

welfare standards which must be maintained in order for a farm to qualify for inclusion, and the systems for inspection and auditing which ensure these standards are maintained.

When the RSPCA's Freedom Food standards were first drafted, it was recognized that regular veterinary attendance and on-farm involvement were crucial to animal welfare. A written Veterinary Health Plan (VHP) forms part of the conditions for inclusion in the Freedom Food scheme and the RSPCA has now published a booklet (see details below) providing complementary notes to their welfare standards for dairy cattle, and guidance for producers and their veterinary surgeons in the formulation of the VHP. The booklet outlines the four areas which the VHP should cover: i) basic disease control measures (including mastitis prevention, parasite control, lameness, vaccination, stockmanship, neonatal care, carcass disposal, and casualty slaughter); ii) herd security against infectious diseases; iii) recording, monitoring and control of disease present on the farm; and iv) disease surveillance. In each section, the relevant RSPCA Freedom Food welfare standards are presented and guidelines or example guidelines on the nature of the husbandry and veterinary protocols expected are listed.

The last four pages of the booklet address the conduct of the VHP visit. There must be an inspection of all cattle on the farm, of their environment and of the relevant farm records. It is a requirement that the incidence of a range of specified disease conditions should be noted, including, in particular: unsatisfactory body condition, lameness, mastitis, coat cleanliness, infectious skin disease, and evidence of trauma. Relatively little guidance is presented on the nature of the VHP document itself. There are clearly great advantages to allowing flexibility in this, but inclusion of an ideal example or two would have been helpful.

This is an essential document for Freedom Food cattle farmers and their veterinarians but will also be of interest more widely – and especially to others involved in setting or assessing standards of cattle welfare.

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*RSPCA Veterinary Health Plan: Dairy Cattle Guidance Notes*. Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1999). RSPCA: Horsham. 21pp. Paperback. Available from the publishers, Causeway, Horsham, West Sussex RH12, UK. Free.

### **Humane care and use of birds**

The current *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* produced by the American Association for Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC) does not specifically address the husbandry and care of birds. In view of this, the Association of Avian Veterinarians has recently given consideration to principles on the humane care of birds used in research or education and issued a policy statement on this subject. The recommendations provided have been 'based on scientific principles, expert opinion, and experience with methods and practices that have proved to be consistent with high quality bird care'; and the purpose of the guide is to assist scientific institutions and their animal care and use committees in establishing standards for the use and husbandry of laboratory birds in ways judged to be professionally appropriate. Although written specifically to meet a need in the USA, these guidelines provide quite a comprehensive framework of standards for avian husbandry and will be of interest and value to others developing codes of conduct on the use of birds in science and education.

Following a brief outline of the relevant North American legislation on animal welfare and protection of endangered species, the document covers various aspects of avian husbandry and the ethical use of birds under the following topics: general considerations, sampling (which is about determining sample sizes for experiments, rather than methods of collecting blood or tissue samples), laboratory bird management, laboratory bird quality and health, disposition of birds after experiments, and occupational health. Some idea of the nature of the document can

be gained from the following extracts taken from the section on general considerations. 'Procedures that may cause more than momentary or slight pain or distress to the birds should be performed with appropriate sedation or analgesia except when justified for scientific reasons in writing by the investigator in advance...', and, 'The living conditions of birds held in captivity should be appropriate to satisfy the standards of hygiene, nutrition, group composition and numbers, refuge provision, and protection from environmental stress necessary to maintain that species in a state of health and well-being.'

In the absence of any such guidelines in the USA hitherto, this document is a good step forward and an excellent start. It provides a useful checklist for those responsible for the care of avian research animals in the USA and for institutional ethics committees responsible for overseeing their activities. One hopes that it will be widely used in this context and will form the basis of more detailed, species-specific standards in the future.

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*Policy Statement for the Humane Care and Use of Birds (1998)*. Association of Avian Veterinarians: Bedford, Texas. 6pp. Loose-leaf. Available from the producers, PO Box 210732, Bedford, Texas 76095, USA; or from AAVPubs@aol.com. Free, if obtained via e-mail; or US\$1.00 for a hard copy on receipt of a sae.

#### **Guidelines for wildlife rehabilitation units**

Recent surveys of wildlife hospitals in the UK have estimated that at least 20 000 sick and injured vertebrate wild animals are taken into temporary captivity for treatment and rehabilitation each year – and that the actual number is probably very much greater. In contrast to the situation in some other countries, there are no specific legal controls dealing with these endeavours in the UK (although constraints are set by a variety of other legislation). No licence is required to run a wildlife hospital, nor is there any requirement for people who wish to try their hand at wildlife treatment and rehabilitation to undergo training beforehand. Recognizing a need for the development of standards and for dissemination of information on the subject, a group of interested people formed the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (BWRC) in the late 1980s to address these, and related issues. Since then, the BWRC has organized an annual conference, produced news-letters, served as a forum for information exchange, and done a great deal to promote high standards of animal welfare in wildlife rehabilitation in the UK. The organization has now produced a very useful set of guidelines for the running of wildlife rehabilitation units. These have been designed to help achieve the BWRC's objectives of promoting the welfare of wildlife casualties – both while in captivity and after release to the wild – and of ensuring that casualties are handled within the framework and spirit of the law, by 'outlining the basic facilities a rehabilitation unit might provide and the ethical and legal considerations within which it might work'.

The booklet provides information under the following section headings: 'Capture handling and transportation', 'The treatment phase', 'Convalescence and pre-release assessment', 'Release', 'Permanent captivity', 'Records', and 'Volunteers'. Appendices are provided on: i) relevant legislation (outlining 12 Acts); ii) basic skills in which senior personnel should be competent; iii) basic equipment that should be available including the medical kit, accommodation, and handling equipment; and iv) defining a 'statement of facilities'. In the latter, it is suggested that each unit produces a statement of facilities which outlines working practices and the maximum capacity of the unit.

The guidelines promote a realistic and sensible approach. For example, they state that 'at all stages...the welfare of the individual animal must be the main concern', but then recognize: 'At the same time consideration should be given to the consequences of attempting to return a rehabilitated casualty to its wild habitat and the effect this may have on the stability of the