

Trade in exotic animals

During 1997 a study was carried out on welfare aspects of the exotic animal trade in the Netherlands to provide data for the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture in their preparation of animal health and welfare legislation. The summary and conclusions are available in English translation. In a report which provides some interesting statistics on the scale of the trade and keeping of exotic animals as pets in the Netherlands, it is estimated that about 16 million animals are kept as pets, of which some 11 million are birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish. There are 2200 pet shops and through these some 1 million birds, 200 000 reptiles and amphibians, and 200 000 small mammals are sold each year. The majority of these are bred in the Netherlands but there are significant importations of wild-caught marine fish, reptiles and amphibians and birds. Welfare problems were identified at the pre-transport, transport, and subsequent stages of the chain from source to buyer. The report recommends that the selling of wild-caught animals to inexperienced pet owners should cease and suggests ways in which this could be brought about including: increasing the availability of captive-bred animals, making wild-caught animals more expensive (eg by taxing their sale), and making it a requirement that wild-caught animals can be sold only through registered outlets.

Research into the Welfare Situation of Exotic Animals During the Process of Animal Trade. English Summary. C M Vinke (1998). Animal Welfare Centre: Utrecht. 11pp. Loose-leaf. Obtainable from the publishers, University of Utrecht, Yalelaan 17, 3584 CL Utrecht, The Netherlands (welfare@pobox.ruu.nl). Free.

Welfare of calves

On 27 July 1998 new regulations came into force in the UK on the husbandry and welfare of calves. These implement EU Council Directive 91/629/EEC, as amended by Directive 97/2/EC, (laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves). Under the new law, calves older than 8 weeks must be kept in groups, unless isolated for veterinary reasons. Furthermore, those kept in individual stalls prior to this age must be able to have direct visual and tactile contact with at least one other calf through perforations in the walls of their stalls. To allow time for changes in housing, these rules will not apply for 5 years to accommodation that was in use on 1 January 1998. Minimum space allowances are also defined both for individual stalls and for group pens.

The law makes several other new provisions. Tethering is no longer permitted for single calves and group-housed calves may only be tethered for up to 1h when being fed milk or milk substitute. Tethers must cause no harm and must allow animals to lie down, stand up and groom without hindrance. Calves must have access to a clean, comfortable lying area with appropriate bedding at all times, must be fed twice daily, and during hot weather conditions or when they are ill must have a constant supply of fresh drinking water available. Calves housed indoors must be inspected twice daily. Minimum daily rations of fibrous food are set by these new regulations and it is a requirement that the diet contains sufficient iron to ensure blood haemoglobin levels of at least 4.5 mmol l⁻¹ (see, Morisse *et al* earlier in this issue).

Welfare of Livestock (Amendment) Regulations 1998. (1998) HMSO: London. 5pp. Leaflet. Obtainable from The Publications Centre, PO Box 276, London SW8 5DT, UK and other usual HMSO sources (Statutory Instrument No1709). Price £1.55.

Reappraising quarantine and rabies

In what the UK Government are calling the 'most radical changes to UK quarantine laws for almost a century' the Advisory Group on Quarantine, chaired by Professor Ian Kennedy,

published their review of quarantine legislation in September 1998. The Group was set up to provide the Government with an independent assessment of the risk of introducing rabies to the UK under the current policy of quarantine for pet animals, and under proposed alternative policies; the first review since the Waterhouse Committee reported back in 1971. If the recommendations are accepted, then taking pets on holiday to Europe (not to mention package deals for people and pets) will become a reality for many UK citizens.

Current UK quarantine legislation requires specific classes of mammals including carnivores, chiropterans (bats and flying foxes), lagomorphs and rodents be placed in secure quarantine facilities for a period of 6 months upon entering the country. The Group recommend a partial relaxation of this legislation, to allow certified cats and dogs to enter the UK from other EU member states and specified rabies-free countries, like New Zealand and Japan, without undergoing a period of quarantine.

Certification for exemption from quarantine for cats and dogs will be issued by veterinary surgeons and will depend on the animal:

- i) being electronically 'tagged' with a microchip;
- ii) being vaccinated against rabies at or over 3 months of age;
- iii) having had a blood test, following vaccination against rabies, carried out at least 6 months before re-entering Great Britain;
- iv) having been treated no more than 24h before return to Great Britain with an acaricide to prevent ticks and an antihelminthic for the removal of the tapeworm, *Echinococcus multilocularis*.

