

Animal Welfare

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What is Animal Welfare?

It is an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance Cap.169 to treat animals cruelly and cause unnecessary pain or suffering to them. Under the Ordinance, an animal is defined as any mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, fish or any other vertebrate or invertebrate whether wild or tame.



Animal welfare also applies to an amphibian, e.g. a toad.
(Photo provided by Marek Szczepanek)

Animal Welfare is however, not only about ensuring an animal is not treated cruelly or caused unnecessary pain or suffering, it is about ensuring that an animal's physical state, its mental state and its ability to fulfill its natural needs and desires are considered and attended to.

Why Animal Welfare?

Human concern for animal welfare is based on the awareness that animals are sentient (有感覺的) and that consideration should be given to their well-being, especially when they are used for food, in animal testing, as pets, or in other ways. These concerns can include how animals are killed for food, how they are used for scientific research, how they are kept as pets, and how human activities affect the survival of endangered species.

Animal Welfare Definitions

There are many definitions of animal welfare and the three mentioned below are often used to provide valuable guidance on animal welfare.

(1) Saunders Comprehensive Veterinary Dictionary

Animal welfare means the avoidance of abuse and exploitation of animals by humans by maintaining appropriate standards of accommodation, feeding and general care, the prevention and treatment of disease, and the assurance of freedom from harassment, and unnecessary discomfort and pain.

(2) OIE (The World Animal Health Organisation) Definition of Animal Welfare

Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress. Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter/killing. Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal; the treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment.



OIE (The World Organisation of Animal Health)

(3) The Five Freedoms

In 1965, the United Kingdom (UK) government commissioned an investigation, led by Professor Roger Brambell, into the welfare of intensively farmed animals, partly in response to concerns raised in Ruth Harrison's 1964 book, *Animal Machines*. On the basis of Professor Brambell's report, the UK government set up the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee in 1967, which became the Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1979. The committee's first guidelines recommended that animals require the freedoms to "stand up, lie down, turn around, groom themselves and stretch their limbs". The guidelines have since been elaborated to become known as the Five Freedoms: (1) Freedom from thirst and hunger - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour. (2) Freedom from discomfort - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area. (3) Freedom from pain, injury, and disease - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment. (4) Freedom to express normal behavior - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind. (5) Freedom from fear and distress - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Animal Sentience

It is now widely accepted that all vertebrates (mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish) are sentient in that they have the capacity to feel pain, to experience distress and suffering, to experience both positive and negative feelings. Scientific evidence is that this also possibly applies to some invertebrates, such as cephalopods (頭足類動物) and crustaceans (甲殼綱動物).



The European Union officially recognised animals to be 'Sentient Beings' in 1997.

Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW)

A number of animal welfare organisations are campaigning to achieve a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW) at the United Nations. In principle, the Universal Declaration will call on the United Nations to recognise animals as sentient beings, capable of experiencing pain and suffering, and to recognise that animal welfare is an issue of importance as part of the social development of nations worldwide. The campaign to achieve the UDAW is being co-ordinated by the World Society for the Protection of Animals, with a core working group including Compassion in World Farming, the Royal Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), and the Humane Society International.

Animal Needs

The term 'needs' is often used in discussions on animal welfare, as needs are the things that should be provided to ensure an animal's welfare. A need is: "a requirement, fundamental in the biology of the animal, to obtain a particular resource or respond to a particular environmental or bodily stimulus." Needs may include a range of provisions such as food, water, comfort, avoidance of infectious disease and environmental enrichment. For animals under our care it is a human ethical responsibility to provide for their needs. Different needs have different levels of importance to animals. Observing effects after withdrawal of needs provides an indication of their relative importance.

Animal Welfare Improvement

Human sympathy and empathy with animals are motivations to improve animal welfare. Motivations can also be based on self-interest. For example, animal producers might improve welfare in order to meet consumer demand for products from high welfare systems. An example of this is the RSPCA's farm assurance and food labeling Freedom Food scheme which is the only UK farm assurance scheme to focus solely on improving the welfare of farm animals reared for food.



People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)
"Lettuce Ladies" in the Short North, Columbus,
Ohio (Photo provided by Postdlf)

External factors that affect people's concern for animal welfare include affluence, education, cultural heritage and religious beliefs. Increased affluence in many regions for the past few decades afforded consumers the disposable income to purchase products from high welfare systems. The adaptation of more economically efficient farming systems in these regions were at the expense of animal welfare and to the financial benefit of consumers, both of which were factors in driving the demand for higher welfare for farm animals.



