welfare of wild animals require exploration. Wild Animal Initiative's (WAI) Grants Program supports researchers in investigating neglected welfare issues, prioritizing species whose welfare is typically overlooked. Through our Challenge Grants, we aim to fill strategic gaps in knowledge. In this presentation, we will outline the key criteria we, as funders, use to evaluate the impact of a project and we will guide scientists in strengthening the design of their research projects to create long-term benefits to wild animals. We will discuss the importance of studying common species to maximize research impact and how our projects are addressing non-anthropogenic threats to welfare.



Elena Nalon & Ajuda, I.

Eurogroup for Animals, Belgium

EU politics and animal welfare research: How do they fit?

Influencing the European Institutions to improve animal welfare legislation is paramount to ensure that the same standards apply across the Union and that animals kept or traded in the EU have good lives. The process is complex and involves the European Commission, which has the prerogative of proposing new legislation, and its co-legislators - the European Parliament, representing citizens, and the Council of the European Union, representing the Member States. Before these three entities enter the negotiation phase of agreeing on new legislation (the so-called trilogue), there are intermediate steps where various stakeholders can have their say. These include a fitness check, one or more impact assessments, EFSA opinions, consultations with expert sub-groups, and the Commission's internal regulatory scrutiny board and interservice consultations. Researchers can contribute their knowledge by participating as experts in the various steps of the preparatory phase that precedes the proposal of any new European legislation. The presentation will illustrate these possibilities and stress the increasing importance for animal welfare scientists to actively engage in the European policy-making process, ensuring that future animal welfare legislation is as progressive as possible, thus having a positive impact on billions of animal lives.



PLENARY: Dr Leopoldo Stuardo

World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)

WOAH's animal welfare commitment: From science to standard

Since its founding in 1924, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, founded as OIE) has been responsible for setting intergovernmental animal health standards. In 1995, when the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was established, the WOAH animal health Standards were specifically recognised in the WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement. In 2002, at the request of its Member Countries, the WOAH broadened its mandate to include animal welfare standards on its Terrestrial and Aquatic Animal Health Codes, noting that animal health is a key component of animal welfare. The first WOAH standards on animal welfare were published in 2005 and new Standards continue to be added. To date, fourteen Chapters have been published in the Terrestrial Code and four in the Aquatic Code. WOAH animal welfare chapters are regularly updated considering new developments in scientific knowledge, and the WOAH World Assembly of Delegates adopts all WOAH standards. Animal welfare has been recognised as a complex and multifaceted issue and these aspects makes the implementation of the WOAH animal welfare standards challenging among their Members. Implementation of WOAH animal welfare chapters at national level, are recognized as an integral and important part of establishing and improving the legal framework regarding animal welfare. To support the implementation of WOAH animal welfare Standards, WOAH Members adopted the WOAH Global Animal Welfare Strategy (GAWS) in 2017. This strategy was developed from lessons learned from actions taken at national and regional levels and aims to be a source of ongoing guidance for the WOAH's animal welfare activities.



Buddhamas Pralle Kriengwatana¹, Hirskyj-Douglas, I.², Iyasere, O.^{3,4}, French, F.⁵, Jalali, A.⁶, Kleinberger, R.⁷, Mott, R.⁸, Nager, R.²; Penacchio, O.⁹, Potvin, D.¹⁰, Sabet, S. S.¹¹, Sobukola, O.⁴, Spencer, K.¹², Spierings, M.¹³ & Wells, D.¹⁴

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Acoustic enrichment interest group: A network to synchronise research and explore the use of sounds for animal health and welfare

For most animals, sound is a vital source of information about the environment, conspecifics, and heterospecifics. The global soundscape is profoundly altered by anthropogenic sounds and/or a lack of natural sounds, which can detrimentally affect behavioural, physical, and psychological states in a wide range of taxa. Enrichment of the acoustic environment may be a complementary means of improving animal welfare, but it remains understudied and underexploited. We define acoustic enrichment as the modification of a soundscape that improves indicators of health and welfare (via characterisation and the addition, reduction, or removal of sounds that are perceptible and meaningful to animals). We present the newly formed Acoustic Enrichment Interest Group (AEIG), a network that connects researchers, practitioners, and other related stakeholders to create and develop valuable knowledge about the relationship between sounds and welfare in animals, and to generate a positive impact on animal wellbeing through practical initiatives and advocacy. Our primary goals are to: 1) promote research, education, and guidelines on acoustic enrichment for different species through scientific publications and monthly webinars; 2) provide opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration through an online forum that connects members; and 3) deploy and evaluate novel implementations of acoustic enrichment to improve animals' experiences.



