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Humane control of rats and mice: Guidance notes and principles

One of the staple news stories that the media periodically revisit are alarmist stories on the rise in numbers of rats and mice. Reports in the UK press in 2008, for example, indicated that there had been a sharp increase in the number of pest control call-outs (NPTA 2008), with some newspapers claiming rises of 40–142% in some UK cities (Daily Mail 2008). At a time when local government authorities have increased their charges for dealing with infestations, decisions on how to control unwanted rats or mice is becoming one that householders and others, in the UK and elsewhere, are increasingly called upon to make (NPTA 2008).

With a range of different control methods on offer, and a growing interest in non-lethal options, the recent Report from the UFAW Humane Rodent Control Working Group is thus timely. This group seeks to promote welfare improvements in the control of rodents through, amongst other things and as contained in this report, the provision of advice and guidance about current methods. As one would expect from a UFAW Report, the guidance is very much grounded in the principles of replacement, reduction and refinement (The 3Rs) — although, in this case, the advice about reduction is not so much in the number of animals killed as in ensuring that only those pest species targeted are killed.

The Report starts by outlining the guiding principles that it sees as underlying any humane control measures — does the presence of rodents have to be addressed, and where it does, can this be through non-lethal exclusion measures rather than capture or killing? If the latter, then the report advocates an approach based on what it terms as ‘killing kindly’.

Pros and cons of the different control options are discussed, with some attention paid to what many householders would view as apparently the ‘most welfare-friendly’ option — that of live trapping. The Report notes that choice of this option requires some careful thought and cautions that such traps “can have a significant adverse welfare impact on the trapped animal”. Frequency of trap inspection is highlighted as a key issue, as is the decision as to what to do with the animal after trapping. On being faced with a successfully trapped rat or mouse, householders often balk at the idea of killing it themselves and opt for the ‘less troublesome’ release of the trapped animal into a different location. Again, the report cautions that release is not necessarily without welfare consequences and outlines the legal situation regarding such releases within the UK.

Other methods discussed include spring-powered killing traps, glue boards, gas traps and stretched rubber ring strangulation systems. It should, perhaps, be pointed out that this Report only considers the humaneness of control methods for rats and mice and the impact of these methods on the welfare of the individual animal. Those seeking other, more detailed information, such as on the relative effectiveness of the methods or how they should be deployed, are guided elsewhere to other published sources.

The Report concludes “that there is no perfect method of control” and that it “is not possible to make generic recommendations about which methods will be acceptable from a humaneness point of view in all situations” because “the humaneness of the various methods can vary greatly according to how carefully they are used”. Nonetheless, for those seeking to control rats and mice, seven steps for humane control are detailed.

For anyone who has ever been faced with the problem of controlling unwanted rats or mice or been asked to give guidance to others on the most humane methods, this Report will prove of use, as it will for those who are seeking topics for debate with their students. For considering an area of welfare concern that may be overlooked and unappealing but of no lesser importance for this, and indeed of worldwide

concern given the number of pest rodents trapped and killed each year, this Report is to be commended.

Guiding Principles in the Humane Control of Rats and Mice (February 2009). A4, 13 pages. Published by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, UK. Copies are available at <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/rodents.php>.

References

Daily Mail 2008 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1080944/Rats-rampage-Vermin-boom-blamed-cuts-refuse-collections.html>

NPTA 2008 <http://www.npta.org.uk/assets/documents/Massive%20Surge%20in%20UK%20Rodent%20Problems.pdf>

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New regulations proposed to protect the welfare of greyhounds in England

Commercial greyhound racing first began in Britain during 1926 and, although it declined over the years (dropping from 151 racing tracks in 1960 to just 34 today), greyhound racing is still a common spectator sport and ranks third in popularity after football and horse racing (Donoughue 2007). However, during the last few years there has been increasing concern amongst the public that the welfare of racing greyhounds is not sufficiently protected. There is a perception that the conditions at greyhound race tracks are inadequate and that there is a lack of traceability of greyhounds, especially once they have finished their racing careers. The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) has estimated that the total average number of dogs racing in Great Britain each year is approximately 14,000 and they have calculated that, annually, a minimum of 4,728 dogs are unaccounted for after their racing careers have finished (APGAW 2007). Dogs begin racing at around 15 months and finish at between three and five years of age.

In 2006, the UK Government gave a commitment to introduce regulations to improve the welfare of racing greyhounds during the passage of the Animal Welfare Bill through parliament. Additionally, two major inquiries were carried out into the greyhound racing industry. The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) reported on the welfare issues surrounding racing greyhounds in England, and Lord Donoughue undertook a review of the current and future regulation of greyhound racing. Both reports have played a key role in how the greyhound racing industry has evolved since they were published in 2007.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is now consulting on a proposed set of regulations to protect the welfare of racing greyhounds and to improve the traceability of greyhounds during and following their racing career. A number of minimum standards have been put forward, including:

- The presence of a veterinary surgeon at all race meetings and trials;

- All dogs to be inspected by a veterinary surgeon before running;

- Appropriate facilities for a veterinary surgeon to allow administration of first aid, on-site;

- Adequate kennelling on-site for 20% of greyhounds present at the track;

- All racing greyhounds to be identified by both microchip and earmark and the details placed on a national database;

- All tracks to maintain records of dogs raced or trialed for 5 years and any injuries sustained by dogs for 10 years.

Tracks will be required to comply with the proposed minimum standards and to be licensed by their local authority. However, the majority of racing tracks (28) are regulated by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) and it is intended that the GBGB will be accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) which will then give GBGB tracks an exemption from the licensing requirement. This is due to the GBGB having their own minimum standards which already meet the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. A few tracks are not licensed by the GBGB and are classed as 'independents'; it is these independent tracks that will be most affected by any new regulations and where the main benefits to animal welfare are expected to take place.

The consultation opened on 30 April and will close on 22 July 2009. The draft regulations, impact assessment of the proposed regulations and associated consultation documents may be accessed via the Defra website.

Consultation on Proposals for Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations (2009). Defra, Animal Welfare Act Implementation Team. Consultation and associated documents available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/greyhound-welfare/index.htm>.

The Welfare of Greyhounds (May 2007). Report of the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) inquiry into the welfare issues surrounding racing greyhounds in England. Available at: <http://www.apgaw.org/reports.asp>.

Independent Review of the Greyhound Industry in Great Britain (November 2007). A report by Lord Donoughue of Ashton for the British Greyhound Racing Board and the National Greyhound Racing Club. Available at: <http://www.greyhounds-donoughue-report.co.uk/>.

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Scotland publishes new Code of Welfare for Equidae

The Scottish Government has recently published the first species-specific Code of Practice under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. The code covers all domesticated equidae (horses, ponies, donkeys, and hybrids) and came into effect in Scotland on 20 April 2009.

It is intended that the code will provide practical guidance to people who own or manage equines by outlining a person's 'duty of care' and describing the welfare needs of