A protest march in Huntingdon in
England - November 10, 2007.
(Photo provided by Stop Huntingdon
Animal Cruelty (SHAC) Activist)

Interest in animal welfare continues to grow, with increasing attention being paid to it by the media, governmental and non-governmental organizations. The volume of scientific research on animal welfare has also increased significantly. This research is funded by governments, corporations and industry bodies, welfare groups, and other agencies.

Animal Welfare Assessment

Welfare assessment is often used as the basis for the reform of animal welfare legislation. It is also used to improve conditions for animals reared for food, used in research, kept in captivity or as companion animals.

Three components are important in animal welfare assessment:

- (1) the use of the Five Freedoms;
- (2) the assessment of welfare inputs and welfare outputs, inputs being the factors that affect the animal's welfare and outputs being the actual impact of these factors on the animal's welfare; and
- (3) the quantification of welfare problems found or measured using severity, duration and number of animals affected.

An example of assessing a broiler chicken farm's welfare would encompass considerations such as:

- (1) the Five Freedoms;
- (2) inputs such as the broiler farmer's empathy, knowledge and observation skills, the broiler's environment such as the population density, housing, bedding, feed quality and water provision and the broilers breed, age and sex suitability for the system; outputs such as findings of leg disorders, feather pecking, skin changes and growth rates on the farm; and then
- (3) quantifying these outputs such as the severity, duration and number of birds affected.



A modern broiler house
(Source from USDA)

In some situations, welfare outputs may be assessed physiologically by measuring an animal's heart rate, respiratory rate, blood cortisol levels, blood pressure, and adrenaline, enzymes and metabolite levels.

Animal Rights vs. Animal Welfare

Animal welfare is often contrasted with the animal rights and animal liberation positions, which hold that animals should not be used by humans, and should not be regarded as their property. Animal welfare denotes the desire to prevent unnecessary animal suffering that, whilst not categorically opposed to the use of animals, wants to ensure a good quality of life and humane death. Animal rights denote the philosophical belief that animals should have rights, including the right to live their lives free of human intervention. Animal rightists are philosophically opposed to the use of animals by humans although some accept 'symbiotic' relationships, such as companion animal ownership.

Animal Rights vs Animal Welfare

Animal Rights vs Animal Welfare		
	The Rights Position	The Welfare Position
Morality	Using animals is morally wrong.	Using animals is morally right.
Benefits	We should not use animals to benefit ourselves.	We can use animals to benefit ourselves.
Interests	We should not invariably overrule the interests of animals with human interests.	Our interests are always more important than the interests of animals.
Pain	We should not inflict pain or death on animals.	We should not cause animals 'unnecessary' pain or death.
Humane Treatment	We should always treat animals humanely and eliminate the human made causes of animal suffering.	We should treat animals as humanely as convenient to us.

This table is the view of an animal rights organisation on the above subject. (Source: ARF (Animal Rights Fund) Newsletter)

Animal Conservation vs. Animal Welfare

The key difference between animal conservation and animal welfare is that conservation cares about species and extinction whereas animal welfare cares about the individual animal and its suffering.

Well known Animal Welfare Organizations

There are numerous and varied animal welfare organizations throughout the world and some of the better known ones are as follows: The Universities Federation of Animal Welfare (UFAW); the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA); the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA); Compassion in World Farming; the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS); International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW); and the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF). Some animal rights organizations have welfare aspects to their activities e.g. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). The Chinese Animal Protection Network (CAPN) is a recently formed non-profit animal protection organization, and the first Chinese network for animal protection.

Animal Welfare Issues

There are many major animal welfare issues worldwide, some are highlighted in photographs throughout this article.

Hong Kong's Animal Welfare Advisory Group (AWAG)

Late in 1996 the rail link between Hong Kong and China was cut temporarily as a result of flooding. Consequently, livestock imports were increasingly diverted and delivered to Hong Kong by river boat. The welfare of the livestock being off loaded from the river boats received severe criticisms in the media and as a result, the Governor at the time, Chris Patten, recommended the setting up of an independent animal welfare advisory group to assist in dealing with such matters.

AWAG was appointed in April 1997. Its function is to advise the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation on matters concerning animal welfare. Advice includes the promotion of community awareness of animal welfare and responsible pet ownership. The group consists of a chairman, an ex-officio member and nine members of the public, who are drawn from various animal welfare organizations, kennel clubs, other animal related business and other individuals with an interest in animal welfare. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department provides secretarial and administrative support to AWAG.

AWAG's recent work programmes include topics such as: regular updates on relevant animal laws; education and media programmes to promote responsible pet ownership; the regulation and control of commercial dog breeding; the control of stray cattle; the keeping of exotic animals as pets; the control of animal experimentation and welfare issues related to performing animals. The group meets four times a year and the meetings are open to the public.