Sarah Wolfensohn

University of Surrey, UK; DEFRA Animal Welfare Committee, UK

Understand and improve welfare by using the Animal Welfare Assessment Grid (AWAG)

The Animal Welfare Assessment Grid (www.awag.org.uk) is an online tool to assess and monitor the welfare of animals. The AWAG encompasses the five domains of welfare across four parameters: Physical, Behavioural, Environmental and Procedural. It provides a mean score for each parameter and a cumulative welfare score (CWAS) which is tracked over time, recording the lifetime experience of the individual or groups of animals to visually demonstrate quality of life. The AWAG tool has been developed for use with a number of different species and types of animal use including companion dogs, assistance dogs, racing greyhounds, captive wild animals in zoos, laboratory species, cattle, pigs, racehorses, and used to provide evidence in legal proceedings. By working with an independent technology company who understand how data, systems and processes can come together to deliver a strategy, we have solved the unique and complex problems of welfare assessment through the engineering of a technology-driven solution that integrates strategic thinking and hands-on action. It connects with the animal carers resulting in actions to improve welfare. The system has further potential for retailer use and to increase consumer understanding of animal welfare issues which is very relevant to sustainability and regeneration issues.



Jessica Cait¹, Avey, M. T.² & Mason, G. J.¹

¹ University of Guelph, Canada; ² Canadian Council on Animal Care

From scientific evidence to guideline recommendation: How can animal welfare science learn from human medicine?

Animal welfare science informs the guidelines governing the treatment of non-human animals; however, there is often a significant lag between scientific consensus and guideline changes. Furthermore, guidelines may not accurately represent scientific consensus, leading to misinformed recommendations, potentially reducing welfare. One reason behind these issues is the overreliance on expert review in guideline development. Guidelines are informed by fallible human committees that cannot rigorously weigh all available scientific evidence without bias. Human medicine has addressed similar issues by moving away from expert opinion and towards unbiased, transparent, and rigorous assessments of the quality of available scientific evidence. This approach requires researchers and guideline developers to formulate questions, prespecify relevant outcomes, conduct systematic reviews, and assess Confidence in Cumulative Evidence. Such assessments enable researchers to rate the quality of evidence and for guideline developers to formulate guideline recommendations based on those ratings. Transparent frameworks to assess Confidence in Cumulative Evidence, such as the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) approach, have been widely adopted in human medicine (e.g., by the WHO). We suggest applying this framework to assess Confidence in Cumulative Welfare Evidence with the express goal of enhancing evidence-based guideline recommendations for animal welfare across the globe.



Katarína Bučková¹, Moravcsíková, Á^{2, 3} & Šárová, R.²

¹ Iowa State University, USA; ² Institute of Animal Science Prague, Czech Republic; ³ Czech University of Life Sciences

Effect of pair-housing on dairy calf welfare and performance (a systematic review)

Popularity of individual housing of young dairy calves tend to decrease due to animal welfare concerns. Therefore, it is important to provide practitioners and policy makers with accurate and reliable scientific knowledge on alternative housing systems for dairy calves. Our objective was to critically evaluate the scientific knowledge on pair-housed dairy calves. Research papers were found through targeted searches in research databases. After applying the inclusion criteria, 35 articles were left. The majority of papers did not report improved body weight (BW) gain before weaning from milk, but pair-housed calves typically gained more BW during and/or after weaning. With exception of social behaviour, which tend to be better developed in pair-housed calves, behaviour did not seem to differ between pair-housed and individually housed calves. In general, pair-housed calves coped better with stress although a limited number of studies suggests they were less willing to engage in contact with a human. We found no consistent evidence of impaired health or improved learning abilities and emotional states in pair-housed calves. In conclusion, pair-housing provides calves with more benefits than individual housing, and improve or do not affect variables of a high value to a producer.



