

barely intelligible for anyone brought up with no concept of any religion at all". In so far as sanctity is a religious concept moreover, it is questionable whether it should influence legislation, and in practice even religious opponents of assisted dying tend to invoke equally or more often, the fear of an inevitable empirical 'slippery slope' from voluntary to non-voluntary euthanasia. But this fear, sometimes expressed by people with disabilities as well as some religions, the authors suggest, is not necessarily justified by what has occurred in countries where assisted dying has been legalised, and the possibility of it being realised ought to be avoidable if the relevant legislation is sufficiently carefully crafted.

The authors however do not explain in detail how this might be achieved and they recognise that in practice there will be major difficulties in the case, for example, of mentally incompetent adults or of psychiatric assisted suicide. At present, they believe, legislative and medical opinion in the UK is unlikely to agree to more than, at most, legalisation of assisted suicide in the limited number of difficult cases where palliative care fails to relieve terminal suffering. But a problem about legalising only assisted suicide — allowing doctors to provide patients with drugs to self-administer — is that for a variety of practical reasons these may fail to end the patient's life and there will then be no legal opportunity for doctors, as they can in The Netherlands, "to administer euthanasia if assisted suicide should fail". The authors note moreover that whereas in The Netherlands "where terminal care is largely managed by the family doctor at home", doctors "have stressed the importance for them of a long association with a patient who ultimately requests help to die", in the UK "palliative care... is increasingly the realm of specialist hospice teams" and, "a long acquaintance with a given patient is quite unusual". Despite these potential problems, however, a significant advantage of legalising even only assisted suicide, is that the reassurance of a 'way out' that this offers, enables many people to go on living until death comes naturally.

While there is much else to commend in this very useful and generally fair-minded account of assisted dying, there may be a problem at the heart of one of its authors' claims. They argue, very cogently, that traditional and especially religious opposition to assisted dying of the 'not playing God' variety, has been overtaken by the fact that medical progress has ensured that an increasing number of people will now survive into very old age when they will "spend their last months or years in hospitals or 'care homes' where, for many, their death is the result of a decision, not their own, that the effort to keep them alive may properly be abandoned and they are deliberately allowed to die". But, having made this highly-important point about the human responsibility created by human extension of the 'Biblical' span, the authors then go on to argue that a reason for taking greater "responsibility for our own and other people's death" is that "since Darwin,

we have become accustomed to placing human beings among the other animals" and that the idea of humans having a "Mind or Soul" as an independent "something added on", or "inserted from the outside" into their body and brain no longer makes sense. One does not need to disagree with this criticism of a philosophical straw man, to take a deep breath before agreeing that it is morally appropriate to regard the death of another human animal in the same way as the death of a non-human animal.

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### **The Welfare of Animals: The Silent Majority**

C Phillips (2009). Published by Springer, 11 West 22nd Street, New York, USA. 214 pp Hardback (ISBN 978-1-4020-9218-3). Price £79.95.

This is a somewhat different book about animal welfare, as it deals with some aspects not usually included, such as historical references, animals in religion and wild animals. The subtitle to me indicates an emotional journey — which may put some readers off — but the book is not an empathic story of animal suffering.

Each chapter can be read as a separate entity, as definitions are carried through and issues which overlap with other chapters are repeated. This is at the same time the strength and the downfall of the book as it makes it very user-friendly (when one is looking for information on specific issues) but also somewhat discontinuous. Some chapters jump between subjects, so that a section on pain is followed immediately by a section on improving animal welfare in developing countries.

I found the chapter on definitions and concepts of animal welfare intriguing, and the arguments raised in relation to various definitions lend themselves as a good starting point for a discussion with students of the subject. One chapter is dedicated to the scale of the world's animal industries, which is particularly useful as a reference source. The historic, religious and anecdotal passages are interesting, and set this book apart from the many other textbooks on animal welfare. In contrast, the chapter on teaching animal welfare deals solely with veterinarians, which promotes, perhaps unintentionally, the notion that only vets are equipped to assess the welfare of animals.

Although the book is well written, more illustrations would have lifted the accessibility of some of the chapters, where the language at times is very heavy and tending towards the old-fashioned. An unfortunate typographical error refers to the RSPCA as the Royal Society for the Protection (sic) of Cruelty to Animals.

