Poster presentations

Is it advisable to rehabilitate and release owls with monocular vision?

**Jennifer Zimmerman^{1,2},
Anthony Sainsbury²,
David Williams³**

¹ Royal Veterinary College, London, UK

² Zoological Society of London, London, UK

³ University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

OBJECTIVES

While there is common consensus that blind owls should not be released to the wild, there is less certainty with monocular owls. To address this issue, we focused on determining the fate of monocular owls arriving at wildlife rehabilitation centres in England, as well as analysing differences in flight and landing behaviour between owls with limited vision or only one functional eye and normal birds.

METHODS

Surveys of 15 rehabilitation centres and 15 experienced wildlife veterinarians were conducted regarding their opinion and experience on the feasibility and ethics of rehabilitating and releasing owls with limited vision. Also, four barn owls, of which one had only one eye and one had limited vision through cataracts, were studied to compare flight and landing behaviour.

RESULTS

Results showed conflicting opinions between the rehabilitation centres and veterinarians surveyed, with lack of agreement on what would be best with regard to release of these owls in terms of their welfare. At the same time, no significant differences were found between the one-eyed owl, the bird with limited vision through cataracts and the normal birds in any of the aspects of flight analysed. Finally, from a literature review and reports from the centres surveyed, cases where one-eyed owls survived in the wild were documented.

STATEMENT

Our findings pave the way towards more realistic experiments to determine what conditions these animals need to survive in the wild with good welfare standards. This would serve to improve UK guidelines on rehabilitation of wild owls, leading to consistent approaches throughout the UK.

UK vets' opinions on keeping reptiles as pets

**Martin Whitehead¹, Anna Wilkinson²,
Tatjana Hoehfurtner², Oliver Burman²,
Lisa Collins²**

¹ Chipping Norton Veterinary Hospital, Chipping Norton, UK

² School of Life Sciences, University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK

OBJECTIVES

To determine UK veterinary surgeons' opinions on keeping reptiles as pets.

METHODS

As part of an internet survey of vets regarding various aspects of the veterinary care of pet reptiles, three questions asked opinions about keeping reptiles as pets, each answered using a 1–5 scale or 'don't know'. The survey was advertised via BVA, BSAVA, BVZS and other means.

RESULTS

Excluding 'don't know' answers, 227 respondents gave 185–222 responses to each question.

Asked how well owners, overall, meet the welfare needs of pet reptiles, with the 'five welfare needs' from the UK's Animal Welfare Acts listed for reference, only 22.2% (tortoises), 19.5% (snakes), 13.6% (lizards) and 11.9% (turtles/terrapins) of respondents thought welfare needs were well met or very well met.

Asked how acceptable it is that captive-bred reptiles be kept as pets in the UK, 34.2% (tortoises), 29.5% (snakes), 30.1% (lizards) and 25.9% (turtles/terrapins) of respondents thought it acceptable or very acceptable.

Asked how acceptable it is that wild-caught reptiles be imported and kept as pets in the UK, ≤2.7% of respondents thought it acceptable or very acceptable for each of the four taxa.

STATEMENT

A majority of respondents believe that pet reptiles are kept in a manner inconsistent with the five welfare needs listed in the UK's Animal Welfare Acts. The veterinary profession's overwhelming opinion is that wild-caught reptiles should not be kept as pets, and opinion is divided over captive-bred reptiles, with many vets believing it unacceptable that they be kept as pets.

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