



Module 26

Companion Animal Welfare

Student Activities

Questions

1. When a shelter with a 'no kill' policy has adequate facilities and resources it can house a certain number of animals comfortably. If admissions to the shelter significantly increase this can limit how well the behavioural and physical needs of each individual animal are met.

a) Identify five issues that may arise in an overcrowded shelter that has a 'no kill' policy

(5 marks)

- Relative overcrowding in poorly constructed and maintained facilities
- Poor hygiene and sanitation
- Reduced and unbalanced nutrition
- Lack of prophylactic and therapeutic medications
- Inability to quarantine or isolate animals

b) List five factors that predispose animals to the outbreak of infectious disease in shelters.

(5 marks)

- Overcrowding
- Poor hygiene and sanitation
- Prolonged contact with infected animals
- Poor nutrition
- Intercurrent disease

2. Rescue shelters may take in non-owned animals from stray populations as well as lost free roaming animals that are owned by humans. List three functions of a rescue shelter.

(3 marks)

- To keep lost pets to allow them to be reclaimed by their owner
- To keep lost pets for re-homing
- Temporary accommodation as part of neuter and release programmes

3. If a shelter becomes overcrowded and does not have sufficient resources or funding it may use selective culling to reduce 'unnecessary suffering' of the animals in its care. Into what seven groups might you classify dogs that are entering a shelter in order to assess which animals it may be most appropriate to cull?

(7 marks)

- If the animal is dangerous to human health
- If the animal is dangerous to the health of other animals in the shelter
- If the animal has a severe injury or disease that cannot be treated
- If the animal has a severe injury or disease that can be treated but at high cost
- If the animal has a minor injury or disease
- If the animal has behaviour problems
- If the animal is healthy with no apparent problems

4. Individuals of the same species can vary in the degree to which they cope in a shelter environment. List three behaviours might you look for in dogs that indicate that they may not be coping and their welfare is threatened in the shelter environment.

(3 marks)

- High levels of aggression directed towards other dogs and humans
- Withdrawn behaviour, staying at the back of the kennel, cowering and shivering
- Highly active behaviour, constantly circling the kennel, excessive barking and whining

5. Rescued animals may not be identifiable if they have not been microchipped or tattooed. Describe three advantages for rescue shelters' rehoming programmes when they are able to identify incoming animals.

(3 marks)

- Being better able to distinguish owned and non-owned animals
- They can identify animal owners who regularly fail to take steps to manage where their animals roam
- The rescue shelter can monitor the success of a re-homing programme

6. Legislation concerning the ownership and management of dogs may vary between regions. As a vet you may be required to advise on developing such legislation. List four problems associated with breed-specific legislation aimed at controlling aggressive dogs.

(4 marks)

- Aggressive and non-aggressive individuals can occur in all dogs, regardless of breed
- Most bites occur in the home by breeds typically thought of as 'non-aggressive'
- Difficulty of specifically identifying certain breeds due to cross-breeding
- Penalties are commonly aimed at the dog rather than the owner

7. The regulation of the welfare of animals bought and sold as part of the pet trade varies between regions. List the three stages of the pet supply chain where the welfare of the pet needs to be considered.

(3 marks)

- The sourcing of animals
- The housing of animals in the pet shop/market
- The animal's new house/environment

8. Veterinarians may surgically alter various parts of an animal's body for cosmetic purposes. List five such procedures that may be considered as unnecessary mutilations.

(5 marks)

- Tail docking
- Ear cropping
- Devocalisation
- Declawing
- Defanging

9. You are at a conference and one of the speakers remarks that it is OK to dock puppies' tails within the first two days because puppies can't feel pain at that stage. You give a scientific response to their statement. What do you say?

(4 marks)

- Research using Electroencephalography (EEG) indicates that puppies are incapable of suffering in the first days of life because their brain is not neurologically mature enough to allow it.
- However, research on rat pups and human infants suggests that other parts of the pain pathway are activated by the tissue damage that tail-docking causes, and that this predisposes the pups to be oversensitive to pain in the area later in life, or to lack of sensitivity to pain there.
- There is no feasible way of providing analgesia to puppies at the age when their tails are docked.
- Consequently, although what the speaker says is scientifically accurate, it is not an adequate reason for docking pups' tails.

10. Human consumption of dog meat is a cultural norm in some countries. The sourcing of dog meat is less regulated than the equivalent sourcing and farming of more common production animals. Identify three welfare issues associated with the dog meat trade.

(3 marks)

- Overcrowding in large-scale farming
- Sub-optimal conditions during long-distance transportation
- Inhumane slaughter methods

In-class activities

Discussion

The Five Freedoms provide us with a framework through which to consider the welfare of animals. The degree to which each of the Five Freedoms can be afforded to a certain animal will depend in part on the environment and the way in which humans manage and care for them.

