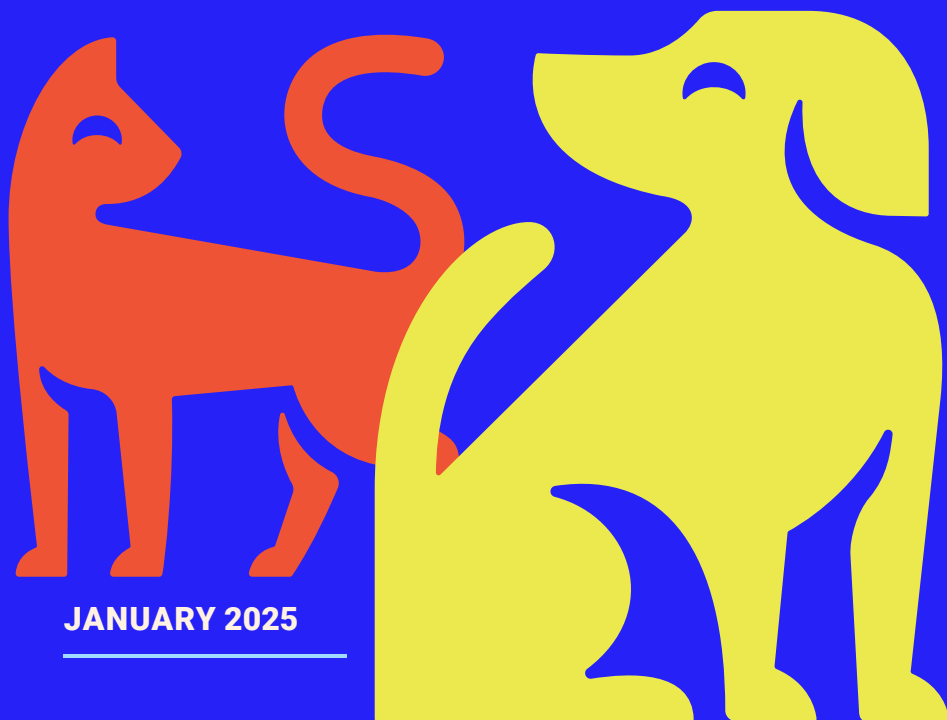


RSPCA.

Policy book

An overview of our policy positions and approaches on a range of issues affecting animal welfare



JANUARY 2025

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Purpose of the *Policy book*

The RSPCA is the world's oldest and largest animal protection organisation. We were founded 200 years ago in a coffee shop in London by a group of revolutionaries – including anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce, Irish MP Richard Martin and the Reverend Arthur Broome – sparking an animal welfare movement that spread around the globe. We exist today to inspire everyone to create a better world for every animal.

For 200 years, we have changed laws, attitudes, behaviours and lives for billions of animals in the UK and around the world. We investigate cruelty and neglect and rescue animals in urgent need, and our rescue teams work with staff and volunteers across our network of hospitals, centres, branches and partners to rehabilitate, release or rehome a huge variety of species.

The *Policy book* provides an overview of the RSPCA's overarching policy positions and principles on a range of issues affecting animal welfare. It is intended for use by policymakers, journalists, RSPCA members and supporters, and anyone else interested in the RSPCA's policy work. All our policy positions are informed by the latest scientific evidence and ethical considerations, alongside our frontline experience of rescuing and rehabilitating animals.

Introduction

The RSPCA's **vision** is a world where all animals are respected and treated with kindness and compassion. Our **purpose** is to inspire everyone to create a better world for every animal.

The RSPCA's **strategy** to 2030 emphasises that animals have emotions, feelings and needs, and that all of us can and should help make a difference by making their lives better. Animals enrich our lives, and humans should recognise that animals' lives have intrinsic worth and are important in and of themselves.

Our beliefs are that:

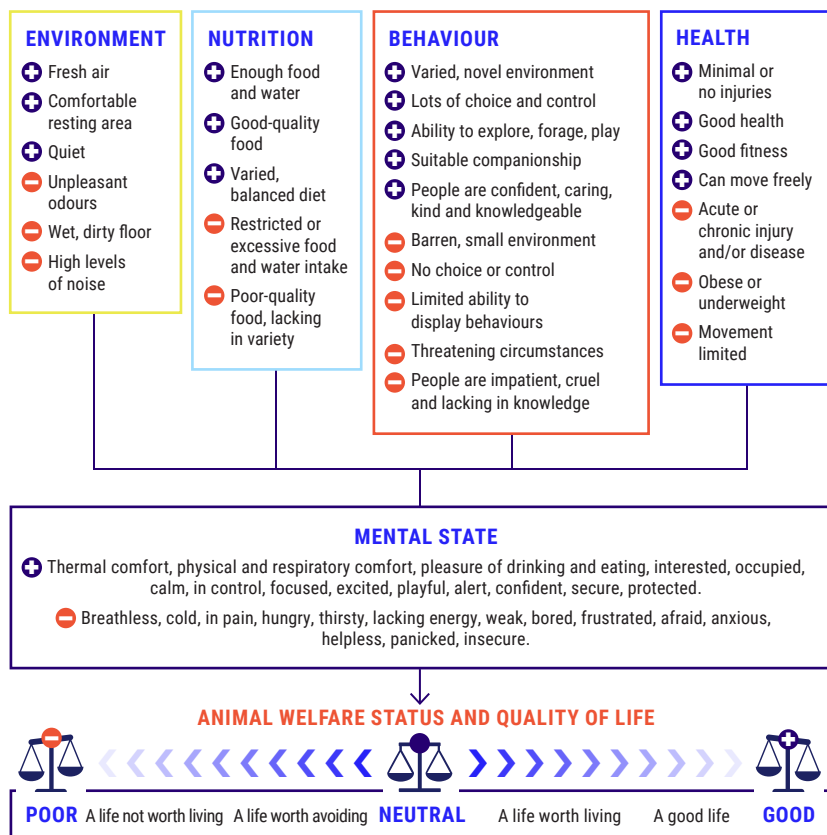
- all animals deserve a good life
- animals' lives are important in themselves
- animals have emotions, feelings and needs
- animals enrich and improve our lives
- all of us can and should help to make animals' lives better.

The *Policy book* provides an overview of the RSPCA's headline policies and approaches to animal welfare. Each policy is based on scientific evidence and practical experience, and is underpinned by ethical considerations. Our approach to welfare is characterised as the **Five Domains** model (see Figure 1), which considers how nutrition, environment (i.e. an animal's housing or habitat), health and behaviour contribute to, or detract from, an animal's mental state. When we refer to an animal's needs being met, we mean that their welfare needs in each of the Five Domains are being met. The Five Domains model also provides the underpinning of how we operate as an organisation, from our frontline operations through to our campaigning and advocacy work.

Fundamental to all of our work is ensuring that animals' voices are always heard. For the RSPCA, the animals we rescue, rehabilitate, rehome and release are our beneficiaries. Throughout all stages of their journey with us, each and every animal should experience good welfare. If animals are unhappy they can't make a complaint as we would. To ensure the RSPCA hears each animal's voice, we have developed a suite of welfare assessment tools for our frontline services based on the Five Domains model. Making



FIGURE 1: Identifying whether conditions, situations and interactions within each domain are positive or negative – and the corresponding feelings – requires an up-to-date and thorough knowledge of the animal as an individual and of their species.



sure each animal’s voice is heard is central to our policy and advocacy work, and has shaped the positions in this *Policy book*.

▪ **Definitions**

What do we mean by ‘animals’? This may seem obvious, but it is not as straightforward as you may think. Many people use the term to mean mammals, but the biological definition includes birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish. It also includes invertebrates (animals without backbones) such as insects, lobsters and octopuses.

Our benchmark is whether a species is likely to be **sentient**. We define sentience as the capacity to have positive or negative experiences such as pleasure, pain and distress – these are experiences that matter to a sentient animal. Legislation, including the Animal Welfare Act (2006) and Sentience Act (2022) in England and Wales, recognises that all vertebrate animals (including fish) are sentient as well as some invertebrates (for example decapod crustaceans, such as crabs and lobsters, and cephalopods, such as octopuses and squid). As we learn more about just how sentient animals are, the protection we give should increase. We encourage everyone to treat all animals with kindness and respect.

It is worth remembering that human beings are animals too, but when we say ‘animals’ in this *Policy book* we mean non-human ones.