PLENARY: Dr Dennis Bahati

Africa Network for Animal Welfare (ANAW)

Evidence based approach in enhancing animal welfare within Africa

Africa Network for Animal Welfare (ANAW) believes that, as sentient beings, animals should not suffer. However, it is becoming apparent that animals are increasingly suffering as people pursue various development goals and progress in Africa. Consequently, the changes happening in society have created situations whereby animals are unable to cope naturally, hence becoming unhealthy, living in pain, distress and discomfort. Animals are increasingly unable to adapt to the growing human needs in Africa. This has resulted in poor animal welfare throughout the continent. To address these challenges, ANAW embraces knowledge-based approaches and applied research to guide specific, desirable actions towards improving animal welfare standards in Africa. The pressure to bring immediate relief to suffering animals tends to override questions concerning the long-term effectiveness of particular interventions. However, significant and sustained improvements in the treatment of animals will only be reached by employing the kinds of evidence-based approaches that are used in other sectors. There is continued need for careful assessment of outcomes, to determine which policies and practices are ultimately successful and which are not and hence determine what works for Africa.



20th June 2024 (Day 2)

PLENARY: Prof Lynne Sneddon

University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Impact of science in improving aquatic animal welfare

Concern over the welfare of aquatic animals has grown dramatically in recent years. Prior to 2002 it was thought that fishes could not perceive pain and cultural references as well as dietary choices seem to reflect less care for these aquatic animals. However, the identification of nociceptors in the rainbow trout and subsequent work on responses to painful treatment demonstrated that fish were able to experience discomfort associated with tissue damage. This has led to dramatic changes in the way fishes are considered in public opinion and with respect to their treatment in aquaculture, fisheries and in the laboratory. This presentation will focus on how empirical data can influence science, animal care, industries that use aquatic animals, government and regulatory bodies. Engaging with the media can drive the dissemination of information regarding the science behind fish welfare and has led to improvements in the treatment of aquatic animals. To overcome barriers to improving the care and welfare of fishes it is important that there is effective communication between animal carers and researchers so that pain management strategies can be adopted. How scientific findings can be used to change public opinion and have a cultural impact will be highlighted and related to current concerns over other aquatic species including decapod crustaceans and cephalopods.



Ben Todhunter^{1, 2} & Mark Ferguson^{3, 4}

¹ The NZ Merino Company Ltd, New Zealand; ² Cleardale Station Ltd., New Zealand; ³ NeXtgen Agri International; ⁴ Genesmith, New Zealand

A genetic approach to reducing footrot prevalence in sheep

Virulent footrot, a distressing condition affecting sheep, cattle, deer, and goats, is primarily caused by the bacteria *Dichelobacter nodosus*, leading to severe lameness and pain due to the necrosis of the epidermis and separation of the hoof from underlying tissues. Traditional management strategies in New Zealand and Australia, such as vaccines, antibiotics, and footbaths, have been partially effective in managing outbreaks but fall short in eradicating the disease on individual farms, often due to labour intensity and impracticality during critical farming periods like lambing. Since 2013, the New Zealand fine-wool sheep industry has pursued an innovative genetic approach to combat footrot, focusing on the natural genetic variation in resistance to the disease. This heritable resistance has enabled the development of tools for selecting disease-resistant animals, significantly reducing the incidence and severity of footrot in flocks adopting this strategy, thereby decreasing the animals' suffering. A pioneering group of farmers has further advanced this approach by establishing a group breeding scheme to enhance genetic resistance to footrot, demonstrating significant improvements over the past 11 years. This paper discusses the methodology, implementation, and positive outcomes of leveraging genetic resistance against disease, underscoring its potential as a sustainable and effective solution to mitigate the pain and suffering of farmed livestock through reduced disease prevalence.



Luke Hecht^{1,2}, Liedholm, S. E.¹ & Elliott, V.^{1,3}

¹ Wild Animal Initiative, UK; ² Durham University, UK; ³ Smithsonian Institution, USA

Optimizing population density for wild animals' welfare

The size of a population relative to limiting resources is likely to impact welfare through factors including resource accessibility, social interactions, predation risk, and disease transmission. The shape of the relationship between population density and welfare for a given population may depend on which age groups struggle the most when resources are limited, and how adults respond in accordance with their life history traits. In general, for populations near their carrying capacity, welfare is likely to be higher when adults limit immediate reproduction in favour of somatic maintenance and parental care, than when reproduction continues unabated and survival is reduced instead. Beyond serving as a non-lethal approach to “pest” control, wildlife contraception has the potential to improve wild animals' welfare above natural baselines by averting negative consequences of high population density. Wildlife contraception is likely to have the most positive impact on welfare where large declines in juvenile survival occur between growing and stable population states, and where these declines steepen as populations approach carrying capacity. We present a framework, based on these principles, for predicting how much animals of a given population stand to benefit from wildlife contraception based on their life history strategy and ecological context.



