

Fly the Coop! Research into Free-range egg production systems

Free-range production systems are increasing in Australia, partly due to retailers' demand for what are perceived as 'welfare-friendly' products. Yet, there is little scientific evidence supporting that access to an outdoor range yields clear welfare benefits to the hens.

The Animal Welfare Science Centre is currently undertaking a 3 year research project funded by the Australian Egg Corporation to elucidate the benefits and challenges of free-range systems on the welfare of laying hens. That project, led by Dr. Jean-Loup Rault, will track hens in commercial flocks to increase our understanding of the use of the outdoor range by the hens and correlate that information with behavioral and physiological changes in the birds. It will also investigate management strategies that could optimize the use of the outdoor range, such as the provision of horizontal or vertical shelters.

This research will ultimately increase our knowledge on the effects of using the outdoor range on the behavior and physiology of free-range laying hens in Australian commercial conditions.

The information gained through this project will also contribute to improvements in the management of flocks in free-range housing systems.



Development of educational material for recreational horse owners.

The welfare of horses used for recreational purposes has become an increasingly important issue, as evident by the incidence of horse welfare investigations conducted by the Victorian inspectorate of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

Since 1997, the RSPCA in Victoria has investigated more than 1200 cases of welfare concerns regarding recreational horses annually.

Approximately 60% of the cases investigated by the RSPCA reportedly involve the mismanagement of horses where cruelty has not yet occurred, but may do so if the situation continues.



(Recreational horse owners -cont'd from page 1)

Similarly, reports concerning recreational horse populations around the world indicate that a substantial proportion of the welfare problems that occur are due to owner neglect or mismanagement, as a result of ignorance rather than intentional abuse.

Lauren Hemsworth, as part of her PhD studies, found that while horse owners believe that education is necessary to improve the welfare of horses, they also indicated that although information and advice is available, it needs to be actively sought out and is often difficult to obtain. Consequently, in order to capitalize on horse owners' positive opinions of education and for the provided resources to be of benefit, information and support/advice needs to be more accessible.

ANZ Trustees, through the Kathleen Agnes Back Estate, have funded a one year project, (led by **Dr Ellen Jongman**), which aims to:

- develop and provide horse owners with the resources necessary to appropriately manage the health, husbandry and welfare of their recreational horses.
- develop a pilot horse welfare benchmarking tool to enable recreational horse owners to benchmark their horses' welfare/time and monitor their husbandry and management practices.
- improve the health and welfare of recreational horses, and reduce the incidence of horse welfare investigations in Victoria.
- reach recreational horse owners who potentially have limited access to information and support due to a lack of membership to horse clubs and societies, and/or limited contact with other horse owners.

The expected outputs of the project consist of a range of resources including a centralized website, a series of information brochures and a horse welfare benchmarking protocol, all of which will be designed to provide recreational horse owners with information, support and tools relevant to appropriate horse husbandry and management.

Staff movements at AWSC

Professor Grahame Coleman has moved from Monash University to take up a position of Professor, Human-Animal Relationships at the School of Land and Environment at the University of Melbourne.

Funded in part by the Victoria Bureau of Animal Welfare, this appointment will strengthen research capability and leadership in companion animal welfare and will also maintain the AWSC focus on human characteristics, including attitudes, which are relevant to human-animal interactions across all animal use sectors and in the relationship between community attitudes and community behaviours that impact on the animal use.

In taking up a position as Research Fellow - Animal Welfare at the School of Land and Environment at the University of Melbourne, *Dr. Ellen Jongman* will continue to follow her research interests in the dairy and sheep meat industries.

Ellen will also contribute to AWSC research looking at companion animal welfare and management.

Both Ellen and Grahame are located on the University's Parkville campus



Stockperson training in sheep feedlots

The AWSC is participating in a project led by Dr Samantha Bickell from the University of Western Australia which will investigate the effects of stock-handling training in sheep feedlots.

This one year project, funded by Meat and Livestock Australia, aims to demonstrate the effects of stockperson training in sheep feedlots on animal welfare and the stockperson's attitudes and behaviour towards sheep.

Stress free stockmanship training will be complemented with cognitive-behavioural modification training so that long-lasting behavioural and attitudinal changes are achieved with the stockpeople.

The cognitive-behavioural modification component of the training will be delivered by Jeremy Skuse and will be developed by Paul Hemsworth and Grahame Coleman through modifying the existing training program developed for sheep handlers at Australian abattoirs (ProHand Red Meat Abattoir).



Visitor-animal relationships in zoos seminar

The Animal Welfare Science Centre, Zoos Victoria and others are presently developing an ARC Linkage project studying the relationships between zoo visitors and zoo animals. To assist in exploring the scope of this project and developing collaborations, a targeted seminar was held to discuss recent research on this topic.

Over 40 people from several zoos and universities attended the seminar which was kindly hosted by Melbourne Zoo.

Speakers included:

Sally Sherwen (PhD Student, AWSC, The University of Melbourne) outlined some of her research which is investigating the effect of visitors on zoo animals.

Vicki Melfi (Behavioural Biologist, Taronga Conservation Society) discussed human-animal bonds in the zoo environment.

Rosie Martin (Taronga Conservation Society) presented some results from her Master's research at Plymouth University (UK) which compared zoo animal behaviour in the presence of familiar and unfamiliar people.

Roger Rassool (School of Physics, The University of Melbourne) demonstrated some practical applications that his group has developed which will be of assistance in remotely observing animal behaviour.

Grahame Coleman (AWSC, The University of Melbourne) reviewed the interactions between zoo animal behaviour and human attitudes.

Andrew Tribe (CAWE, University of Queensland) gave a presentation focussing on how visitors view the captive environment.

Katie Pahlow (Director, Visitor & Community Development, Zoos Victoria) outlined Zoos Victoria programs which target visitors' attitudes to assist in wildlife conservation.



Michael McGrath (Zoos Victoria), Paul Hemsworth (AWSC) Vickie Melfi (Taronga)



AWSC / RSPCA Public Lecture

How happy does a happy animal have to be.....
(and how can we tell)?



James Yeates, *Chief Veterinary Officer, RSPCA UK, and Honorary Lecturer, University of Bristol*

This public lecture will challenge your thinking on the concept of animal welfare assessment!

Animal welfare research has mainly focused on the “negative” side of animal welfare, ensuring animals can “cope” and avoid unpleasant states such as pain and frustration.

Recent years have seen the beginning of a wider conceptualisation of animal welfare, to include “positive” states, including a greater focus on subjective experiences and an appreciation of pleasant experiences.

Future assessment of animal welfare may consider states that are achieved “beyond coping”:-

Enjoyment, euphoria and satisfaction, self-fulfillment and autonomy, achievement and fulfillment, and considerations of a “good life” are just some examples.

Such concepts allow us to move forward from a situation where we are merely neutralizing negative states to one where we are promoting positive welfare states in animals.

To register, please email rspca@rspca.org.au (include Melbourne in subject line) before February 22nd

Wednesday February 27th
5.30pm – 6.30pm
Lecture Theatre 230
The University of Melbourne
Level 2, 234 Queensberry Street
Parkville.



<http://maps.unimelb.edu.au/parkville/building/263>

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