



Winter Conference 2019 Language and Animals

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Abstracts

Exotic animal patients - understanding their needs and acting as their advocate with their owners. Just because we always have... doesn't mean it's right or acceptable

Neil Forbes
Exotics Consultant

Most UK residents know how to and can care for companion animals using proprietary feeds without compromising their welfare. The same cannot be claimed for exotic species, sadly the vast majority of vets are insufficiently trained to recognise husbandry defects or be able to advise on appropriate management.

Banning exotic species is not the solution, as it would force exotic species keeping underground. Making the training and testing (proportionate to the level of care required) of would be owners prior to purchase, with the licensing of keepers, with mandatory annual health checks with exotic vets trained to at least certificate level, might provide an appropriate solution. A review of the standards of care provided, and that should be provided, to exotic pets in the UK is overdue. The keeping of single pet parrots in cages and the hand rearing of parrots should, in the author's opinion, be banned. The keeping of a reptile in an enclosure without a thermometer and hygrometer should be banned, the periodic verification by testing of the UV provision, in line with published Ferguson Zone requirements should be mandatory. Such issues will be discussed further.

Words, animal welfare, and the law; the Humpty Dumpty problem

Peter Fordyce
University of Cambridge

The nature of the language used in animal welfare protection legislation is important; it not only conveys the legislator's ethical imperative to wider society, the words contained in the legislation may determine the statute's effectiveness, as they will be used by a court to determine innocence or guilt.

Animal welfare science discourse often encapsulates complex and nuanced concepts and arguments in superficially simple language, although the words used frequently hide a hinterland of philosophical complexity and scientific uncertainty. Without clarity about the meaning of words used in animal welfare science discourse, fallacies of ambiguity may arise which may frustrate the attempt of legislators to achieve their ethical aims.

The presentation briefly looks at some of the words used in the animal welfare proposals in the new Environment Bill outlined in the recent Queen's Speech in Parliament, with a view to promoting discussion on how those involved in animal welfare science might help legislators, and the courts, achieve better welfare outcomes for non-human animals.

Language, Policy and Sheep

Phil Stocker

National Sheep Association

With significant changes to agriculture imminent, the National Sheep Association (NSA) has launched a 'Business Readiness Toolkit' to help UK sheep farmers ensure they're prepared for changes in the coming months and years and help improve their businesses for the future.

NSA has long been aware our exit from the EU will result in significant change that will affect sheep farming. This is likely to be seen in trade patterns and markets, but also in the way that Government and society is prepared to support agriculture following our departure from the EU Common Agriculture Policy.

To help farmers deal with and adapt to these changes, NSA has developed a toolkit packed with guidance and advice as well as case studies highlighting farms where particular practices have worked well. NSA are confident the future holds real opportunities in the marketplace, and that our industries approach to multi-functional land use and sustainable land management will be recognised as beneficial by policymakers and the majority of the public. But we also know the change of the order we could see will bring disruption and uncertainty for many. The toolkit covers seven different topics, crucial for farmers to consider, including preparing mind-set and mental health, assessing your businesses current working and thinking about future income streams

Is there a problem in calling a non-human animal 'it'?

Frances Robinson

Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics

The philosopher Jacques Derrida recognized that there was an inconsistency between his actual experience of interacting with an animal and his conceptual understanding of the animal. He also realized that his conceptual understanding of the animal was based on human values, and that those human values were greatly influenced by ideas in Western philosophy – and, in particular, by the ideas in Western moral philosophy. Thus in order to try to find out where the problem lies (the cause of this

inconsistency), it is necessary to critically analyse the ethical theories in Western moral philosophy.

Having discovered the root of the problem, there is then a discussion of some of the detrimental consequences that have arisen as a result of this problem. Two examples are used for this purpose – 1) the evolution of the Common law and 2) animal experimentation.

Language, animals and welfare

Heather Bacon
University of Edinburgh

Language can be a powerful and evocative tool when describing the utilisation of animals for human benefit. How we use language to describe animals often depends on our ethical stance and whether we consider a particular animal or group of animals to have intrinsic or extrinsic value to us as humans for example terms such as ‘harvest’ – commonly applied to non-sentient plant crops is also commonly used to refer to the capture and slaughter of large numbers of food-producing animals such as fish or game. Do terms like this devalue and distance us from considering the good welfare of the animals that we are referring to?

Language is also powerful when we discuss our companion animals – those often considered to have intrinsic value. For pet owners anthropomorphism is a common challenge and whilst we widely accept that animals are sentient, with rich and varied emotional lives, this does not necessarily mean that their emotions and experiences are the same as ours. Whilst primal emotions such as fear and joy may be evident in companion animals, more complex emotional states such as guilt or jealousy may not be experienced in the same way or during the same experience. The misapplication of emotional states to companion animals can have implications for their welfare as we may respond inappropriately through misunderstanding an animal’s motivation for a particular behaviour. We see similar challenges when we ascribe human labels to animal behaviour in the veterinary clinic; pets who misbehave are often labelled ‘naughty’ or ‘difficult’ when logic tells us that their behaviour is much more likely to arise from a combination of previous learned experiences and associated fear or anxiety. This type of labelling has been shown to lead to situations that have potentially detrimental impacts in the human literature, and it is likely that the same risks apply to our animal patients.

The association between words and the welfare of free-living and captive wild animals

Chris Draper
Born Free Foundation

The words we use can have a substantial impact on the treatment of, and protections afforded to, wild animals, and as a result on their welfare. The categorisation of animals shapes and perpetuates our attitudes and relationships with them. Animals may be designated as ‘pest’ or ‘pet’, ‘native’ or ‘invasive’, ‘game’ or ‘wildlife’, and their treatment and protections may vary accordingly. Such labels are very often a product of human attitudes to wildlife, and not an inherent characteristic of the individual

animals, populations or species being considered. Similarly, our use of language in setting out prescribed and proscribed activities relating to the care and control of wild animals can have intended and unintended consequences on their welfare outcomes. Impacts may be contradictory, complementary or counterintuitive; suffering may be lawfully meted out to individuals of protected species, while protected animals are, in theory, safe from the compromised welfare of their conspecifics. Using examples from legislation and standards, we explore the connection between wording and the welfare of wild animals in conservation, wildlife management, trade, and captivity.