Part 1 – In pairs, identify the Five Freedoms of animal welfare.

Answers:

1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst
2. Freedom from Discomfort
3. Freedom from Pain, Injury and Disease
4. Freedom from Fear and Distress
5. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour

Part 2 – The class will divide into ten groups.

Each group will be allocated one of the Five Freedoms and must explore the extent to which their allocated Freedom is met (or not) in the context of either a stray or a shelter dog as follows:

Group 1 – Stray dogs; Freedom from Hunger and Thirst

Group 2 – Shelter dogs; Freedom from Hunger and Thirst

Group 3 – Stray dogs; Freedom from Discomfort

Group 4 – Shelter dogs; Freedom from Discomfort

Group 5 – Stray dogs; Freedom from Pain, Injury and Disease

Group 6 – Shelter dogs; Freedom from Pain, Injury and Disease

Group 7 – Stray dogs; Freedom from Fear and Distress

Group 8 – Shelter dogs; Freedom from Fear and Distress

Group 9 – Stray dogs; Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour

Group 10 – Shelter dogs; Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour

Part 3 – Each group will report on the content of their discussion to the rest of the class.

Part 4 – To end the session, the class will discuss whether the Five Freedoms are more easily met for a stray dog or a dog in a rescue shelter.

Points for lecturer/discussion facilitator to consider:

- Freedom from Hunger and Thirst – Good welfare for shelter dog if he/she has access to adequate, suitable food and clean drinking water. For the stray dog, this is also dependent on his/her environment, but he/she may be able to scavenge and hunt for food and fresh water.
- Freedom from Discomfort – Good welfare for the shelter dog in that he/she has the opportunity to seek appropriate shelter. The shelter dog may still experience thermal discomfort as he/she may be unable to engage in the necessary behaviour to self-regulate body temperature (e.g. seek shade). The stray dog may experience poor welfare due to lack of shelter.
- Freedom from Pain, Injury and Disease – Good welfare for the shelter dog if he/she is receiving necessary veterinary care to treat pain, injuries and disease. However, he/she may still suffer from a range of diseases despite being housed individually, due to contaminated surfaces and poor hygiene standards in some rescue centres. Stray dogs can experience poor welfare from a range of diseases, may be injured in traffic accidents, and may suffer prolonged periods of pain because he/she has no access to veterinary care. Additionally, the extent to which analgesics are used during and after surgical neutering procedures can determine the extent of pain in both stray and shelter animals' experiences.
- Freedom from Fear and Distress – The shelter dog may experience poor welfare if he/she is already fearful of humans or other animals, as he/she will be more exposed to these stressors and cannot run away. He/she will have good welfare if he/she has the freedom to escape from the source of stress. However, if the rescue centre has the human resources available, the dog may receive socialisation training to help treat and reduce fear and distress associated with human contact. The stray dog may experience poor welfare if he/she is fearful of other animals or distressed due to pressures on food resources, increasing aggression and conflict between conspecifics.
- Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour – In kennels a shelter dog may be able to express only a limited range of normal species-specific behaviour and to a limited extent. The stray dog may experience better welfare as he/she has more freedom to express normal species-specific behaviour.

Applied Learning Opportunity

Visit an animal rescue shelter

Students should visit an animal production system or farm or obtain work experience at one. They should be required to complete a report using the following guidelines which should be shared with them in advance so that they can gather the appropriate information while visiting/on placement. This report focuses on qualitative data as opposed to the quantitative data gathered using the assessment protocol outlined above. Both of these activities can be combined.

1. Background information

A brief introduction to the establishment. Identify the animal species involved and how many animals are present. The history and some data about the scale of the particular industry should be included along with the objectives of the individual establishment.

2. The daily routine of the animal establishment

Outline the system of production and management employed in the animal establishment including information about daily and other cyclical routines and how resources are distributed (diagrammatic representation of this may be useful). Identify the inputs and outputs of the system.

3. The species typical environment and behaviour

Provide an overview of the natural environment and behaviour of the animal species concerned. Reference scientific literature where possible.

4. Evaluation of the current environment

Provide an overview of the extent to which the establishment and its management system replicate the natural environment of the animal species concerned. Use the framework of the Five Freedoms and explain how the animal's behaviour and welfare is positively or negatively affected by the system in which they are living. Reference scientific literature where possible.

5. Evaluation of ethical issues

Identify and comment on the potential ethical issues associated with the way the animals are used and managed in the establishment. Use the framework of an Ethical Matrix to explore and explain the implications for different stakeholders according to various ethical principles.

6. Summary/conclusion

Bring together all the strands discussed in the report to summarise the experience, the establishment and the experience for the animals concerned