

Keeping up with the field on animal welfare

INCREASING knowledge of the remarkable array of cognitive, social, communicative, behavioural and other morally relevant characteristics found among various animal species has led to a substantial re-evaluation of their moral status, and to increased scrutiny of their use for food, fibre, scientific research, entertainment and other human purposes.

Driven partly by such increased knowledge and altered understanding, and partly by increasing social attention and concern, the veterinary profession has also increasingly turned its attention to animal welfare.

Recent statements from organisations such as the FVE/AVMA (2011) and WVA (2014) have affirmed that animal welfare is a top priority for the profession, and a series of veterinary conferences in recent years have had animal welfare as their primary foci.

One such conference was the 2nd annual meeting of the newly established American (veterinary) College for Animal Welfare (ACAW), held in June at NC State University. As with the 2014 ACAW short course, the 2015 course was booked to its capacity of 100, which was limited by the lecture theatre used.

This was despite a relatively low level of awareness of this event within the animal welfare veterinary community. As with the previous year, I was the only international delegate – unless, that is, you count California, which was reportedly considered a foreign country by certain attendees from more easterly states.

For two days we were treated to a variety of interesting presentations covering the principles of animal welfare assessment, and their application to dairy cattle, farmed pigs and small ruminants, shelter animals, and elephants maintained in zoos. A

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discussion of welfare issues associated with animal research included a review of 3Rs, alternatives, and the US Animal Welfare Act.

For the many veterinarians interested in becoming diplomates of the College, a particular highlight was the information provided concerning the ACAW's annual examination. We were treated to all 34 intimidating pages of the animal welfare syllabus that diplomates are expected to master, and to information about the format of the eight-hour examination. Finally, we worked through some sample

ANDREW KNIGHT reports on a recent meeting which looked at principles of welfare assessment and their application to dairy cattle, farmed pigs, small ruminants, shelter animals and elephants in zoos



questions, which were somewhat more reassuring.

Any veterinarians interested in specialist qualifications in animal welfare should note that if they have sufficient experience, knowledge and publications, they may be exempt from undertaking all or part of the normal three-year required residency. However, this opportunity only exists during the first few years of the life of a new speciality college, and it ends in 2016 in Europe and 2018 in the US.

Those successfully meeting the European requirements may become *de facto* diplomates of the European College of Animal Welfare and Behavioural Medicine, in the sub-specialty of Animal Welfare Science, Ethics and Law (and then, European veterinary specialists in the latter field). The requirements for recognition ("credentialing") by the American college are slightly less rigorous than those of the European College (Knight, 2014); however, the eight-hour annual examination awaits those who pass the US credentialing. Only after passing it can candidates become diplomates of the ACAW.

After absorbing this intimidating detail concerning the examination and 34-page required syllabus, it was definitely time for some R&R. Accordingly, some animal welfare colleagues and I escaped for the evening to downtown Raleigh. There



Speakers and diplomates at ACAW.

we discovered a cosmopolitan vibe, with numerous outdoor cafés, parks and musical performances under the balmy summer skies.

Best of all was a giant street party, mainly focused on a massive outdoor cinema, on which Spielberg's *The Goonies* would be shown to hundreds of people once the sun went down. Regrettably, we missed the movie due to our explorations, but fortunately we ended up in a Caribbean-style cocktail bar filled with interesting people and only marginally less interesting drinks.

The next morning it was back to work – if such entertainment can be so misleadingly labelled. We split into groups to tour various parts of the university farm for welfare discussion and assessment exercises. The university has one of the largest and most diverse functioning farms of

any veterinary school, which includes dairy cows, small ruminants, pigs, horses and even the odd coyote from the surrounding forests, although the latter are not invited.

As should be the case for any teaching farm, it apparently rates within the top few percentage points with respect to animal welfare, when comparisons with other farms are conducted.

During my time on the dairy cow tour one piece of affirmative evidence for this claim became all too evident: contrary to the wary attitude toward people displayed by most dairy cows, these appeared to have a negative flight distance! It was challenging not to be pushed around by these enormous, half ton creatures, as they inquisitively nuzzled backpacks and people, and presented their chins to be scratched!

The instructors apparently have to go to considerable efforts to instil some understanding that not all cows will be quite so friendly to students,

when encountered later on other farms.

The field trips planned for next year's conference are likely to be even more interesting. Scheduled for the first week of June, the 2016 ACAW short course will continue to include practical hands-on welfare assessments, to apply the didactic principles of welfare assessment learnt in lectures.

The College is exploring options including a day trip to the North Carolina State Zoo, the nearby Duke Lemur Center, a trip to the coast where several NC state universities have a marine research facility, or a nearby wildlife sanctuary for discussion of welfare assessment of managed wildlife.

Whatever eventually results, this will doubtless be an interesting and informative meeting for any veterinarians interested in animal welfare, and a particularly important one for any interested in becoming US veterinary specialists in this field. Further details will be available via www.acaw.org.

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