In addition, the Group recommend that all species, other than members of the orders Carnivora and Chiroptera (those most commonly affected by rabies), should be exempted from the system of rabies quarantine, although restrictions on importation will still apply. The Group also ask the Government to consider exempting the importation of any carnivores held in zoological collections or research establishments from non-qualifying countries with a low incidence of rabies into equivalent collections in Great Britain.

It is planned that a 3-year period should be allowed for the introduction of this system, to enable it to be implemented effectively; and that there is monitoring after implementation to identify and resolve any operational problems.

It seems highly likely that the recommendations of the Advisory Group will be accepted in full. In recent years, pressure has been mounting for the UK Government to amend the present restrictive quarantine laws. Revision of quarantine legislation in Sweden, Australia and New Zealand coupled with a reduction in the incidence of rabies within Europe and technological advances, including improved detection of immunity via blood testing and effective electronic identification systems, have produced a climate of change. Acceptance will also strengthen the position of the UK Government in forthcoming talks designed to harmonize the control of rabies across Europe.

The report also highlights some areas of concern in need of further consideration. One problematic area identified by the Group was gaining international acceptance of a single test to assay rabies antibody levels. They recommend that, if an agreement cannot be reached, the UK Government should use the most recent scientific opinion to decide upon which serological testing standard and method should be adopted.

Increased movement of animals across borders obviously increases the chances of diseases other than rabies being imported into the UK. The Group considered some of the commonest of these diseases and focused on those which are of potential danger to humans. Their recommendations involving the use of effective antihelminthics and acaricides a maximum of

24h prior to importation were designed to reduce the risk of the most dangerous. They are aware, however, that further work needs to be undertaken, and call for a fuller assessment of the risks.

Finally, the Group stress that the greatest precaution against the importation of rabies into the UK following a relaxation of quarantine legislation, is to encourage European governments and those of countries bordering the EU to continue or adopt campaigns to vaccinate foxes and eradicate rabies from their territories.

While this report will be warmly greeted by owners looking to holiday with their pets, whether the relaxation of quarantine will necessarily benefit all animals in the UK is open to debate. The Group estimate that, if the quarantine laws are relaxed, about 50 times as many cats and dogs would potentially enter and leave the UK than do so at present. They estimate that close to a quarter of a million UK dogs and cats might be taken abroad annually, and that a further 120 000 might enter the UK from abroad. (This compares with a 1996 total of 7267 cats and dogs entering UK quarantine.) Any increased movement of companion animals must also increase the chances of animals suffering, through transportation in inappropriate conditions over great distances, and/or at the whims of owners uneducated as to their pets' real needs. It can only be hoped that the rigours of certification and the cost, estimated at an initial cost of £150.25 with a recurring annual cost of £60.25, will help to keep numbers down. Similarly, it should help to discourage kind-hearted travellers from adopting and importing large numbers of stray and abandoned animals from holiday resorts, reducing the urgency and pressure for such communities to tackle the problem at source, through more desirable campaigns of control and neutering.

There are other hidden costs. Current *European Pharmacopoeia* standards require that the capacity of a vaccine to induce anti-rabies antibodies is tested on each target species, by submitting 25 vaccinated animals of each species and 10 controls to a challenge with an approved rabies virus strain, at the end of the immunity period claimed by the vaccine producer. Subsequent batches can then be tested on mice. It must be hoped that further work will continue to identify alternative in vitro tests, for this and other vaccines, which will eliminate the need for animals as part of vaccine manufacture.

Quarantine and Rabies: A Reappraisal. Report by the Advisory Group on Quarantine (1998). Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: London. 316pp. Paperback. Obtainable from MAFF Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX, UK. Price: £15.00.

EU Directive on the protection of farm animals

The Council of Agriculture Ministers agreed a final text for Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes in June 1998, and the Directive was formally adopted in July 1998. This Directive sets minimum standards for welfare of livestock throughout the EU and a framework for adoption of more detailed standards for individual farmed species. It is not uncommon in legislation for the taxonomic range of the species covered to be rather poorly defined and often more inclusive than, one guesses, the legislators had in mind (eg specifying 'bovine animal' when 'domestic cow', rather than any member of the subfamily Bovinae was intended). In this case, it is made clear that the Directive applies only to vertebrate animals kept for farming purposes. However, while Article 3 requires that owners or keepers of any vertebrate animals kept for these purposes '...take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of animals under their care and to ensure that those animals are not caused any unnecessary pain, suffering or injury', Article 4 applies only to some vertebrates, thus: 'Member states shall ensure that the conditions under which animals (other than fish, reptiles or amphibians) are bred or kept..., comply with the provisions set out in the Annex.' The provisions in the Annex outline