

Xenotransplantation

This brief report, from the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals (DSPA), discusses developments in xenotransplantation - the transplantation of organs, tissues or cells between different animal species, including humans - and the animal welfare, disease risk, and ethical issues associated with this technology. In their summary, the authors set out their position which is based on the report's findings: 'The Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals is against xenotransplantation and pleads for a moratorium of at least two years in the Netherlands.'

The threats to animal welfare which they outline in this publication are posed by or associated with: housing designed to minimize the risk of exposure to specific infectious agents; experimental procedures (including studies of immunosuppression) on which the development of xenotransplantation depends; and the development of donor strains genetically altered to improve host acceptance.

The risk of novel infectious diseases entering the human population through xenotransplants is also briefly discussed. In this case, the authors comment: 'Since the transmission of infections could have wide-scale consequences on public health, no risks will be taken when choosing a system to raise source animals. Animal welfare will certainly not be taken greatly into consideration.'

In January 1997, the Commission on Xenotransplantation of the Netherlands Board of Health was established. No doubt the concerns raised by this DSPA report will be among the issues exercising the minds of this body.

Xenotransplantation: animals reduced to spare organ suppliers. Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals (1997). Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals: The Hague. 30pp. Paperback. Obtainable from Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals, Postbus 85980, 2508 CR Den Haag, The Netherlands. Free.

Welfare aspects of killing or capturing wild vertebrates in Britain

The authors describe this booklet as a primer for those needing a perspective on the complex issues of wildlife welfare. They point to where future research efforts are needed and make a plea to legislators to use a sound scientific approach to wildlife management issues rather than an emotional one. Following introductory sections - entitled 'What is suffering?' and 'What is cruelty?' - the meat of the report is an analysis of the numbers of wild animals killed annually in the UK by various methods and for various reasons. A table provides estimates (in orders of magnitude) of the numbers of various species/groups of mammals and birds killed by shooting, poisoning, snaring, hounds, terriers, cats, birds of prey (falconry) and in other ways. Estimates are also provided of the duration of catch-to-kill intervals for various methods of killing. Subsequent sections draw attention to a 'massive inconsistency' in public attitudes as to what is and is not acceptable (contrasting attitudes to the killing of wild birds by pet cats with those to killing mammals with dogs). The authors argue that there is a need for research into the welfare aspects of various wildlife management practices, such as harm caused by snares, wounding rates caused by guns, and suffering involved in angling and net fishing.

Welfare Aspects of Killing or Capturing Wild Vertebrates in Britain. N Fox & H MacDonald (1997). 18pp. Paperback. Obtainable from Dr N C Fox, Penllynin Farm, College Road, Carmarthen, Carmarthenshire, Wales, UK. Price £2.00.