In assessing sentience we apply the **precautionary principle**, which is well-recognised in environmental law. This says that where evidence of sentience is inconclusive, we should give the animal the benefit of the doubt and treat the animal as if they are sentient. We apply the same approach in assessing how much an animal may suffer in a particular situation and in what ways.

In our work we talk about **animal welfare**, but when addressing some audiences we might use the term **animal wellbeing**, which has the same meaning as welfare but can be more readily understood. Developments in animal welfare science are increasingly focused on good welfare, including not only the avoidance of suffering or the prevention of harm (not feeling bad), but providing opportunities for positive states (feeling good) by providing good experiences, opportunities and conditions. In simple terms, not feeling bad is not enough; an animal should also feel good.

Whether the animal experiences positive or negative states, i.e. feels good or bad, is influenced by their environment, nutrition, behavioural interactions and health. We want animals to experience **good welfare and have a good life**. This means that each and every animal has their needs met, and has a life where positive experiences outweigh negative experiences. This includes animals being able to enjoy their environment and diet, having the ability to express normal behaviour and having good health. When we refer to an animal having a ‘good life’ throughout this *Policy book*, we are referring to this specific definition.

The RSPCA also advocates for animals at the end of their life to have a **good death**. A ‘good death’ is a welfare-positive death with dignity, which results in the minimum possible anxiety, pain and distress. This should apply to every animal, regardless of their species, the reason for their death and the situation. We also want to see animals whose natural lives are prematurely ended, such as farmed animals and laboratory animals, experience a **humane death** where suffering is minimised.

■ Our beliefs

Wherever people interact with animals, animals should have a good life. Our beliefs (see above) are based on scientific evidence, our frontline delivery experience and ethical considerations. They are our ‘North Star’ guiding our decision making – for example our beliefs mean the following.

- The RSPCA wishes to see a fundamental reappraisal of our relationship with animals, moving to a kinder, more compassionate world. We believe that human beings and animals alike deserve full respect – one of our founders was William Wilberforce, the great campaigner against the slave trade in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and the RSPCA was instrumental in founding the NSPCC. Animals have value in and of themselves, known as intrinsic value, and their worth should not be judged according to their usefulness to humankind. We do not discriminate between different species – we care about all animals, whatever situation they find themselves in.
- Many animals, kept as pets, can experience a good life and can enrich the lives of human companions. However, some animals are not suitable as pets. All animal ownership is a privilege, not a right, with pet owners needing to protect and respect the intrinsic value of their pets.
- In many situations, the law regards animals as the property of their owners but this should not detract from the importance of their welfare needs being fully met. Animals should not be regarded as things to be treated or traded.
- Animals must not be bred or reared in a way that predisposes them to suffer, as happens all too often.
- Where human and animal interests may differ or conflict, the answer is not to diminish animal welfare but to identify humane alternative approaches.

- As a general rule, wild animals and human beings should not interact closely. People should be respectful of wildlife and enjoy watching wild animals from a distance to avoid disturbing them.
- Animal suffering is often unwittingly caused by a lack of knowledge. The RSPCA believes strongly in the importance of education and in helping people to better understand and care for all animals.
- Euthanasia is the deliberate ending of an animal’s life to prevent or alleviate suffering, which is a vital welfare tool. Taking the decision to end an animal’s life should be made with great care and consideration. The RSPCA uses the Five Domains model to help decide what is in each animal’s best interests. If euthanasia is required and it is delayed, this can result in the animal suffering unnecessarily.
- The RSPCA believes in the intrinsic value of the life of all animals. However, we acknowledge that some animals’ lives are ended early due to human needs, e.g. animals being farmed and slaughtered. We want every animal to live a good life throughout their life. Where possible, wasting of animal lives should be avoided (animals being killed in the food production process, but not consumed), with animals being treated with respect and care throughout their lives.

■ Lifestyles

The RSPCA encourages everyone to adopt lifestyle choices that minimise harm to animals, while applauding the steps people feel able to take rather than criticising them for the steps they don’t take. Because of the interconnectedness of human and animal lives, lifestyle choices that benefit animals – for example reducing plastic use to reduce the impact on wildlife – often also benefit the environment and human health. For example, we encourage people who eat meat, fish, dairy and eggs to reduce their consumption and only to buy products from animals raised to higher welfare standards, thereby hastening the end of low-welfare farming.

We also encourage other consumer choices, such as not wearing fur, as well as purchasing cosmetics and household products that are accredited by a labelling scheme that forbids animal testing anywhere in the world.

Governments and corporations also have an important role to play in making these and other animal-friendly lifestyle choices more accessible to everyone. For example, the RSPCA would like to see governments and

corporations fast-tracking alternative proteins (i.e. plant-based food and lab-grown meat), which could have a dramatic impact on the number of animals farmed.

■ Ethical dilemmas

We live in a complex world and the RSPCA, like other organisations, often faces ethical dilemmas when it comes to protecting animal welfare. This is inevitable because of the scope of our mission – we care for all animals, within all human–animal interactions. Unfortunately, we sometimes have to make decisions that prioritise the welfare of some animals over others.

For example, we encourage people to vaccinate their pets to prevent serious diseases, but veterinary vaccines are currently developed and tested using laboratory animals. Situations like these require us to consider a range of different factors in order to decide what, all things considered, is the right course of action. We think about:

- how much suffering might be caused to each animal, what kind of harm (including physical and mental suffering), and for how long
- how many animals of each species will be affected
- what is likely to happen in the future, with each potential course of action
- every possible alternative to causing harm, for example changing human behaviour to prevent problems with unwanted rodents
- every possible way of minimising harm, such as making sure that animals are humanely killed if there is no alternative to culling a population.

Frequently there are alternative approaches that, with sufficient resources and political will, would avoid ethical dilemmas. The RSPCA will work to create a societal shift towards animals, so that everyone can recognise animals' intrinsic worth, which ultimately will avoid unpalatable choices being made.

■ How we help animals

The RSPCA's approach is based around prevention, from the earliest and holistic interventions to increase knowledge of animal sentience and welfare, through to changing attitudes, behaviours and laws. We support animal

keepers to better care for their animals, and support animals staying with their keepers, where possible. When it is necessary to improve the animal's welfare we will, where we can, physically remove individual animals from situations of cruelty and neglect.

Our operational staff and volunteers work tirelessly to help animals in distress, with the help of an invaluable network of branches. We also campaign and lobby governments and international institutions, and influence stakeholders. We commission research and use the latest scientific evidence to drive improvements to welfare for animals in our care and in the care of others, for example farmed animals. The gold standard is strong legislation and international treaties that are effectively enforced. Changing attitudes and practices through education is also crucial.

We can't do everything we'd like to and therefore work closely with other organisations. We concentrate on the areas where we can deliver the greatest impact, with the degree of animal suffering a key factor for decision making. We also have to consider that our resources are finite, and in some instances a resources vs benefit ratio has to be considered.

Legal constraints The policies in this *Policy book* represent the considered position of the RSPCA on a range of animal welfare issues. Readers should be aware of the constraints placed by charity law on all animal welfare charities. The RSPCA is advised that it can concern itself with any activity that adversely affects an animal and adopt a policy according to what it believes. However, under charity law, the RSPCA can only use its funds to further the public benefit. Sometimes it is argued that the public benefits from harm caused to animals in certain situations, and that in those cases the RSPCA can only spend money advocating different approaches.

We all have a role to play in improving animals' lives. Small actions can make a big difference, and together we have achieved many positive breakthroughs for animals around the world. The RSPCA will continue to campaign for, and implement in our own work, ever higher standards of welfare in all areas. We believe passionately that society should do everything in its power to ensure that every animal interacting with people has a good life.

Issues throughout the lives of animals

This *Policy book* is grouped into sections exploring the issues that affect different groupings of animals, e.g. farmed animals and companion animals. Other theme headings outline the RSPCA's positions on issues affecting all animals, regardless of species, throughout their lives.

Breeding

The RSPCA is opposed to breeding practices, techniques and programmes that have, or are likely to have, a detrimental impact on the welfare of the parent animals and their offspring.

The breeding of animals can alter their traits, such as size, colour, body shape, temperament and productivity (e.g. accelerated growth in the case of farmed animals). Enhanced selection for such traits can cause or predispose animals to poor welfare, including hindering the performance of normal behaviour.

Breeding objectives should always prioritise the health and welfare characteristics of parents (including source and recipient/surrogate animals) and offspring. This includes selection for particular traits that avoid the need for invasive procedures, including mutilations, and for large litter sizes. However, this selective breeding often does not address the root cause of the health issue – addressing this should be the priority.