Pigs undergoing transport by boat. (Provided by AFCD)

Animal Welfare Organizations in Hong Kong

Animal welfare organizations are all well represented on the Internet and a recent search of animal welfare organizations in Hong Kong brought up the following: The Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA); Animals Asia Foundation; Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden; HK Animal Speak; Companion Animal Federation: HK Alleycats; Society for Abandoned Animals (SAA); Lamma Animal Protection; Hong Kong Animal Adoption Center; Asian Animal Protection Network; Save Hong Kong's Cats and Dogs (STOP); Hong Kong Dog Rescue; Lamma Animal welfare Centre; Protection of Animals Lantau South (PALS); Hong Kong Cat Salvation Army (HKCSA); Laboratory Animal Defenders (LAD); Doggy Garden; Doctor Pet; Mongrel Club HK; Sai Kung Stray Friends; Reptile Paradise; Hong Kong Parrot Club; and the Hong Kong Rabbit Society.

Animal Welfare Issues

There are in reality almost as many animal welfare issues as there are species of animals which man attempts in one way or the other to manage. Some issues are common to large sections of society who actually own and manage that species, for example owners of pet dogs and cats. These pet owners therefore have an opinion backed by some experience on some welfare issues, such as issues concerning the pet shop trade and puppy farms.



A puppy farm in rural United States
(Provided by PETA)



Zoo Animal in Asia
(Provided by Pale blue dot)



Animal Experimentation
(provided by joint © RDS/Wellcome Trust Photographic Library)



Animal Testing
(Provided by Janet Stephens)

On other issues the majority have no experience and can only gain theoretical knowledge. This is because they do not own or manage that species. It has to be said that with the advent of the information boom from the Internet, the reliability of some of the information available is questionable. Examples of issues where few people themselves have personal experience would be; captive marine mammal issues, captive zoo animals, animal experimentation and animal testing.

There are some issues where historical cultural norms conflict with modern welfare theory. Examples of these would be; bear bile (活熊取膽) farming, bullfighting (鬥牛), fox hunting, cock fighting, and dog fighting.



Bull Fighting
(provided by Tomas Castelazo)



Cock Fighting (provided by Nasim Fekrat)

On the other end of the spectrum, one has issues where modern farm techniques conflict with current welfare theory, examples of this would be sow breeding crates(種母豬欄), parasite and health issues of pigs in modern organic farms, battery egg laying farms(籠養蛋雞場), some broiler breeder (肉種雞) units, some broiler house managements, salmonella issues on modern free range chicken farms, and dairy cow foot welfare.



Factory Farming in the United States
(Provided by en.wikipedia)



Sow Breeding Crate
(Provided by Alisha Vargas)

How and why some issues become more embedded in a populations' consciousness is itself an interesting subject for debate. It is usually due to a combination of media attention, animal welfare charity action, science research results and many other factors, for instance an internet subject being highlighted in the blogosphere. The reality is of course that there are welfare issues involved with every species man manages.



Battery layer hens face welfare issues.



A free range pastured chicken system with different welfare issues from battery hens. (Source from Geoffrey McKim)



Fox hunting often attracts media attention.
(Provided by Henrik Jessen)



A mink farm in the United States. (Source from Royalbroil)

Conclusion

This article has given a brief overview of the framework to animal welfare issues. Whenever you open a newspaper you may read articles which concentrate on an animal welfare issue. You may see that there are many different aspects to the issue; public opinion, the action of welfare charities, the relevant legislation, the actions of government, the views of researchers, guidelines issued by respected bodies, different philosophical views about welfare, cultural views about the welfare of particular species, and finally descriptions about events surrounding the issue. Using this document, if you are interested, you can begin to do your own research into all the different aspects of an animal welfare issue. You may then discover that sometimes the issue is complex with no perfect answer or other times the issue is simple and easy to assess.



Trimming a cow's foot to maintain good welfare standards. (Source from Flominator)

Finally, this article has deliberately avoided bringing emotion into the subject. Not because it is irrelevant: emotion is relevant. But in many cases if emotion is not handled correctly, it can obstruct sound reasoning and then poor decisions are made, sometimes to the animal's detriment (損傷). Nevertheless cold reason has to have an element of emotion, however small, to validate itself. The quote below is from the famous vet and author James Herriot:

"I hope to make people realize how totally helpless animals are, how dependent on us, trusting as a child must that we will be kind and take care of their needs... [they] are an obligation put on us, a responsibility we have no right to neglect, nor to violate by cruelty."

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