

The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (as amended) requires that all animals are stunned before slaughter using prescribed methods, but allows exemption for slaughter by the Jewish (Shechita) and Muslim (Halal) methods. FAWC takes the position here, based on consideration of time to loss of brain responsiveness following cutting the major vessels of the neck, that "... slaughter without pre-stunning is unacceptable and that the Government should repeal the current exemption".

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*Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing. Part 1: Red Meat Animals* (June 2003) Farm Animal Welfare Council. 72 pp A4. Published on behalf of FAWC by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Product code PB 8347. Available, free of charge, from DEFRA Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX and also at the FAWC website: [www.fawc.org.uk](http://www.fawc.org.uk)

### **The welfare of non-domesticated animals kept as pets**

The Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC) was established in the UK in 1999 to provide objective views and advice on companion animal welfare issues. The Council is structured along the same lines as, and follows the general approach of, the Farm Animal Welfare Council. In July 2003, CAWC published its report on the keeping of non-domesticated animals for companionship, the objectives of which were stated to be: (a) to present information on the practice of keeping of non-domesticated species for companionship in the UK; and (b) to make recommendations intended to promote high standards of welfare, where such a need has been identified.

The keeping of non-domesticated animals for companionship has a very long history but it has become very much more popular in recent decades as, for a variety of reasons, many animals have become more readily available and knowledge about them and husbandry systems have been developed. The Report draws attention to the very wide range of species that is now commonly kept for companionship or hobby purposes (estimating that well over 1000 species are kept in the UK) and to the fact that the national populations of some of these animals are very large. This is a relatively new phenomenon and it is important to consider potential risks associated with it and how these should be managed. The Report includes sections on: the range of species kept; possible species variation in capacity for suffering; types of problems associated with keeping non-domesticated animals; owner responsibility; potential problems associated with capture, sourcing and transport; potential benefits of non-domesticated animals as companion animals; concerns other than those related to welfare (eg threats to biodiversity and welfare of indigenous fauna); education; and legislation.

The preamble to the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals (1987, ETS No 125) includes among the considerations that underpin its provisions:

- "the importance of pet animals in contributing to the quality of life and their consequent value to society"; and
- "the keeping of specimens of wild fauna should not be encouraged".

The Convention therefore generally regards the practice of keeping companion animals positively, but this attitude does not extend to circumstances in which wild animals are kept. The CAWC report points out that, although the rationale for this reservation is based, at least in part, on considerations of animal welfare, this point is neither explained nor discussed and no evidence is produced to support it. One of CAWC's conclusions was that: "The challenges of keeping non-domesticated animals to high standards of welfare will often be greater than those of keeping more traditional companion animals, but this is not always the case: it depends on the species compared. From the point of view of welfare, it is not possible to make a simple distinction based solely on whether or not an animal is domesticated."

The report indicates that the difficulties of keeping non-domesticated animals to high standards of welfare are often that: (i) needs may not be known; (ii) where the husbandry of the species has been well studied, the relevant information may not be readily available to owners; and (iii) there may be difficulties obtaining specialist food or equipment. The Report includes various recommendations relevant to these points.

Although a wide range of diseases apparently associated with captive husbandry has been described, the CAWC report stated that there is little information about the prevalence of these diseases. Since such information is relevant to decisions about which species are unsuitable to be kept and also to prioritising preventive efforts, CAWC recommended surveys to investigate the prevalence and epidemiology of husbandry-related disease and welfare problems.

Among the other recommendations are: that a quality assurance scheme should be developed which certifies that animals for sale are, and have been, cared for to certified standards; and that, in view of the scale and diversity of animal importations, the Government should review the adequacy of current biosecurity measures to protect indigenous fauna from introduced exotic infections.

At the launch of the Report at the Houses of Parliament on 9 July, it was noted that the keeping of non-domesticated animals for companionship is a large and complex subject and one to which CAWC expects to return to address specific aspects in greater detail in the future.

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*The Welfare of Non-Domesticated Animals kept for Companionship* (July 2003) Companion Animal Welfare Council. 45 pp A4. Available from the Companion Animal Welfare Council, c/o The Donkey Sanctuary, Sidmouth, Devon EX10 0NU, UK.

### **Welfare aspects of shooting foxes**

It is perhaps surprising, considering the widespread use of shooting in harvesting or control of some wildlife species, that there have been few studies of the welfare consequences of shooting. This subject, as it pertains to the fox, is one of considerable interest in the UK at the present time, associated with the current debate about the humaneness of hunting with hounds. A preliminary report (see details below) of the results of a recent study undertaken by Fox and others has been published by the All Party Parliamentary Middle Way Group, which also commissioned the work.

The main body of the report comprises four sections: an introduction and description of the design and methodology of the study (by Dr Nick Fox); two sections, with different authorship (The International Veterinary Group and Dr Douglas Wise), each separately scoring the results; and a concluding discussion (Nick Fox). The study involved target shooting, by unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled shooters, and using various methods of life-sized paper silhouettes of a trotting fox, and inference from the impact positions of the pellets/bullets about the likely outcomes had these shots been fired at live foxes. These inferences were informed, to some extent, by investigations of the depth of penetration of shotgun pellets fired at fox carcasses from various ranges. For the shotgun studies, moving 'foxes' were towed in such a way as to emerge from behind screens into the shooter's visibility for 3 s, and for the rifle studies, each target was hinged up into visibility in a stationary position for 4 s.

From the results of the above study, and also from records from fox shooters, the authors consider that: "... under common field conditions, for every fox dead with a shotgun, at least the same number are wounded and many of these are never found." They call for a principled, science-based and integrated approach to assessing welfare in the killing of wild animals.