

LETTERS

Wildlife rehabilitation

Sir, I am pleased that my *Wildcare Handbook* received a review in *Animal Welfare* 1992, 1: 301-302. Wildlife care is now being accepted as a discipline all over the world and I am sorry that Ian Robinson of the RSPCA seems to have missed the whole purpose of the book, that of giving help and treatment to wild birds and other animals that for many years appear to have escaped much needed professional assistance.

Euthanasia is fast being rejected as a first aid measure and now more and more people are insisting that injured wild animals receive treatment. Birds, and especially wild birds, receive scant attention by the veterinary colleges and practices and at times the person seeking qualified assistance for a bird has had to soldier on alone. To add to this, analgesics are relatively untried in birds and I understand that only a few veterinary practices use Isoflurane, in many opinions the only safe anaesthetic for use in birds.

Because of this, many birds have and will continue to be treated without either and although I would not necessarily agree with this, it is a fact of life. A fractured bone stabilized without anaesthetic is going to be far less painful than a fractured bone flapping uncontrollably.

The paper 'Pain in birds' in the same issue highlights the unknown realms of bird pain sensation and comes up with few conclusions. It might have been more helpful had the paper or Ian Robinson discussed the obvious discomfort a bird shows even when under anaesthetic. I fear that even when anaesthetized, pain is not fully

eliminated especially when the veterinary surgeon has to pluck feathers to gain access to a wound site.

Throughout my book I recommend the input of veterinary surgeons - many of whom have written to say that my experiences of 7,000-8,000 birds each year has been helpful in general practice.

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Statistics of scientific procedures on living animals

Sir, The workings of the *Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986* (Reports and comments, *Animal Welfare* 1993, 2: 90-92) rightly drew attention to the difficulty of using the Home Office *Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals*. Such concerns are not new and are shared by protagonists on both sides of the present debate over the use of animal experimentation in the UK. Indeed, commenting on the 1991 publication, Hart has argued that: 'Doctors wanting to defend Britain's 3.2 million scientific procedures on living animals will want to know much more about what they are defending than this book tells them.' (*British Medical Journal* 303: 670).

Noting that like many statistical publications, the Home Office statistics seemed to conceal more than it revealed, your report suggested that careful study and comparison of different tables would often reveal apparently hidden facts (*Animal Welfare* 1993, 2: 90-92). However, recent correspondence between the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) and

the Home Office calls into question the extent to which one can make valid deductions through comparison of information from the different tables.

On 18 December 1992 the BUAV wrote to the Home Office raising a number of concerns in relation to the *Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Great Britain 1991*. In particular we pointed out that Table 2a, of the 1991 statistics listed 111 procedures on squirrel, owl and spider monkeys for body-system studies, while Table 2b recorded just two such monkeys used in this category of procedures for the year in question. Noting that this suggested that at least one monkey had been used in over 50 procedures, we asked the Home Office to explain this statistic. The Home Office's reply of 29 January 1993 stated the comparison of the figures from the relevant tables could not be used to draw the conclusion outlined above. The letter went on:

'Table 2a lists the total number of procedures carried out during 1991; Table 2b lists the total number of animals used for the first time in procedures in 1991. For example, if 100 dogs are used for the first time in a procedure in December 1990 and are used again in the same procedure in January 1991 with no further use in 1991, the statistics for 1990 would show 100 procedure on dogs in Table 2a and 100 dogs in Table 2b whilst the statistics for 1991 would show 100 procedures on dogs in Table 2a and zero dogs in Table 2b' (Original emphasis) (Home Office personal communication 29 January 1993).

The notes accompanying the tables give no indication that this is how the figures for numbers of animals used are actually calculated.

Arguably the Home Office's reply on this point exposes a serious inconsistency in the present statistics and suggests that in some cases, the figures given for total numbers of animals used may be seriously flawed. In effect the manner in which the Home Office presently counts total number of animals used allows animals subject to repeated reuse in similar procedures to simply disappear from the statistics on the 31st of December each year. Such practices seriously undermine the credibility of the statistics as a whole.

The BUAV believes that the Animal Procedures Committee should now initiate open consultations with all relevant interested parties as to how the accuracy and presentation of Home Office statistics could be improved.

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