Sarah Bonser-Blake

Wild Welfare

Bringing together animal welfare research and application to improve husbandry practices in zoological facilities through humane education

What is a welfare standard? How can we ensure evidence based welfare standards are engaging and accessible to provide a consistent level of good welfare for all animals under human care? How do we utilise humane education to do this? Wild Welfare's own Standard of Practice for Captive Wild Animals, developed through hundreds of peer reviewed papers and books, has been transformed for the very purpose of providing obtainable but detailed learning content based on the latest scientific research, through a digital and problem based learning approach. Identifying the barriers to providing good animal welfare standards and then practically applying up to date concepts and species knowledge to daily keeping activities, enclosure design, infrastructure and nutrition, can make a huge difference to an animal's well-being. This presentation will demonstrate how the programme utilises a standard based on up to date research to create a participatory learning approach that provides accessible and engaging opportunities in which animal care fundamentals can be learned and applied, bridging the animal welfare knowledge and skills gap to ensure best practice.

Siyao Shi & Legrand, A.

Compassion in World Farming (CIWF)

From research to impact for farm animal welfare: Examples from CIWF’s food business programme

Practical implementation and dissemination of scientific findings to a large audience, including the farming and food industry, is key to advancing farm animal welfare. Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) uses the latest scientific evidence to back up its policy and corporate asks, resulting in positive change for billions of farm animals. In the food sector alone, through its Good Farm Animal Welfare Awards scheme, partnership projects and technical guidance to producers and food companies, CIWF’s work is set to benefit over 2.5 billion animals per year since the launch of its global food business programme in 2009. In countries such as China, where animal welfare laws are absent whilst public and scientific interest for farm animal welfare are growing, stimulating the voluntary uptake of higher welfare standards by the industry through positive engagement and consultancy is key. Forging collaborations with other local groups, in particular with the academia, also allows to maximize outreach for a higher visibility and impact for farm animals.



Libby Syddall

Nestera Global

Could you make your animal welfare research more accessible and relevant?

For 18 years I have worked at the coalface of converting poultry research into tangible actions for poultry keepers. I am proud to be a conduit! Back garden chicken keeping features an interesting demographic. In high income countries most keepers are well-educated, financially comfortable, passionate about improving welfare and eager to learn. We use social media posts, blogs, videos, podcasts and more recently 'poultry packs' to filter down the fascinating lessons learned by researchers. However, the papers I am reading are written peer to peer and lack photos and illustrations that would more easily convey their content. Although the message has wide-spread appeal, the format does not. The prevalence of small-scale poultry keeping is high in rural areas all over the world. In low and middle-income countries, women own 90% of these flocks which provides income, food security and greater empowerment. The plethora of poultry research is aimed at commercial flocks in commercial settings. These businesses are usually run and staffed by men. Research shows that women are twice as likely to implement strategies that improve welfare than men, yet their access to this information is hampered by poor literacy and relevance. Is the very nature of welfare research gender-biased?



Alan G. McElligott¹ & Briefer, E. F.²

¹ City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China; ² University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Making goat welfare research impactful

Ultimately, the goal of animal welfare research should be to improve the lives of the animals being studied. Thus, communicating research findings to stakeholders such as farmers and the general public must be integral to all projects. There are over one billion goats globally, and yet, historically, they have been neglected in terms of animal welfare research. This may have resulted from their numbers in the Global North being low compared to other livestock. Just over 10 years ago, we began to study goat welfare. Our research has shown, for example, how they express their emotions, as well as how they perceive emotions in conspecifics and humans. We have demonstrated their remarkable physical and social cognition abilities, including long-term memory, thus challenging the notion that goats are unintelligent. We have used press releases and extensive media engagement to communicate our findings to diverse stakeholders, with the aim of improving the lives of goats. Our research has now found its way into formal welfare guidance, such as for the handling and transport of goats and other livestock. Thus, we advocate for greater public engagement and science communication by animal welfare researchers in order to generate impact from their research.