Clive Phillips does not shy away from sensitive subjects, and the mulesing operation (removal of skin from the hindquarters of sheep to prevent flystrike) is mentioned in almost every chapter. However, it is not clear what the author's view of mulesing is in relation to animal welfare, and it is not made clear, that this operation is usually carried out without anaesthetic or pain relief. Statements like

“Animal welfare can be estimated using an Animal Needs Index” (p 12) appear overly simplified, and indeed in other places the fallacies of this are emphasised. Different aspects of research into animal welfare are highlighted, including the dilemma connected with industry funding, in particular the reluctance to fund research which may lead to increased production costs.

This is not a book to introduce novices to the subject of animal welfare, but it is a book which has sections that enlighten and sections that may provoke the informed reader.

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### **The Domestic Duck**

C and M Ashton (2008). Published by The Crowood Press, Crowood Lane, Ramsbury, Wiltshire SN8 2HR, UK. 200 pp Paperback (ISBN 978-184797-050-3). Price £14.99.

This book provides comprehensive information for novice duck-keepers, from those wanting to have a couple of ducks in their backyard to those wishing to breed larger numbers and become involved in showing.

Roughly half of the book provides information on breeds of duck, their characteristics, history and (for the designer ducks) information on the genetics of their production. The remainder is given over to the behaviour and management of adult ducks together with specific information on breeding.

The authors provide a focus on breeding of ducks for specific, desired, characteristics but the negative aspects of this breeding are not overlooked. The importance of the health and vigour of breeding stock, including the mating of unrelated birds, is stressed as a vital aspect of successful breeding. The book specifically states that inbreeding is not advisable and that selection for more than just one trait (eg crests) is to be encouraged. The reduced fecundity of greatly inbred birds is described together with the hardiness caused as a result of recent crossbreeding vigour.

The authors provide great detail regarding the genetics required for certain traits, together with the consequences of inbreeding, such as lethal genes, and the problems involved in continuing to breed birds carrying these genes. The results of breeding experiments should not come as too great a surprise to someone experimenting with crossbreeding, who has read this book, and this information may help to reduce numbers of unwanted young. The issue of culling non-desired colour variants is mentioned but the authors also discuss reasons to keep mismatched young. Emphasis is repeatedly placed on how hard it is to breed perfect birds and the need for good stock, together with suggestions for record-keeping and the need for pedigrees to encourage responsible breeding.

The necessity of breeding birds for characteristics other than appearance, such as their personality, is also touched upon in order to produce birds that are less likely to suffer from stress and behavioural issues. Management techniques for stress reduction from a young age are also described,

such as ensuring that new ducklings are not afraid of their owner. The positive aspects of allowing the maintenance of inbuilt natural behaviours in captive birds are discussed, including allowing birds the freedom to decide where to nest (ensuring that this is balanced with preventing predation). The welfare issues of predator reduction are also mentioned, including highlighting humane pest control options and emphasising identifying the correct predator to ensure the use of the right traps.

A large number of the issues relating to welfare in this book are not significantly highlighted, simply described as part of correct management techniques.

Simple advice and tips are provided down to the most basic of husbandry tools which would be ideal for a novice duck-keeper or breeder and tips such as where to place the shed to make the ducks easier to herd in at night may help to reduce stress to both the ducks and the owner!

In a number of areas, the merits of different options are discussed, such as varieties of bedding, to provide new owners with options they can choose from to suit their circumstances. These merits include simple issues such as ease of cleaning and management of parasites such as mites. Specific points are highlighted for certain breeds in order to reduce the risks of problems which may not have been considered by a novice owner. Easily understood descriptions of temperature management will also help novice keepers to reduce stress and problems with their birds in this area.

From the moment the eggs are laid, welfare is described as key and there are many points made to increase the health and viability of offspring and their long-term welfare. Stress is placed on the need for constant care and regular checking of eggs and ducklings so that any issues can be dealt with at the earliest opportunity. The prevention of problems such as splayed legs by not using newspaper as a substrate is reiterated in order to ensure it is remembered and it is simple suggestions like this that are at the heart of the animal welfare implications of this book. This focus on welfare is carried though all aspects of the ducks' life, up to and including humane methods of slaughter and legal regulations relating to it.

Another, often overlooked, aspect of breeding ducks in which welfare is vital is the use of broody hens to hatch eggs. These birds require greater care because they are being asked to incubate duck eggs for longer than they would their own and this leads to increased strain on their systems. The need for this care and ways in which to provide it are fully detailed in the text.

Focus is placed throughout the book on measures to avoid problems occurring rather than treating them once they are present. The requirement for planning before buying ducks is repeatedly stressed, together with the need to start slowly with a small number of ducks and be ready to adapt the environment as necessary. The need for owners to be aware and watch their birds to learn more of their habits is also frequently reiterated and may help them to discover problems before they become significant.