Housing and care

The RSPCA maintains that every animal should be kept in housing that fully meets their welfare needs and enables them to have a good life. Additionally, anyone who is responsible for caring for or working with animals, including companion animal owners, should have the appropriate knowledge, compassion and skills to ensure that the animals' welfare needs are met.

Having access to good housing and care is one of the most important factors affecting whether an animal can live a good life. Animals kept by humans are completely under our control. Where animals are kept, humans decide almost every aspect of their lives. An animal's ability to live a good life depends on the standards of housing and care we choose to provide for them. This is a significant responsibility that everyone should take seriously.



Animal housing should provide enough space to enable animals to exercise appropriately, display natural behaviours and move away from stressful situations. All animals should have control and choice within their environment; they will benefit from this too. This could include different areas for different activities, bedding and nesting material to keep warm and comfortable and toys to prevent boredom. All animals should have a stimulating environment.

An appropriate diet that meets animals' nutritional needs and provides interest is also essential, for example by encouraging natural foraging behaviours using puzzle feeders. Care should be taken to ensure that appropriate hygiene standards are met. A responsible individual should identify if an animal is experiencing any health or welfare issues. All animals should have appropriate veterinary treatment whenever they need it.

An essential aspect of care for kept animals is trying to protect them from negative experiences such as fear, boredom, anxiety and stress. A good understanding of animal behaviour and welfare needs will help to set up housing and care that will minimise welfare risks and promote positive experiences.

Those working with animals, as a paid employee or as a volunteer, will need good-quality, rigorous training. This should make sure they are technically competent, working humanely and fulfilling all of their responsibilities towards the animals in their care. Training may include species-specific animal behaviour and biology, welfare assessment, good practice for training animals and relevant details of relevant legislation. Some roles will also require training in the ethics of animal use.

The RSPCA believes that all animals of a given species have the same welfare needs. These needs should be met, regardless of how animals are kept, or used, by humans. For example, a rabbit may be born at a companion animal breeder, on a farm or in a laboratory. Their welfare needs will be the same, wherever they are kept and for whichever purpose. The RSPCA recognises that fulfilling the needs of any animal may be more challenging under some circumstances, for example where farm or lab animals are kept in large numbers. Everyone should strive to put in place housing that meets animals' needs, challenge any obstacles and make animal welfare a top priority.

Transport

Transport can be one of the most stressful events in animals' lives. The RSPCA asserts that the impact of transport on animals should be minimised and avoided wherever possible. The RSPCA is opposed to transporting live animals to other countries for fattening and slaughter.

The transport process can involve catching/herding the animal(s), restricting normal behaviour and access to food and water, separating animals from their social group, as well as exposing them to unfamiliar surroundings and experiences, such as vehicle motion. Ideally, transport should be avoided wherever possible; however, where veterinary treatment is required, this should preferably be undertaken as close as possible to an animal's home location. Where animals are transported, journey duration should be minimised and the quality of the transporting conditions optimised, to reduce the risks to animal welfare. Animals should not be transported for longer than their ability to cope with the journey. The transport of animals in the last trimester of pregnancy should not be undertaken, unless it is a medical emergency.

■ Transportation of farmed animals

Transportation is a stressful event in the lives of farmed animals. Due to the increased risk of distress caused during transport, the RSPCA advocates that farmed animals should be slaughtered as near as possible to their point of production, and ideally on the farm. However, for fish, transport to land-based slaughter facilities can be beneficial compared to slaughter on farm, e.g. on-farm slaughter can be significantly impacted by weather conditions.

The RSPCA is opposed to the trade and transport of live animals to other countries for slaughter or further fattening. The long, complex journeys can cause animals to become mentally exhausted, physically injured, hungry, dehydrated and stressed. The RSPCA advocates the adoption of a carcass-only trade.

Mutilations

The RSPCA is opposed to most mutilations of animals.

Mutilations are routine procedures that involve interference with the sensitive tissues or bone structure of an animal. Mutilations can cause harm, which often includes immediate and ongoing pain; this can prevent the animal from living a good life. Even when conducted with pain control, mutilations

change the appearance of an animal, can result in losses of bodily integrity, cause ongoing health issues and can affect the behaviour of the animal.

If a mutilation is deemed necessary by a veterinary professional, the mutilation should only be undertaken if it is within the welfare interests of the animal, there is no more humane alternative to resolving the issue and there is sound justification. The chosen method should cause the minimum pain and distress, and appropriate pain relief should be given.

■ Mutilation of farmed animals

The RSPCA is opposed to the mutilation of farmed animals. Mutilations affect cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and poultry. The methodologies applied are usually chosen for practical reasons: they have to be quick, cheap and effective. The majority of mutilations are either applied for identification purposes or to avoid animals hurting each other. Some mutilations may be carried out where it's considered there is no suitable alternative to prevent the issue and it is within the general welfare interests of a group of animals, e.g. mutilations relating to minimising injury to/from other animals. Evidence shows that these problems can often be significantly reduced through good husbandry. The RSPCA supports non-invasive research to help identify how such mutilations can be avoided. Currently there may be no suitable alternatives to some legally required mutilations, such as ear tagging for the purposes of identification. For this type of mutilation the least invasive method should be selected.

■ Mutilation of companion animals

There are a range of mutilations associated with companion animals. Neutering, which is the removal of the sex organs to prevent pregnancy, is a mutilation but remains a vital tool in improving animal health, welfare and tackling overpopulation. When carrying out neutering procedures, the RSPCA is guided by the best available scientific evidence.

The RSPCA is opposed to mutilations in companion animals that offer no welfare benefit to the animal. These include ear cropping, declawing, de-barking and tail docking, as well as whisker trimming in equines. The reasons for these procedures include the desire for a particular appearance, to prevent strongly motivated behaviours or to avoid injury to a specific body part e.g. tail docking. Unwanted behaviours such as clawing and barking can be signs that an animal is unhappy or ill, so it is important to seek professional

help. In some cases, e.g. tail docking, there is insufficient evidence about the procedure's potential to prevent harm to justify it. Equines should not be branded for any reason because of the pain and suffering this causes.

■ Mutilation of wild animals

The RSPCA is opposed to mutilations in wild animals that offer no welfare benefit to the animal. Such practices include tooth removal, claw removal, mouth suturing, beak trimming/debeaking and pinioning.

Pinioning involves permanently mutilating a bird by surgically removing part of the wing to prevent flight. Pinioning is often used as a form of flight restriction in captive birds to prevent escape – there are serious welfare and ethical concerns about the practice. The RSPCA advocates for an end to pinioning, and the use of extensive, secure and species-appropriate enclosures that meet the needs of those animals. Where pinioning still occurs, it should be subject to rigorous ethical review, including a critical review of the justification for housing such birds.

End of life

Every animal should experience as little anxiety, pain or distress at the end of their life as possible.

This applies to every animal, regardless of their species, the reason for their death, the situation and whether they are a zoo, farmed, companion, sporting, laboratory or wild animal.

Where an animal is suffering – physically or mentally – and there is no prospect of recovery within an acceptable period of time, they should be humanely killed to relieve their distress. This is called euthanasia, and should only be advised and carried out by a competent person.

Some animals, such as farmed animals and most laboratory animals, are bred to be used by humans, and then are routinely euthanased. However, sometimes there may be other options. For example, a small number of animals used in research can be rehomed.

The experience of each individual animal should be a top priority when making decisions around the end of life. The most rapid death may cause suffering if it involves a painful or frightening method. There is always a responsibility to respect animals and choose whichever method is most humane.

Animals and technology

The RSPCA supports the position that any application of technology should only be used if it delivers a good life for each animal.

Technologies are increasingly applied to farmed, companion, sporting, wild and laboratory animals. Examples include remote monitoring of animal behaviour or functions, automated animal handling or feeding and gene editing. Many technologies can be both positive and negative for animal welfare. Remote monitoring using video with software, or activity-monitoring devices that are not worn by the animal (or do not affect the animal, such as a lightweight device) can help to identify health and welfare problems early on. Automated feeding and watering can help to avoid human error and tailor animals' diets to their needs. Well-designed automated handling can also reduce stress in animals who may be fearful of humans, such as chickens and fish.

