

Book Reviews

Welfare of the Laying Hen

Edited by GC Perry (2004). Poultry Science Symposium Series, No. 27. Published by CABI Publishing, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 8DE, UK. 448 pp Hardback (ISBN 0 85199 813 5). Price £75.00.

This book is an absolute gem! It contains something for anyone interested in the welfare of the laying hen. It is a collection of papers forming the Proceedings of the 27th World's Poultry Science Association Symposium. It might be expected that as a proceedings volume, it would comprise a series of scientific papers each describing a single study. But this book differs markedly from this expectation in two ways. First, the authors of the papers are not only welfare scientists, but also Government officials, veterinarians, economists, retailers, consumers, lobbyists and producers. This gives the book a considerably wider perspective than would a standard scientific proceedings volume. Second, and this is the great strength and attraction of the book, the majority of papers are reviews. Experts, and very often world leaders in their subject, give reviews on their area of interest and relate this to laying hen welfare. The result is a book that contains a multitude of highly informative, clearly written, fully referenced, authoritative articles covering almost every subject relating to laying hen welfare that you might care to think of. Many of the chapters contain such detailed and accessible background information that they would be invaluable to those with more pure interests in, for example, physiology, anatomy, genetics, nutrition and behaviour.

The book comprises five parts and starts with an excellent introductory chapter by James Kirkwood (UFAW) in which he convincingly argues that to a hen, welfare is all that matters — there is nothing else. The book then continues with a section entitled 'The Stakeholders', which includes seven papers by Government officials, lobbyists, consumers and producers. There are then two overview papers on systems of egg production and stress. Part III covers 'Welfare Issues' with 21 chapters under the headings of 'Genetic Issues', 'Perception and Cognition', 'Behaviour', 'Health and Disease', 'Stockmanship and Quality of the Environment', and 'Handling, Transport and Slaughter'. Part IV is a summary of the presented papers, and Part V contains abstracts of 20 posters also presented at the Symposium, which range considerably in their subject matter. The book finishes with a highly useful and comprehensive 10-page index.

The wide range of subjects covered in the book is both its weakness and its strength. For any one individual researcher working in just one area of welfare, it is possible that a large proportion of the book might not be relevant. It could be considered that at a cost of £75, this will not represent good

value for money if the reader is interested in only one or two of the chapters. However, the enormous breadth and depth of information that the book contains and the high quality of writing means this book is an absolute must for libraries, research group leaders, or those with diverse interests in laying hen welfare.

I do have a few quibbles about the book, but these are minor. The book becomes repetitive in places, most notably about European legislation on conventional cages. This repetition is probably inevitable, given that the authors all ensured that the reader is given appropriate background information. It is also possible that the repetition would not be noticed by someone picking up the book to read only a couple of chapters, rather than reading the entire book in 2–3 sittings. Some of the statements made by lobbyists in the first section of the book sat a little uncomfortably with me. For example, the claim "We ... and I think I can speak on behalf of the whole animal welfare movement in Europe, are opposed to hens in cages" is a rather sweeping statement, and contrasts with the more measured and objective assessments of scientists later in the book. Due to the technical nature of some of the subjects, a number of the chapters are less accessible than others, but this will be a personal view-point depending on the reader's own subject of interest and experience. The approach of the papers also differs occasionally, although this is a function of the topic and the existing work in the area. Some papers are somewhat theoretical, others factual, and others offer practical advice, eg how to ameliorate behavioural problems.

The welfare implications of this book are considerable. The Editor, Graham Perry, in his preface states that publication of these Proceedings will precede a review of the EU Welfare of Laying Hens Directive and it was intended that the symposium would include the most recent scientific information for the review body. My reading of the book suggests this intention has been achieved extremely well.

Who is this book suited for? As indicated above, the book covers a phenomenal breadth of subject areas relevant to the welfare of laying hens. As such, it might be that a large proportion of the book is less relevant for someone with specific interests. But, I would strongly recommend to any person starting a project on almost any aspect of the welfare of laying hens, or perhaps any project on hens, to seek out a copy of this book and read the relevant chapter or chapters. Each takes just a few minutes to read and will almost certainly provide the reader with a detailed account of up-to-date information on the topic of their choice, with a comprehensive reference list for further reading.

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