Oluwarore, K. O.¹, Lukas Jasiūnas¹, Qureshi, F.² & Esparza, I.¹

¹ Healthier Hens, ² Healthier Hens Kenya

Building animal welfare knowledge and capacity through vet training on egg-laying hen welfare in Kenya

Preliminary research in Kenya shows poor stakeholder awareness of key egg-laying hen welfare issues such as keel bone damage (KBD) and on-farm indicator assessments. Healthier Hens, in collaboration with the University of Nairobi, organized a 2-day workshop for veterinarians to enhance hen welfare knowledge and skills among vet professionals. 18 participants were selected based on experience, motivation, and impact potential. The workshop taught animal welfare, hen welfare, including hands-on welfare and KBD assessment practice through facilitator presentations, laboratory sessions, and an on-farm visit. Pre-, post-, and post-post-test surveys and interviews were applied to assess the retention and impact of the training. Results revealed increases in knowledge, retention, and motivation to apply the lessons learned. However, some discrepancies were noted in recognizing good welfare practices. Participants want to learn more about keel bone examination, welfare-productivity links, and humane handling. Recommendations for future workshops include addressing outdated beliefs, extending training durations, and enhancing resources for KBD assessment. Despite limitations in participant diversity and potential biases, success was evident in participants' enthusiasm (89% would recommend) and commitment to implement the knowledge (94% will utilize). The workshop demonstrates the potential for similar future initiatives to improve hen welfare practices in the poultry industry.



T. Bas Rodenburg & Giersberg, M. F.
Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Enabling the transition to cage-free housing for laying hens worldwide

Cage housing for laying hens is under debate in many parts of the world, as it only provides hens with a limited space and does not support natural behaviours such as nesting, perching, foraging and dust bathing. Transitions to cage-free housing systems are happening in all parts of the world, in response to increased demand for eggs and egg products from cage-free systems. However, management of cage-free farms is quite demanding. To ensure a successful transition to cage-free housing systems for laying hens, knowledge should be shared openly between the different stakeholders in the different parts of the world. When changes to laying hen housing systems are proposed in a given country or continent, local conditions should be taken into account and local stakeholders should be involved and empowered. A good example is the 'train the trainer' programs, that are organised by various NGO's. These programs also result in local expertise, that can be offered in the local languages. In some cases, these programs are combined with the opening of training and demonstration farms, where a cage-free demonstration farm is opened that allows local stakeholders to visit the farm and obtain experience with managing a cage-free flock.



Carolyn Breitenbach, Larrateguy, M. V. & Phillips, W.

Welttierschutzstiftung (WTS) Vets United

Bridging the teaching gap: Making animal welfare education accessible with holistic teaching materials

Worldwide animal welfare is a topic of growing interest and concern. Animal health professionals are key players in this development, advocating for animal welfare in daily practice, law enforcement and as experts in society. For this important task, veterinary students need to be equipped with profound knowledge, skills and a strong animal welfare awareness. But while the WOA has named animal welfare as one of the core competencies of veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals and included it into their curriculum recommendations, the topic is still often neglected in veterinary education. One of the reasons we struggle to encompass animal welfare in education is the lack of up-to-date teaching materials which have a holistic approach and focus on veterinarians in everyday work. Animal welfare is a cross-sectional subject influencing all areas of veterinary medicine and should be taught accordingly. To support academic institutions to include animal welfare into their training WTS has developed comprehensive teaching modules focusing on applied animal welfare. These teaching materials align with WOA curriculum recommendations and are peer reviewed by experts in science, academia and practice. Our presentation will introduce the teaching materials and demonstrate how they can enrich existing curricula by providing a holistic perspective on animal welfare.