However, there should not be too much reliance on automation, especially if this is for economic reasons, because of the potential risk to animal welfare. It is still essential to have well-trained, empathetic human observers to identify any concerns not detected by the technology. Automated monitoring, feeding and watering technologies should not be used to enable farmed animals to be kept in high stocking densities, or housing that otherwise does not meet their needs. Nor should these technologies be used to enable animals who are dependent on human keepers, such as companion animals, to be left alone for long periods. Any technology used should be designed to meet the needs of each animal, rather than forcing an animal to compromise their needs to fit with the technology. Technology should only be used if it enables animals to have a good life.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significant potential to improve animal welfare. Systems are available to monitor farmed animal health and behaviour, including analysis of individual animals' facial expressions. Other applications have been developed to recognise subtle signs of pain in companion cats as veterinary patients, and to better understand dog behaviour. However, AI is an emerging technology, and the ethical principles to govern how it is used in animal welfare are not yet in place. Ethical guidance, rooted in science, needs to be developed to ensure AI is used to make sure animals have a good life, rather than being used to efficiently commodify animals.

Gene editing

The RSPCA does not support gene editing unless it leads to clear animal health or welfare benefits that are not achievable by alternative approaches.

- Humans have been altering the appearance, biology and behaviour of companion and farmed animals for thousands of years, for example by selective breeding and mutilations. We recognise that this has led to significant harm to animals. However, directly editing the genomes of any animal raises additional concerns for the RSPCA.
- For mammals gene editing involves harmful procedures. For example, procedures to obtain eggs and implant embryos can require injections of drugs and hormones (with side effects) and surgery.
- Animals without the desired genetic changes are usually killed, so their lives are wasted.
- The effects on the gene-edited animal are instant (within a single generation), hard to predict, and can be significant.
- Gene editing can reinforce the idea that animals are objects to be manipulated to serve human purposes, rather than individual sentient beings.

However, we also recognise that in some instances, gene editing could be beneficial for animal welfare: for example it is used to make animals resistant to diseases that cause suffering. In these cases, which we would consider individually, we would want to ensure the following.

1. There is no less invasive way of achieving the same outcome. For example, with disease resistance, could improvements to the way the animals are kept achieve the same result?
2. That gene editing isn't used to make animals fit into husbandry systems that don't meet their needs, i.e. to be able to resist disease in farming systems that make them sick. For example, low-welfare farming systems should not be facilitated or 'propped up' by gene editing, i.e. by reducing the negative environmental impacts of these systems. We want to see an end to all low-welfare farming systems.
3. That gene editing is not used to achieve fast growth rates, high yields, improved sporting performance or for physical features that can cause animals to suffer.

Animals in educational establishments

The RSPCA does not recommend that any animal is housed or used in a primary or secondary school environment. This includes visiting animals introduced by third parties and the introduction of wild animals into the school.

However we do understand that many schools already have animals in their classrooms. If a school does house or use an animal for educational purposes, they should ensure that the animal's physical, behavioural and psychological needs are fully met and their welfare is safeguarded at all times, in line with model RSPCA licensing conditions. They are based on science and good practice and cover the Five Domains model, to ensure that every animal can have their welfare needs met and live a good life. There is no current legislation that prohibits the keeping of domestic animals in schools.

There is also a growing trend for animals to be brought into/housed in schools for therapeutic purposes. This involves students having access to an animal, with perceived benefits to the student such as improving their mental health and supporting emotional regulation. The RSPCA will be conducting further research into the welfare impacts on therapy animals used in education to ensure the welfare needs of these animals are fully met. Therapy animals differ from assistance animals, such as guide dogs, who provide support to disabled students. Any young disabled person requiring an assistance animal has the legal right to bring their animal into school, ensuring they (if under 16) are supervised by an adult. The welfare needs of assistance animals need to also be met at all times.

Animals may also be housed in colleges and universities as an essential part of educational courses such as a veterinary degree. Again, it is imperative that animals housed in these establishments can have a good life and their welfare needs fully met.

Animal welfare education

The RSPCA wants to see education on animal welfare introduced into the curriculum of all schools, as well as embedded into academic animal-related courses.

All people have an impact on the welfare of animals. Education should play a critical role in preparing everyone for their future interactions with animals. This includes professional interactions (e.g. veterinary surgeons,

dog groomers etc.) and personal interactions (e.g. animal keepers). The RSPCA believes that all vocational and academic animal-related courses should include a mandatory ethics and animal welfare component. More broadly, animal welfare should be included in the curriculum of all schools, so that learning about responsible and compassionate behaviour towards animals is recognised as a core requirement of good citizenship education.

Sustainability, climate and social responsibility

The RSPCA is concerned about the impact of climate change on all animals. We are committed to conducting further research to understand how the impacts of climate change on animal welfare can be effectively mitigated.

■ Sustainability

There is a synergy between sustainability and improving animal welfare. Corporate and Social Responsibility (CSR) provides a good opportunity to improve animal welfare standards and encourages corporate and other bodies to agree to plans that include animal welfare.

As an organisation the RSPCA is taking steps to ensure our own activities are environmentally sustainable, such as reducing our carbon footprint, investing sustainably, reducing use of plastics at our sites and making sure new buildings are environmentally friendly. We will work with our partners to try and mitigate the impact of climate change on animals.

■ Impacts of climate change on animal welfare

Climate change can negatively impact animal health and welfare both directly (heat and cold stress) and indirectly (food and habitat scarcity, biosecurity, flooding) across all species and ecosystems. Human-induced and natural impacts of climate change include deforestation and severe weather events, with human activity, such as farming, also contributing to climate change. The RSPCA will conduct further research to understand the impacts of climate change on all animals, as well as the steps we need to take to mitigate these effects.



Companion animals

Responsible ownership

The RSPCA maintains that any person keeping an animal as a pet should follow the principles of responsible pet ownership and, wherever possible, should adopt rather than buy a pet.

By ‘pet’, we mean animals kept by people for the primary purpose of personal interest or companionship. This includes mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, birds and fish. The RSPCA believes that any person keeping an animal as a pet should follow the principles of responsible pet ownership.

There is no clear or universal definition of responsible ownership. The characteristics and behaviour of a responsible owner are as follows.

- Being prepared and understanding the commitment and duty that having an animal requires.
- Acquiring an animal with careful consideration to make sure the health and welfare of the individual animal is protected, as well as their parents’ health.
- Having an up-to-date and thorough understanding of an animal’s welfare needs – for example putting in place the right housing, nutrition and enrichment activities for each animal.
- Making sure that an animal’s welfare needs are met throughout all of their life stages, following the Five Domains model.
- Providing opportunities for animals to experience a good life.
- Taking reasonable steps to ensure that their animal does not compromise the health, welfare or safety of other people, animals, society and the environment.
- Meeting all legal requirements relating to the care, control and welfare of the animal.

These characteristics and behaviours should extend beyond those who own animals and include guardians of animals, who are those that care for,

use or control animals. Guardians of animals include professionals dealing with animals, such as boarding establishments, breeding establishments, animal sellers, veterinary professionals, enforcing officers, armed forces, police and sporting bodies.

Positive lists

The RSPCA advocates for restrictions that limit the type of animals being kept as companion animals. Only animals that can have their welfare needs met and can experience a good life should be kept as pets.

A ‘positive list’ is a list of animals who can be kept as pets, and any animal not on this list cannot be kept as a pet. This approach is used in other countries to stop unsuitable animals being kept as pets. In the UK, almost any type of animal can be legally bought by a member of the public and kept in their home, although there are certain requirements for some species. The needs of exotic animals can be challenging to meet by members of the public because their needs are the same as they would be in the wild and are fundamentally linked to certain behaviours, diets or environmental conditions that can be difficult to replicate in a home. Evidence shows that some breeds and species are unlikely to have their needs met and experience a good life in a household environment. Owners of these animals are unable to fulfil their duty as a responsible owner, due to the complexity of the animal’s needs, a lack of knowledge about how to meet those needs, or health and welfare issues caused by selective breeding. Evidence shows that keeping these animals in a domestic setting can be detrimental to their welfare. It is the RSPCA’s position that such animals should not be bred, kept or sold as pets. Another example is primates. Due to their complex needs the RSPCA believes primates should not be kept as pets. The RSPCA opposes the import of wild-caught animals for the pet trade.

We advocate for preventive and precautionary regulations that limit the keeping of wild animals as pets to those species that are likely to experience good welfare. To this end we are calling for improved legal protection for pets that includes consideration of positive lists, which outline species that are permitted to be kept as pets. Positive lists are based on systematic, evidence-based assessments of the risks to animal welfare and they can also consider risks to biodiversity, the environment and human health and safety. If a species is not on the list it cannot be kept as a pet, and there can be specific exceptions

to this. Positive lists deserve due consideration for England and Wales as they have been successfully introduced in several European countries and are supported by other welfare organisations because they offer several benefits over current legislation. Because positive lists are evidence-based and take a precautionary approach, they are more responsive to new trends in pet keeping.

