



Press release: Abnormal behaviour in captive animals is bad, say UK researchers, but physically preventing it is even worse.

The picture of the pacing animal, repeatedly circling its enclosure, is one of the most familiar images associated with poor welfare in animals. A recent study, funded by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare and published in the proceedings of its 2003 international symposium ‘Science in the Service of Animal Welfare’, estimates that a staggering 85 million or more farm, laboratory and zoo animals worldwide display kinds of abnormal repetitive behaviours.

From pecking movements in hungry hens (over 50 million) and jumping and somersaulting in laboratory mice (over 5 million), these behaviours tell us their environments are poor for welfare. Most studies of these ‘stereotypies’ - repetitive, unvarying and apparently functionless patterns of behaviour – find that the conditions that cause them, also cause other signs of poor welfare (such as raised levels of stress hormones). But surprisingly, Dr Georgia Mason and Naomi Latham of Oxford University contend that the welfare of the individuals performing stereotypies may be as good, if not better, than their calmer-seeming cage-mates: these bizarre behaviours may actually help them to cope with the adverse conditions they have to live in.

An implication of this is that measures taken simply to stop the performance of stereotypies may be deleterious to welfare. These include the painting of greasy or hot-tasting substances on stable doors and mangers to deter ‘windsucking’ or crib-biting in horses, the ‘weaving bars’ used to stop the swaying to and fro of these same animals, and the changes desperate zoo-keepers sometimes make to their animals’ enclosures to block troublesome pacing. Try and understand where the behaviours are coming from, argue the researchers.

‘Creating environments that do not cause this behaviour is very important’ said Georgia Mason *‘But just masking the symptoms of poor welfare when they appear could do more harm than good’*. The actions may function as *‘do-it-yourself enrichments’* for the animal, by substituting for natural behaviour, and or they may even calm the animal through repetition – like human *‘mantras’*. Mason and Latham therefore call for more caution when tackling animals that show stereotypic behaviour, concluding: *“stereotypies should always be taken seriously, as a warning sign of potential suffering, but ... not be reduced by means other than tackling their underlying motivation”*. ends

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE

Notes to Editors

Can't stop, won't stop: is stereotypy a reliable animal welfare indicator? by GJ Mason and NR Latham. In: Kirkwood JK, Roberts EA and Vickery S (eds). *Proceedings of the UFAW International Symposium 'Science in the Service of Animal Welfare'*, Edinburgh, 2003. *Animal Welfare* 2004, Vol 13: S57-69 (Suppl)

Other reports in this special supplementary issue of *Animal Welfare*, which features the papers presented at the UFAW International Symposium 'Science in the Service of Animal Welfare' that took place in Edinburgh, 2-4 April 2003, include:

- the science of welfare assessment
- using science in ethical decisions
- public understanding, science and other factors influencing animal welfare policy
- the application and transfer of scientific advances to the care of animals.

The symposium was one of the largest ever gathering of animal welfare scientists in the UK, and featured 374 delegates from 24 countries.

For more details and for copies of the report, please contact UFAW's director, Dr James Kirkwood, at the address above.

Animal Welfare is published four times a year by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare. If you would like a copy of the issue in which this report appears, or to be put on our press list, please contact UFAW (details above).

INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

UFAW, founded in 1926, is an internationally recognised, independent, scientific and educational animal welfare charity concerned with promoting high standards of welfare for farm, companion, laboratory and captive wild animals, and for those animals with which we interact in the wild. It works to improve animals' lives by:

- promoting and supporting developments in the science and technology that underpin advances in animal welfare
- promoting education in animal care and welfare
- providing information, organising meetings, and publishing books, videos, articles, technical reports and the journal *Animal Welfare*
- providing expert advice to government departments and other bodies and helping to draft and amend laws and guidelines
- enlisting the energies of animal keepers, scientists, veterinarians, lawyers and others who care about animals.
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"Improvements in the care of animals are not now likely to come of their own accord, merely by wishing them: there must be research ... and it is in sponsoring research of this kind, and making its results widely known, that UFAW performs one of its most valuable services."

Sir Peter Medawar CBE FRS, 8th May 1957,
Nobel Laureate (1960), Chairman of the UFAW Scientific Advisory Committee (1951-1962)