

BOOK REVIEWS

Management and Diseases of Deer: a Handbook for the Veterinary Surgeon, 2nd edition

Edited by T L Alexander and D Buxton (1994). The Veterinary Deer Society: London. 255pp. Paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, c/o British Veterinary Association, 7 Mansfield Street, London W1M 0AT, UK (ISBN 0 9510826 1 2). Price £18.50 (UK), £22.50 (overseas).

The first part of the book covers the whole field of deer farming from the first history, the development of the sources of stock from originally captured animals, land use, present day marketing, slaughter and use of all the products. The second part deals with management, restraint, husbandry, feeding and breeding. The rapid advances in our knowledge of the physiology and nutrition of these animals, which are at present undergoing domestication, are detailed. The third and major part deals with diseases of deer found in the UK with descriptions of the conditions found in New Zealand. There are one million farmed deer in New Zealand and the work on nutrition and especially on copper metabolism is of interest. The appendices list the classification, physiological and blood and milk biochemistry values of the species of deer present in the UK.

The extreme importance of correct, quiet and efficient handling of deer is stressed throughout the book – in translocation, transport, sales, surgery and slaughter. Advances in marketing such as the electronic auction sale, ensure that calves are marketed whilst still on the farm – and the provision of good transport can be certain.

The section on sedation and immobilization of healthy and injured deer describes the advances in technique and the possibility of the future use of long-acting tranquillizers, lasting up to 10 days in their effect.

The problem of the increased Scottish populations of red deer is discussed by Dr Fletcher in the section, capture of free-living deer. The possible use of capture systems to handle large numbers of animals before culling with humane killers is mentioned.

The chapter on reproduction has details of a programme for embryo transfer. It is salutary to learn that a hind would have been handled and treated on seven occasions, in the three weeks before surgery. The author, Dr L M Griffiths queries the ethics of this procedure and the importance of defining the issues involved.

In such a factual work it is a surprise to find such an unthorough statement as: 'Deer are the most comprehensive animals in Chinese medicine, occupying the paramount position equivalent to that of ginseng among the medicinal plants.' It is a further surprise to learn in the chapter on the uses of other deer products: 'There is now scientific evidence that velvet antler has tonic or general performance enhancing effects on both humans and animals.' The further reading at the conclusion of this chapter does not include any references to pharmacological journals. One might expect to find instructions on the use of an alembic on a later page!

The book is carefully written by eleven contributors and each of them is an authority on one or more of the topics covered. The book is well produced, inexpensive, lacking in mistakes and is a model of the type of reference book to have close by when faced with an immediate problem.

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