Fertility clinics

The RSPCA opposes unregistered and unaccountable canine fertility clinics, which have no place in ethical dog breeding. We consider the rapid increase in canine fertility businesses to present a significant and emerging threat to dog welfare.

This is for two key reasons: these businesses act as a catalyst to breeding animals with increasingly extreme characteristics, and the businesses deliver invasive procedures carried out by unqualified personnel. Trends for increasingly extreme characteristics in dogs during the Covid-19 pandemic have led to a proliferation of canine fertility clinics (CFCs). The CFC is a new and rapidly expanding business concept, which varies in scale and set-up with clinics varying from fixed business premises to mobile units and even home-based enterprises. CFCs offer a range of breeding and fertility services and have the potential to negatively impact dog welfare in the following ways.

- A lack of veterinary oversight: invasive procedures – including caesarean sections – are often carried out by lay persons.
- Links to ‘fashion’ breeding: there are strong links to the breeding of brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs.
- False advertising and criminality: some businesses have been found to have links with other forms of criminality and animal welfare offences such as ear cropping.

To effectively safeguard the welfare of dogs, fertility work should be small-scale, health-led and only ever carried out by a qualified veterinary surgeon and in a registered veterinary premises. Two legislative changes are necessary to facilitate vet-led, small-scale fertility support that promotes and safeguards the welfare of dogs: they are the reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act and inclusion of CFCs within breeding regulations.

- The Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966) is not fit for purpose and requires urgent modernisation to safeguard the welfare of animals in the UK. The Act needs to be updated to make provision for regulation of veterinary practices in addition to individual veterinary surgeons.
- Breeding regulations need to include CFCs to provide a framework for dismantling businesses that are unlawfully providing fertility-based acts of veterinary surgery.

Additionally, the following is needed to effectively safeguard the welfare of dogs.

- Training courses for veterinary professionals in canine fertility procedures and health-led breeding practices.
- A clear framework for reporting concerns regarding CFCs operating unlawfully.

Extreme breeding

The RSPCA will always advocate for an animal's right to be born into a body that is fit for purpose and allows it to experience all the joys of being a healthy animal. The RSPCA is opposed to extreme breeding for looks, which is a significant animal welfare issue.

There is a comprehensive and expanding body of research that demonstrates that breeding for extreme features, such as brachycephaly (the process of selectively breeding for a shortened skull and flattened face), can lead to a range of painful and life-limiting health conditions. Brachycephaly particularly affects dogs, due to the popularity of flat-faced breeds such as French bulldogs, but we are increasingly concerned about emerging trends in cats and other companion animal species. Extreme breeding is the consequence of aesthetic trends that are only concerned with appearance and that can change over time.

We recognise the need to future-proof against evolving fashion trends and how these relate to dog breeding practices. The RSPCA supports the concept of innate health – all dogs deserve a good life. We are developing a protocol along with key stakeholders, which will have multiple applications to safeguard dog breeding. Our goal is for every animal to be born into a body that is fit for purpose and allows the animal to experience all the joys of being a healthy animal.

Breed Specific Legislation

Evidence shows that Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) does not effectively protect public safety. The breed of an animal alone is not a reliable or good predictor of risk of aggressive behaviour.

BSL applies restrictions to dogs based on their physical appearance. It is intended to protect the public from dogs who are believed to be dangerous because of their physical characteristics or who are reported to show a high level of aggression towards people or other animals. The restrictions can range from a ban on ownership, breeding and advertising, through to compulsory muzzling for affected dogs and lead walking in public places. Protecting the public from dog bites and strikes is critical; however, the evidence does not suggest that the breed of a dog alone can cause aggressive behaviour. The RSPCA does not support BSL.

Aggressive behaviour in dogs is a complex interaction between genetics and lifetime experiences. Whether or not a dog displays aggressive behaviour is influenced by a range of factors, including: how they were bred and reared; genetic, physiological, developmental and environmental factors; their social experiences.

The application of BSL can expose dogs to procedures that have the potential to compromise welfare. For example, where the ownership of a type of dog is banned (type refers to dogs who look similar enough to a conformation standard, rather than a breed, which is a group of dogs with the same genetic characteristics), dogs suspected of being a banned type may be seized and kennelled. In some cases dogs can be returned to their owners and lawfully kept, whereas in other cases dogs are destroyed, even though no aggressive behaviour has been shown, and their owner can also face criminal charges.

Compulsory muzzling and lead walking can also compromise dogs' welfare. These restrictions prevent dogs from displaying behaviour, including play, and limit their ability to communicate with other animals and people.

Breed specific laws can also prohibit the advertising, sale and gifting of dogs. For rescue organisations, these restrictions mean that prohibited types of dog can't be rehomed and so the only option is euthanasia. As many dogs who have been identified as a prohibited 'type' are not aggressive,

euthanasing them purely based on their appearance is a moral and ethical issue. When this happens it also significantly affects the mental health of those who work closely with these dogs.

Legislating against certain types of dogs does not effectively protect public safety. Dog control legislation needs to be simplified, evidence-based and breed-neutral in approach. Measures should be specific to dogs and robustly enforced by those who are knowledgeable and competent. Measures need to be proportionate to the incident, while allowing for early intervention so that incidents are prevented from occurring.

Behaviour and training

The RSPCA wants urgent regulation of those people who practise within the training and behaviour therapy industry.

All animals should be trained using kind, ethical and scientifically evidence-based methods, developed by appropriately qualified and regulated professionals. Methods of training that include punishment, intimidation or cause pain or distress are completely unjustifiable when ethical methods are available that produce better long-term results.

Vets are acknowledged as being a key source of advice and information around animals' physical health. This should be the same for trainers and behaviourists when it comes to seeking advice on training and behaviour problems. Where vets are regulated by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, there is currently no equivalent statutory body for behaviourists and trainers. In practice this means there are a large number of therapists and trainers available with varying levels of knowledge and skill. This is hugely confusing for people looking for help with a training or behaviour issue.

The RSPCA is particularly concerned about the presence of punishment-based techniques, which pose serious risks to animal welfare. Examples include electric shock collars and prong collars, and also any technique that is painful or frightening to an animal. We support the proposed ban on electric shock collars and encourage its full implementation. This would represent an important step forward for animal welfare in the context of training and behaviour.

Animal behaviour is a complex and continually evolving scientific field. The RSPCA firmly believes that those who practise in this sector must have

the appropriate combination of qualifications, knowledge, experience and skills to do so. As a founding member of the Animal Behaviour & Training Council, we continue to call on the government to bring forward regulation of animal trainers and behaviourists. This is crucial in order to safeguard the welfare of all animals who undergo training or behaviour modification.

Horse welfare

The RSPCA supports research that demonstrates that all horses should have the 'three Fs' to live happily and healthily – friends, forage and freedom.

In this section the term 'horse' includes donkeys and mules.

■ Friends

Horses require herd mates, and should be able to see, hear, smell and touch other horses to enable them to have a good life. In nature, horses rely on other horses to help spot danger and to find shelter, good grazing and water. They need other horses to groom and play with, and to feel safe and rest.

■ Forage

A horse's digestive system is made to be constantly full, and horses have a strong desire to eat and chew almost all the time. Their foraging diet includes grass, hay and other long plant fibres that require lots of chewing. Horses who aren't given enough forage will suffer mentally and also from poor digestive health. Being able to forage for food is an essential part of horses being able to have their welfare needs met.

■ Freedom

Horses are naturally herd animals who roam up to 10 miles a day. Freedom allows them to choose whether they want to walk, run, play, roll, groom each other and explore their surroundings, and enables them to live a good life. Freedom also allows them to choose to spend time with, or avoid, their herd mates.



Entertainment and sport

Animals used in entertainment and the media

The RSPCA opposes the use of animals in entertainment, if the animal's welfare needs cannot be met, or they are likely to experience distress and suffering. Where animals are used in entertainment and their welfare needs can be met, the RSPCA will offer guidance on minimising the impact of the production on animals.

'Entertainment' in this context includes, but is not limited to, films, television (including reality TV shows) advertising, the theatre, circuses, exhibitions, mobile zoos and animal encounters/experiences.

