

## BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

### *The Laying Hen: Proceedings of a Seminar Organised by the European Conference Group on the Protection of Farm Animals*

Edited by Valerie and Henry Carter (1992). European Conference Group on the Protection of Farm Animals: Horsham. 140pp. Paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, ECOPFA, The Manor House, Causeway, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1HG, UK (ISBN 1 870861 03 5) Price £20.

The Commission of the European Communities funded this seminar on the welfare of the laying hen, intending that the conclusions of the seminar should provide a major contribution to their own impending report. The Commission is indeed obliged to produce a report on the welfare of laying hens, accompanied by appropriate legislative proposals, in the near future. However, when reading the seminar proceedings one quickly gains the impression that delegates could not agree among themselves and had some difficulty in reaching any conclusions that might help the Commission.

The book itself consists of 140 (awkwardly) large ring-bound pages. Transcripts of invited papers are interspersed with sessional debates. Unfortunately, a large number of typographical errors in text citations and elsewhere interfere with easy digestion of the book's content. This is a pity since much interesting and important information has been assembled and I would still recommend the book to anyone needing to understand the complex scientific, economic and political problems involved in achieving real welfare improvement for the majority of hens in Europe.

The proceedings begin with a paper by Professor Broom outlining the physical and behavioural needs of the laying hen. Both he and Klaus Vestergaard emphasize how important it is for hens to perform many behaviours that are prevented by the battery cage. Rose Marie Wegner's paper described research projects on hen welfare being undertaken worldwide, and serves as a useful introduction to the field, whilst Arnold Elson gives a typically clear technical evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks of both cages and alternative systems.

Experimental trials of multi-level wire floor and deep litter systems in use in Denmark, Germany and Sweden are described in the book, and contributions from farmers during debates add important practical insights. However, although these and many other alternative systems have been tried and tested over the years we still do not fully understand the essential design and management features that will guarantee an absence of welfare problems. Feather pecking, cannibalism, hysteria and disease remain risks with severe consequences. Reference was made several times during the seminar to the possibility of radically modifying the battery cage, and it is an oversight that no paper was presented on work in this area.

Broom concludes that the scientific evidence now available is even clearer than it was at the time of the European Parliament Resolution in 1987, that the welfare of hens in conventional battery cages is bad, and that alternatives must be found. Reading between the lines it seems that a majority of delegates supported this view, but had trouble agreeing what form the alternatives should take.

Lars Hoelgaard presents a fascinating potted history of the political manoeuvring that was associated with the 1988 arrival of the first European Council Directive setting minimum standards for the protection of laying hens kept in battery cages (88/166/EEC). That battle took nine years, and yet the concern felt for the battery hen shows no sign of diminishing. One can only hope that improved standards that truly safeguard the hen are reached more quickly this time.

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***Biology, Rearing and Care of Young Primates***

James K Kirkwood and Katherine Stathatos (1992). Oxford University Press: Oxford. 154pp. Hardback. Obtainable from the publishers, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK (ISBN 0 19 854733 1) Price £40.

This is one of those books that makes you wonder why it has not been written before. Until now it has been difficult for non-academic institutions to obtain information on the rearing and care of young primates, and yet there is a great potential for suffering and mortality if inexperienced attempts are made to raise their young. Moreover, the loss of valuable stock is unacceptable for many endangered species. So this book is very welcome as it provides an excellent summary of the available literature in a readable and concise form.

Data for eighteen example species, from all but two of the primate families (the Indriidae and the Daubentoniidae), are presented in a standardized form providing information not only on rearing and husbandry techniques, but also on aspects of basic and reproductive biology. There are useful sections on methods of re-integrating hand-reared infants in to social groups (important to produce future breeding stock), as well as on potential diseases and their treatments. Individual reference sections for each species are valuable as they will aid institutions wishing to update the information provided.

Inevitably the authors will be criticized for leaving out certain species; but as they point out, techniques can often be adapted from those which are successfully applied to a close relative. Even so, I did feel that there was a gap in the book as there was no example of the larger cebids (spider and howler monkeys) and spider monkeys are, after all, fairly common in large zoos.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book which is an essential and affordable purchase for research institutions and zoos with primate collections. It is to be hoped that as new information becomes available, updated and revised editions will be published.

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