Jo Hockenhull¹, Hannelly, E.², Madders, G.² & Cameron, A.³

¹ University of Bristol; ² The British Horse Society; ³ University of Nottingham

Be Horse Aware: Thank you for not feeding other people's horses

In spring 2020 there was an apparent increase in an existing equine welfare problem: passers-by feeding other people's horses without their permission. Reports of equine fatalities due to inappropriate feeding hit the mainstream media. Here we report how researchers investigating this phenomenon allied with The British Horse Society (BHS) and generated data to inform an industry campaign aimed at reducing this practice. Over three-quarters of respondents completing an online survey (n=788/1,017) reported that they suspected, or had evidence, that someone had fed their horse without their permission. The survey findings were used to inform the BHS 'Be Horse Aware' campaign, including an awareness raising video. The video, launched in April 2022, was covered widely in the equestrian media and has received over 86,000 views across social media and YouTube to date. Respondents' experiences of using different types of signage as a deterrent were used alongside human behaviour change science to inform the design and development of freely available signs. These can be downloaded by horse owners from the BHS website (bhs.org.uk/behorseaware). This close collaboration between animal welfare researchers and industry demonstrates how research can lead to real-world impact, and ongoing alliances working for the betterment of animal welfare.



Giulia Malerbi

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Advocating for a preemptive ban on octopus farming

This paper delves into the burgeoning field of octopus farming, meticulously exploring the legal and ethical dimensions surrounding the commercial breeding of octopus. In response to the escalating demand for seafood, cephalopods, such as octopuses, squids, and cuttlefish, have been identified for their high market value and rapid growth potential in intensive aquaculture. We investigate the regulatory climate, considering both existing and non-existent legislative provisions that could cease global octopus farming operations and identify potential gaps in legal frameworks that require statutory attention. Here, we then scrutinize moral, environmental, and biological implications associated with octopus farming, including evidence of sentience, captive animal welfare, and the potential impact on surrounding ecosystems. As our understanding of cephalopods and their cognitive abilities grows, it is crucial to assess whether current animal welfare laws can adequately cover these intelligent marine species. Finally, we culminate with an analysis of case studies from leading aquaculture nations highlighting current challenges and areas for improvement. By exploring various jurisdictional approaches, we gain an appreciation for how legal structures may evolve to address the unique characteristics of octopuses.



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¹ People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) US; ² PETA UK; ³ Animal-Free Science Advocacy, Australia; ⁴ New Zealand Anti-Vivisection Society

A global campaign to end the forced swim test

In the 1970s a scientific procedure called the “forced swim test” (FST) was popularized for use in research attempting to understand human depression and test potential treatments. In the test, small animals, usually mice or rats, are placed in a cylinder of water from which they cannot escape. The time they spend swimming vigorously and attempting to escape is recorded, with researchers interpreting less time spent exhibiting escape behaviours as an indicator of a more “depressed” animal. The FST’s scientific validity has been questioned since its inception, yet it continues to be heavily used (it appeared in 1,210 peer-reviewed scientific articles between June 2018 and June 2020). In December 2018, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals embarked on a campaign to spread awareness of the FST’s shortcomings and advocate for the end of its use. Joined by animal advocacy organizations around the world, such as Animal-Free Science Advocacy and the New Zealand Anti-Vivisection Society, the campaign has been hugely successful, ending use of the FST at major pharmaceutical companies, research universities, and eradicating uses of the test in entire regions. This talk will detail the campaign’s origin, strategies, successes, and ongoing work.



PLENARY: Prof Georgia Mason

University of Guelph, Canada

How does animal welfare research change policy and practice, and how should it in the future?

I will discuss three main routes by which welfare research can change policy and practice. 1) Research publications accrue into a corpus of literature: a consensus for use by working groups and committees. Pros: Impactful findings are likely to be well replicated and widely-generalisable. Cons: They may not be, because human committees are flawed; very slow (a paper might take decades to have impact). 2) Research is collaborative with animal industry; results are then adopted voluntarily. Pros: Impact can be rapid, and widely adopted; Cons: Likely limited to incremental, inexpensive changes. 3) Research attracts media attention, generating political/ PR-related pressure. Pros: Impact can be rapid, and major; Cons: Public opinion can be arbitrary; basing policy on one paper is risky; can generate resentment/resistance to change. Given these imperfections, I will argue that we should learn from how biomedical and clinical research translates to medical/public health policy. This means greater awareness of replicability issues, and of research practices prone to bias (e.g. omitting blinding); greater awareness of the construct and external validity needed make research relevant to the 'real world'; and greater awareness of transparent methods of research synthesis that are less prone to biases than the average committee.