Animals used in entertainment are exposed to many experiences that can negatively impact their wellbeing. These include: transport; temporary housing; separation from companions; handling; exposure to unfamiliar people, environments and conditions; and being required to perform the same behaviour again and again. Repeated and ongoing use will also lead to cumulative effects on the welfare and health of the animals involved.

For these reasons, the RSPCA always encourages using alternatives to animals. The RSPCA also questions whether the desired result can be achieved while meeting the needs of the animals used. Where this is unlikely, the RSPCA opposes animal use. This includes wild animals used in travelling circuses who spend much of their time in close and inadequate confinement in abnormal social groups and are frequently transported. They are also often subjected to forced training; performing to a timetable and carrying out acts that do not come naturally to them. The use of computer-generated imagery (CGI) is not always a suitable alternative to using live animals, and live animals are sometimes used in CGI imagery to create an accurate movement of the animal, which can result in similar welfare concerns to those around animals performing in a production.

Where it is possible for animals to experience a good life in entertainment productions, the RSPCA engages with stakeholders and offers guidance, with the sole aim of improving welfare. Following this guidance also reduces risks and costs to productions and helps productions stay within the law. Where animals are used for RSPCA media purposes, these

guidelines must be adhered to by all staff, trustees, branches, volunteers and third parties.

The RSPCA's guidance is not intended to affect the artistic content of productions. That said, the RSPCA is concerned about animals being portrayed in a demeaning way, or in a manner that encourages inappropriate care or that, in the case of wild animals, could stimulate demand for them as pets.

Animals used in sports

The RSPCA asserts that animals should only be used in sports where a good life is possible. This means minimising and protecting animals from pain, fear and injury.

It also includes the provision of opportunities for good health and happiness throughout their whole life and at all stages of their life. This includes breeding and rearing to ensure that animals can have a good life beyond specific sporting disciplines as well as during training, at sporting events, at home and when their career ends.

Sport must not put animals at unacceptable risk of injury or death. Drugs or surgery must not be used to alter athletic performance. Animals must not be made to perform at a level beyond their current physical and mental ability. Where a good life for each and every animal at all stages of life is possible and there is the resource to achieve this, the RSPCA engages with stakeholders with the sole aim of improving welfare. The welfare of the animal is always more important than competition success or financial gain.

■ Greyhound racing

The RSPCA is calling for a phased end to greyhound racing. There are significant welfare issues for greyhounds that have not been, and that we do not believe can be, resolved. These issues are at every stage of their life including during their racing career and once their career has finished.

Even if welfare was perfect off the track, greyhounds running at speed around oval tracks is dangerous. It causes significant injury to many dogs, and in some cases death. An inconsistent and inadequate source of funding has prevented progress from being made quickly enough, or on a big enough scale, to protect the welfare of greyhounds.

■ Horse racing

The RSPCA believes that many welfare improvements need to be made for all horses involved in horse racing to be able to live a good life. We actively engage with other charities and the horse racing industry with the sole aim of improving the welfare of the many thousands of horses involved in the sport. There are similar welfare challenges for racehorses to those for racing greyhounds. However, engagement with the industry has achieved changes to the design of jumps and racing procedures in an attempt to improve safety and reduce horse deaths. The financial model is also very different – horse racing has a statutory levy, which returns 10 percent of the profits from racing made by betting companies back to the sport, and provides a reliable income stream to support welfare improvements.

There are still some areas of horse racing where more progress needs to be made in improving the welfare of horses involved. For example, there is clear evidence that the whip should not be used to drive a horse forward, i.e. for 'encouragement', as it is likely that any effect is due to the infliction of pain and suffering and may expose the horse to increased risk of injury. More research is needed to assess whether or not it is necessary to retain the whip for 'safety purposes'.

Traditional events

The RSPCA opposes the infliction of pain, distress, fear or suffering on any animal as part of a traditional or customary event.

Traditional events include: contests in which animals are induced to fight other animals (e.g. dog-fighting) or people (e.g. bullfighting); carnivals, festivals or fiestas (e.g. bull-running); rodeos; celebrations or rites where animals are forced to perform beyond their endurance, strength or ability; and customs that involve deliberate overfeeding of animals (e.g. pigs) to the point where suffering is caused.

Hunting and shooting

The RSPCA opposes any hunting of wild animals using dogs or other animals. The RSPCA also opposes shooting for 'sport' of game birds and other animals, and the use of air weapons, crossbows and catapults against animals as they cause unjustifiable animal suffering.

The RSPCA opposes the hunting of wild animals using dogs or other animals. This includes mink hunting, deer hunting, coursing, hunting of hares and rabbits, fox hunting and badger baiting. Scientific evidence does not demonstrate the need to control the fox or hare population on a national scale, and does not support the notion that hunting is an effective method of population control if needed. In addition to the considerable suffering experienced by the hunted wild animal, suffering can also be inflicted upon hunting dogs and non-target animals.

The RSPCA opposes shooting for 'sport'. Sport and recreation do not justify causing suffering to animals. Air weapons, crossbows and catapults are inadequately controlled and their use leads to animal suffering. Animals are not always killed instantly when shot, resulting in them suffering pain and distress. The RSPCA believes that 'sport' does not justify the causing of suffering to animals. This includes the shooting of 'game birds'. In addition to the suffering caused to animals who are shot, ammunition choice can also have negative impacts on animal welfare. The RSPCA opposes the use of lead gun-shot, as well as the use of lead in angling, due to the suffering and risk of death associated with lead poisoning once ingested by a range of wild and domestic animals. The RSPCA supports the use of lead alternatives where necessary.

Current practices in angling inflict pain and suffering on fish. The RSPCA advocates for anglers and other recreational fishers to use methods that avoid or minimise negative welfare impacts to fish, who are sentient beings and feel pain, as well as to other wildlife. Such methods involve using techniques and equipment that reduce angling duration, air exposure and the risk of injury to the fish. In addition, anglers and recreational fishers need to 'leave no trace' of their activities and take any fishing litter home with them. The RSPCA is also concerned about the welfare of fish caught in commercial fishing and the hazard posed by discarded, lost, or abandoned fishing gear to marine life.

The RSPCA opposes the hunting and killing of whales for any reason other than to relieve their suffering from illness or injury, such as stranded whales. All methods of killing whales at sea cause prolonged and unnecessary suffering.



Farming and food systems

Overview of our position

The RSPCA asserts that the vast majority of farmed animals are reared in ways that are considered unacceptable and fail to provide those animals with a good life. We therefore work closely with a large number of stakeholders, including producers, retailers and the farming industry, to drive change and improve the lives of those animals who are reared to produce food.

Most farming systems used globally today have a primary focus on maximising outputs while minimising costs. They are typically characterised by confining large numbers of animals to small spaces in barren environments, as well as the use of close confinement systems (cages and crates). Breeds of animals that have been genetically selected for increased productivity at the expense of their health are also used. The primary aim of such operations, which includes the transportation and slaughter of the animals, is to maximise the efficiency of production – producing more, faster and cheaper – which is to the detriment of the animals' welfare.

The RSPCA is committed to working with a broad range of stakeholders throughout the food and farming industries to create and drive positive change. The aim is to ensure every farmed animal can live a good life and have a humane death. We actively campaign for an end to lower-welfare farming practices, a reduction in the number of animals farmed and the end of certain systems, such as cages. We also advocate progressive, higher-welfare standards for farmed animals, including through our farm assurance and food labelling accreditation scheme RSPCA Assured. The RSPCA also has a role in encouraging the public to factor animal welfare into their decisions when purchasing animal products. We acknowledge that many people may be reluctant to give up consuming meat (including fish), dairy and eggs, but we encourage the public to consider buying fewer animal products and, when they do, only buying certified higher-welfare products such as RSPCA Assured, i.e. eating less and better animal products. The RSPCA is also supportive of the development of alternative proteins (see below) and the potential benefits they bring to animal welfare by reducing the consumption of animal-derived products.

■ RSPCA standards

There are many significant welfare issues associated with the farming of animals for food. Legislation and industry standards are either absent or insufficient to ensure farmed animals can live a good life and have a humane death. The RSPCA has therefore developed welfare standards to drive improvements to the welfare of the most commonly reared farmed animal species in the UK. The standards, via their application through the RSPCA's higher-welfare farm assurance and food-labelling scheme RSPCA Assured, also provide consumers who choose to consume animal products with a higher-welfare option.

