

## REPORTS AND COMMENTS

### Australian native mammals

The species used in traditional biomedical research involving animals are usually restricted to the rat, mouse, rabbit, guinea pig, ferret, dog, cat and certain primates. When, however, the research is in the agricultural and biological fields a wider range of animal types is studied. And, at times, even wild species are caught and kept under laboratory conditions. The information on the care and management of these animals, if known at all, tends to be held by certain experienced individuals and/or scattered widely over the scientific literature. It can be difficult for potential keepers to gain access to this information.

The National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia has, in an attempt to overcome this problem, published *A Guide to the Use of Australian Native Mammals in Biomedical Research*. Sections 1–3 covering general matters, diets and anaesthetic techniques were issued together in 1990, but now *Section 4: Care of Individual Species* has appeared as an A4 folder with 32 loose information sheets each dedicated to one or a small group of related species. A total of some 50 native Australian mammals are covered.

Each information sheet contains short sections on distribution, methods of catching, handling and transport, housing, specific requirements for breeding, disease control and zoonoses, diet, key references and (in a few instances) institutions with captive colonies.

This guide will be most useful for scientific workers in Australia who wish to keep native mammals for biomedical research purposes and for wild animal keepers across the world. Both groups need access to specialized information on these Australian species. This guide – all the parts of which must be read together – provides this access.

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*A Guide to the Use of Australian Native Mammals in Biomedical Research. Section 4: Care of individual species.* Produced and published by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) GPO Box 9848, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia (1995). Folder plus 32 sheets (ISBN 0 644 33448 7).

### Ferret keeping

While this video does contain some useful information, it is unfortunate that it is seriously flawed in other respects. Firstly, the presentation is amateurish. Most of the footage is of Mr McKay sitting in front of the camera holding various ferrets which are doing their utmost to escape. The video should have concentrated on the animals, and McKay should only have appeared as a voice-over with occasional views of his hands showing how to hold or manipulate the animal. Unfortunately the camera operator was so concerned with keeping McKay in the frame that it was impossible to discover what was happening when, for example, claw cutting was demonstrated. Where a whole person is in frame, the use of a zoom lens is absolutely essential if one is to see the ferret properly.

The commentary too seemed to be rather frivolous at times. A good deal of the information provided was unsatisfactory. Early in the video there was a description of sexing the animal by looking at its head! Not only does this ignore the obvious differences in external genitalia, but it is quite impracticable with young animals. Much of the advice is contradictory, a cage type is shown and recommended and then several other kinds are displayed which are at variance with the advice given with the original design. Viewers are advised to keep ferrets in pairs and then single-housed animals are shown. Ferrets are plantigrade, not plantiform. Contradictory advice on genetics and breeding is given: on the one hand McKay recommends inbreeding and on the other outcrossing with wild polecats. The latter policy is to be deplored because hybrids tend to be much more nervous and quick

reacting and are thus likely to escape and, in some areas, carry domesticated genes into the native polecat population. Considerable concern must also be expressed by the way in which this video seems to recommend the use of antibiotics without veterinary supervision.

While McKay is a real ferret enthusiast, and this comes over in the video, ferrets do need very careful handling and training; their independent and solitary nature generally makes them less rewarding for the average pet owner compared to dogs or cats. In conclusion, it is unfortunate that this video, which contains useful advice and information, is at times rather misleading. Anyone wishing to keep ferrets might be interested to see this video but should regard it with a critical eye. They should also read Porter and Brown's book, *The Complete Book of Ferrets* reviewed in *Animal Welfare* 5(1) to gain a broader perspective.

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*Ferret Keeping*. James McKay (1995). Farming Press: Ipswich. Colour VHS/PAL video, 56min. Obtainable from the publisher, Miller Freeman Professional Ltd, Fenton House, Wharfedale Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 4LG, UK. Distributed in North America by Diamond Farm Enterprises, Box 537, Alexandria Bay, New York 13607, USA. Price £14.95.

### Environmental enrichment

Confined animals, whether they be in zoos, in laboratory animal houses or on farms, are often kept in restricted and barren environments. They cannot readily perform many of their natural behaviours. Under these conditions their ethological needs cannot be fully met and their psychological well-being cannot be assured. One possible way to improve their welfare is to enrich their surroundings.

The literature related to environmental enrichment is substantial and is scattered across a variety of publications. It is difficult for those looking for a possible environmental enrichment solution to a welfare problem to quickly locate the appropriate information. The new 294pp book *Environmental Enrichment Information Resources for Laboratory Animals: 1965-1995*, which has been jointly produced by the Animal Welfare Information Center (AWIC) of the US Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Library and the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW), will help in the search. This book covers birds, cats, dogs, farm animals, ferrets, rabbits and rodents. The exclusion of nonhuman primates is deliberate as they are covered in a separate AWIC publication, *Environmental Enrichment Information Resources for Nonhuman Primates: 1987-1992*.

Each section of the bibliography (see the advertisement at the back of this issue) is introduced by a paper written by an authority on the particular species. There are then lists of resource organizations, suppliers of products, a list of common devices and programmes and an extensive subject index.

This book should act as an excellent starting point for those wanting to initiate an enrichment programme and are looking for guidance from the literature. There is perhaps a need for a similar publication directed towards animals in the zoo and on the farm.

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*Environmental Enrichment Information Resources for Laboratory Animals: 1965-1995, Birds, Cats, Dogs, Farm Animals, Ferrets, Rabbits and Rodents*. Animal Welfare Information Center (AWIC)/Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) (1995). 294pp. Paperback. Obtainable in North and South America from AWIC, National Agricultural Library, 10301 Baltimore Boulevard, Beltsville, Maryland 20705, USA; also obtainable from UFAW, 8 Hamilton Close, South Mimms, Potters Bar, Herts EN6 3QD, UK. See advertisement at the back of this issue for prices.