

An on-line information resource on the use of animals in science

Tuition in animal welfare and related ethical issues is included in an increasing number of secondary and tertiary level courses and there is a growing demand among students for information on the use of animals in science. UFAW receives many requests from students undertaking projects on this subject and seeking guidance on sources of information. This new website, which provides clear and balanced summaries of the issues, is a valuable addition to the literature to which students can be directed and has the advantage that it can be accessed in seconds and for free (apart from communication line costs). The topics covered include: why study animals? minimizing the harm done to animals in science; benefits of animal-based science; balancing harm and benefit; ethics and use of animals; and control of animal use in science. The site presents well-written and succinct introductions to these topics: ideal for secondary-level – and for introduction to tertiary-level – debate on the subject. In addition, the site also provides a list of further reading and relevant videos and the web addresses of other relevant sites.

Although providing an excellent introduction to the general principles, when it comes to the particulars concerning systems for ethical review and the legal controls on the use of animals in research, the site describes only those in place in Australia and New Zealand. Because of this, it falls just short of being a one-stop shop for students in other parts of the world faced with pressing deadlines for essay assignments on the use of animals in research. However, it provides a very good framework and overview and deserves to be widely visited.

Using Animals in Science – Online (2000). Australia and New Zealand Committee for Care of Animals in Research and Teaching (ANZCCART) and the Animal Welfare Science and the Bioethics Centre, Massey University: New Zealand. Website resource. Available via <http://anzccart.rsnz.govt.nz/>.

Welfare aspects of trade in wild animals

The international convention regulating trade in wild animals, CITES, exists to control trade threats to species conservation. Apart from specifying that live animals 'should be so prepared and shipped as to minimize the risk of injury, damage to health, or cruel treatment', the convention gives little consideration to welfare matters. Concerns have been raised about disease and mortality rates in animals taken from the wild for international trade. Although there has been interest among some welfare groups in trying to find ways to strengthen the welfare provisions of the convention, these efforts have met with little success to date. One problem has been with the interpretation of the term 'prepared and shipped', as applying only to the act of packing animals before export. If this phrase was also taken to cover all aspects of the housing and husbandry of the animals from capture to export, then CITES could provide a stronger framework for welfare protection.

In a recent report, Dr Barbara Maas, undertook an extensive literature review of the ways in which housing and husbandry conditions pre-, during, and post-export can cause stress which may predispose animals to disease. Because pre-export husbandry is an aspect of preparation for export which can lead to health damage if standards are poor, she argues that, in the granting of CITES permits, consideration should be given to evidence of health status pre- and post-transport rather than focusing exclusively on the brief period of actual transport. Another argument for taking careful note of pre-export mortality figures when granting CITES permits, is that, because of this mortality, the numbers of animals taken from the wild exceed those actually exported. This will result in the pressure on wild populations being underestimated if it is based only on export number data.