The standards provide a tool and catalyst for creating positive change – they are not the end point in themselves. They drive and deliver improvements to the lives of farmed animals that otherwise would not be achieved. The standards cover every aspect of an animal's life, from birth or hatching through to slaughter. The standards are applicable to a range of commercial indoor and outdoor production systems, including large and small farms and free-range and organic systems. The standards are regularly revised and updated to continually improve welfare over time, with the goal to ensure all farmed animals have a good life and a humane death.

In addition to improving the welfare of farmed animals, the application of higher welfare standards can deliver a number of other additional benefits, including reducing environmental impact (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions), improving human health (e.g. through reducing the use of antibiotics and therefore the risk of antibiotic resistance developing) and reducing the number of animals being farmed.

Breeding

The RSPCA is opposed to breeding practices, techniques and programmes that have a detrimental impact on the welfare of the parents or offspring. This includes breeding and genetically altering farmed animals to increase productivity.

There are more than one billion farmed animals reared in the UK each year. Breeding to increase productivity – producing more and faster – is, and continues to be, the primary focus for the farming industry. This approach has resulted in undesirable changes in animal health leading to serious

welfare concerns. Such concerns include skeletal and metabolic diseases, lameness (difficulty walking) and increased mortality.

The RSPCA is concerned about the production and subsequent slaughter of animals considered surplus to the farming system in which they were born, e.g. male chicks and calves born as a result of egg and milk production. The RSPCA strongly encourages the use and further development of technologies and initiatives that avoid the need to kill such surplus animals, provided those technologies do not cause suffering to other animals. These include the use of sexed semen for dairy cattle and the use of in-egg sex determination for laying hens.

Management

The RSPCA is opposed to the application of management practices, including the administration of substances, that are specifically intended to enhance the production or performance of an animal, and which could compromise their welfare.

This includes the forced moulting of laying hens to increase egg production, or the tethering of animals other than for occasional short periods of time for specific purposes that are within the interests of the animal, such as veterinary examination.

The RSPCA believes that a high degree of caring, responsible management – including prompt veterinary treatment and responsible stockmanship – is vital to ensure good animal welfare. Managers and stock-keepers should be thoroughly trained, competent and skilled to carry out their duties. A good knowledge of animal husbandry and welfare of the farmed animals under their care, as well as the farming systems they operate, is also essential to ensuring good animal welfare.

Even in suitable environments with good management systems in place, situations can arise, e.g. physical injury or disease, that require animals to be unexpectedly killed. Such animals should be humanely killed on site without delay by an appropriately trained and competent person.

Environment

The RSPCA requires that the environment in which an animal lives should provide the opportunity to live a good life.

This includes providing animals with an environment that is physically and thermally comfortable, that delivers good health, that enables animals to be confident and express freely their full range of non-harmful behaviours and that promotes positive experiences. Sadly, many farmed animals are kept in environments that do not provide them with a life worth living.

The environment should also allow the animal to utilise their full range of senses. For example, farmed animals may not be provided with natural light throughout their lives, and farmed turkeys can be kept under very low light levels to prevent feather pecking, despite scientific evidence showing that this may cause severe visual impairment.

The RSPCA also believes that the potential for good welfare increases in more complex environments where animals can exercise greater choice and have a greater level of control, such as where outdoor access is provided. Such environments can also offer increased opportunities for positive experiences and enable a greater range of important behaviours to be performed. For example, some species, such as cattle and sheep, require access to pasture to perform grazing behaviour.

The RSPCA is also concerned about the detrimental effect that housing for farmed animals can have on local wildlife. For example, waste from farmed animal production systems can cause environmental pollution. The RSPCA is opposed to the building and operation of any farming system that avoidably negatively impacts wildlife.

■ Feed and water

The RSPCA requires that all animals should have ready access to clean, fresh drinking water and a diet that is sufficient to maintain them in full health and promotes a positive state of wellbeing. A poor diet can result in hunger, poor body condition and compromised health. Feeding in excess (beyond the animal's appetite) can also be harmful and lead to obesity and a greater risk of health problems, such as digestive upsets, and reproductive and mobility issues.

The manner and frequency in which food and water are provided to animals is also important. Food and water should be provided in ways that allow normal feeding and drinking behaviours to be carried out, while avoiding aggression between individual animals. Equipment should also be hygienically managed to ensure that food and water do not become contaminated.

■ Foie gras

The RSPCA is opposed to the production of foie gras, which is a speciality food product made from the livers of ducks or geese. The production of foie gras stops the birds from carrying out their normal feeding behaviour and involves stressful handling. The feed pipe used to force-feed the bird can damage the bird's throat. Further, the bird's liver can become so enlarged that it stops working properly. It is illegal to produce foie gras in the UK; however, around 200 tonnes is imported from mainland Europe each year. The RSPCA is also opposed to the trade of foie gras.

■ Weaning

Under natural conditions, weaning – the process of removing access to the mother's milk and providing a solid diet – is a gradual process. However, for most farmed animals, weaning is often a sudden event and takes place at a much younger age than would naturally occur. This can be stressful for both the mother and offspring. Early weaning can lead to reduced feed intake, stress, reduced immunity and undesirable behaviours in the weaned animal. The RSPCA is opposed to the weaning of animals at an age that compromises the welfare of the parent or offspring.

■ Close confinement systems

The RSPCA is opposed to the use of close confinement systems for the keeping of farmed animals. This includes the use of cages and crates. Farmed animals need to be able to demonstrate the full range of their natural behaviours freely. Alternative systems should be used to accommodate animals' physical, psychological and behavioural needs.

The RSPCA does not permit the use of cages in its welfare standards. 'Enriched' cages are currently used in the farming of laying hens in the UK; they provide just nine percent more usable space per bird than conventional battery cages, which is equivalent to a single sheet of A4 paper being allocated per bird. There are around 10 million laying hens in such cages in the UK.

Sow stalls are currently banned in the UK; however farrowing crates are still used in the farming of pigs. In the UK, farrowing crates are barred metal crates within a pen where pregnant sows are placed up to one week before giving birth. Farrowing crates prevent the sows from turning around

and they remain there for four to five weeks until their piglets are weaned. Sows remain in the crates for the entire time they are nursing their piglets. A sow will give birth to two to three litters a year, meaning she will spend on average 10–15 weeks a year in a farrowing crate. This does not include 'foster sows', who remain longer to nurse any extra piglets. Around 60 percent of sows are placed in farrowing crates before they give birth and about six million pigs reared for slaughter are born each year in farrowing crates. The RSPCA does not permit farrowing crates under its welfare standards.

The RSPCA is opposed to the use of individual crates (veal crates) for the rearing of calves. While they are now banned in the EU, their use is legal in some other countries.

■ Enrichment

Environmental enrichment involves the modification of the animal's environment to positively improve the level of physical or psychological stimulation provided. This is usually through the addition of objects or materials. Providing suitable enrichment is essential to ensuring animals can have a good life.

The presence of environmental enrichment can give animals more control and choice over their environment. Enrichment can also provide opportunities for the expression of natural behaviour, such as rooting in pigs, and dustbathing and pecking in poultry. Additionally, it has been shown to induce positive emotional states (e.g. pleasure and enjoyment), improve animals' adaptability to change and challenges, and potentially enhance cognitive development.

The presence of environmental enrichment has also been shown to improve animal health, both directly and indirectly. Enrichment can reduce stress which, if chronic, can lead to reduced immunity and therefore increased incidence of disease, as well as poor growth and an increase in abnormal behaviours, such as tail biting in pigs. Indirectly, by encouraging more physical activity, enrichment can improve physical health, such as leg health in meat chickens.

Many farmed animals are kept in barren systems, sometimes with no, or very limited, access to optimal enrichment. The RSPCA is opposed to

systems of husbandry where enrichment is absent or inadequate. It is vital that both suitable types and sufficient quantities of enrichment are provided to all farmed animals to help ensure they have a good life.

Slaughter

The RSPCA opposes the slaughter of animals without pre-stunning. All meat from animals killed in this way should be clearly labelled.

More than one billion farmed animals are slaughtered every year in the UK. Slaughter is the final event in a farmed animal's life and is a major welfare concern. This is not only due to the method of slaughter, but the distressing experience of being transported to the site of slaughter and also the handling of the animal prior to slaughter.

Treating an animal with respect and compassion at the end of their life is as important as caring for them during their time on the farm. Their death should be humane. This means that death should be achieved either immediately or after the animal has been rendered unconscious humanely, such as through stunning. If an animal is unconscious then it will not experience pain, fear or distress.

Where death is not caused immediately, the RSPCA believes that all farmed animals should be humanely stunned first. This is a requirement under the RSPCA welfare standards. Stunning ensures the animals are unconscious, and they should remain unconscious until they have died. The UK law requires animals to be stunned before being slaughtered. However, this requirement does not apply to the slaughter of sheep, goats, cattle or poultry for religious purposes. This is to meet the needs of Muslim and Jewish communities. We respect the religious needs of each community, but are concerned about the impact of non-stun slaughter on the welfare of animals. The Jewish method of slaughter is called Shechita, and the Muslim method of slaughter is called Halal. The majority of animals slaughtered as Halal are stunned, but a significant proportion are not. All animals slaughtered as Schechita are not stunned.

Everyone involved in the treatment of animals throughout the slaughter process should be trained and competent to carry out their duties. People involved in the slaughter of animals should also be required to hold a licence to carry out their duties. The facilities and equipment used at slaughter

plants should be appropriate, fit for purpose and well maintained. CCTV should be installed to clearly record and monitor the animals undergoing all critical stages of the slaughter process at all times.

Alternative proteins

The RSPCA proposes that the further development and adoption of alternative proteins (with the exception of insect protein at this time) has huge potential to improve farmed animal welfare.

Alternative proteins are non-animal or non-traditional proteins and therefore represent a replacement to conventionally produced meat (including fish and shellfish), dairy and eggs from animals. At present, alternative proteins are generally produced from plants, fungi (mycoproteins) or fermentation, but can also be produced using insects and emerging food technologies, such as cultured (lab-grown) meat.

The RSPCA sees merit in the development of cultivated (or lab-grown) meat. This is because it is meat (derived from the cells of living animals) and therefore is more likely to satisfy those for whom the experience of consuming meat and it being part of their lifestyle is important. There is also growing evidence that cultivated meat would save a significant number of animals from being farmed.

This is an emerging issue, but we would like to see more government support for the development and bringing to market of alternative proteins, including re-considering regulatory barriers and more investment in research and development. Being able to replace many farmed animal products with alternative proteins, as part of an overall strategy to reduce the number of animals farmed, could allow for those remaining to be farmed in higher-welfare conditions. There is currently a destructive cycle of over production and over consumption of animal products; alternative proteins should be welcomed as a disruptive technology with potentially significant welfare benefits.

■ Animal feed

The RSPCA supports the use of non-animal alternative proteins in animal feed, where they can be produced in an environmentally sustainable way. Non-animal proteins have the potential to provide a humane alternative to traditional animal proteins used in animal feeds.

Farming insects

There is a growing body of evidence that challenges the assumption that the insects being farmed are not sentient. The RSPCA strongly encourages a pause in the progression of insect farming until there is sufficient information available, and legislation in place, to safeguard their welfare.

The RSPCA is concerned about the rapid growth of commercial insect farming. Until we have evidence to understand whether insects are sentient, we should treat them as sentient animals. There is currently no specific legislation to protect the welfare of insects and, particularly, to mitigate negligence, exploitation and avoidable suffering, which means that trillions of animals can be farmed with no legal underpinning to protect them. To mitigate the risk of widespread suffering, which can become challenging and costly to address once established, it is crucial that insect farming systems are designed and managed with welfare in mind. The RSPCA therefore wants to see a pause in the growth of insect farming until further research is conducted into insect sentience.

Trade deals

The RSPCA opposes any trade deals that undermine UK animal welfare standards.

The RSPCA advocates for a set of core standards to apply to any trade deal. There are trade-based opportunities for raising animal welfare standards worldwide. Countries are encouraged to raise animal welfare at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to agree solutions that will encourage countries to raise their welfare standards. Countries are also encouraged to employ non-protectionist trade measures, such as mandatory labelling and the ability to restrict imports, where this reflects public opinion. These measures ensure that animal welfare is used as a core requirement in any trade deals and ensures equivalence with the UK's production methods when importing products.



Animals in science

Overview of our position

The RSPCA is opposed to scientific procedures that cause animals pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm. Replacing animal use in harmful procedures is our principal goal.

Animals used in research and testing can and do experience pain and distress, and this can be 'severe'. The RSPCA advocates for efforts to be increased to avoid or reduce lab animal suffering. There should also be much more effective ethical review to challenge whether, and how, animals are used. Every possible step should be taken to reduce the numbers of animals used, reduce their suffering and improve their welfare for as long as animal experiments continue.

It is estimated that at least 100 million lab animals are used worldwide every year, and around three million are used in the UK. Animal experiments are done for many different purposes, such as developing and testing medicines and vaccines for humans and other animals. Not all animal experiments are for medical or veterinary research; some are carried out to assess the potential risks of chemicals, such as pesticides, to human health or the environment. Other studies use animals to help understand how animal and human bodies function. Each scientific procedure raises specific scientific, animal welfare and ethical issues. There is serious debate, including among scientists themselves, about the usefulness of many animal experiments.

The 3 Rs

The RSPCA supports the fullest possible implementation of the 3Rs, with 'replacement' as the principal goal. The RSPCA also supports the fourth 'R' of 'rehousing' and calls for lab animals to be rehomed wherever possible.

The 3Rs are principles that provide a framework for more humane and ethical use of animals in research and testing. They are as follows.

- **Replacement** – using methods that avoid or replace animal use is the key objective. Humane alternatives may include developing technologies such as organs-on-a-chip, using human tissues or volunteers, or computer modelling.

- **Reduction** – ensuring that the minimum number of animals is used to answer the scientific question. This may be achieved through robust experimental design and statistical analysis. Data sharing, and in-depth analysis of existing data (systematic reviews) can also provide further insights to help reduce the numbers of animals used.
- **Refinement** – reducing suffering and improving welfare throughout animals' lives by implementing good practice for experiments, housing and care. Examples of refinements include providing more 'environmental enrichment' to reduce boredom, or better pain relief. Many labs now use more empathetic handling techniques, such as picking mice up in cupped hands instead of by the tail.

The RSPCA encourages further implementation of the 3Rs, particularly 'replacement' and 'refinement', through our initiatives to phase out the use of lab animals and end severe suffering as a priority. The RSPCA also works to promote 'refinement' through our work to improve housing and care. Full application of the 3Rs can only be achieved through proper training of all those involved in laboratory animal care and use, and by ensuring effective review of projects by ethics committees and regulators.

The RSPCA also supports the fourth 'R', which is 'rehousing' lab animals wherever possible. The RSPCA believes establishments should set up rehoming programmes for individual animals, provided that it is in their best interests and they will not suffer in the future because of the experiments they were used in.

Phasing out using laboratory animals

The RSPCA wants to see scientific procedures that cause animals pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm replaced with humane alternatives.

It is increasingly possible to replace, and avoid, animal use in research and testing with new non-animal technologies (NATs) and new approach methodologies (NAMs). For example, advanced cell cultures maintained outside the body, such as organs-on-a-chip and organoids, are increasingly available in biomedical research. More approaches that avoid animal use are being introduced to assess the safety of chemicals such as pesticides. Speeding up the development and use of humane alternatives will not only reduce harms to animals, but should also enable better science, as well as economic benefits.

The RSPCA works with individuals and organisations relevant to the current use of laboratory animals, both nationally and internationally, to accelerate the transition to animal-free research and testing. This includes governments, funders of science, companies producing new medicines and chemicals and the bodies regulating them, universities and scientists. The criteria for accepting each NAM should be based on how effectively it answers a specific scientific question, not whether it provides similar results to an animal ‘model’. The RSPCA expects everyone involved to commit to the ambition of ultimately phasing out lab animal use, and to set out clear strategies for achieving this, including investing in the development and validation of NAMs, as rapidly as possible.

Ending severe suffering

The RSPCA is concerned about all levels of laboratory animal suffering, and believes that reducing, avoiding and ultimately ending severe suffering should be a top priority.

Severe procedures on laboratory animals in the UK and European Union (EU) are defined as any scientific procedure that causes the animal severe pain, suffering or distress; long-lasting ‘moderate’ pain, suffering and distress; or a severe impairment to the animal’s wellbeing or general condition.

Many laws that control animal experiments include different categories, or levels, of suffering (referred to as ‘severity’). For example, the UK and EU laws both include four severity categories: ‘below threshold’ (not causing significant pain or distress), ‘mild’, ‘moderate’ and ‘severe’. These categories are used in the decision-making process when licensing procedures. This involves a ‘harm–benefit analysis’, in which the potential benefits of the procedure (for example, a possible new drug for malaria) are considered against the likely harms to animals.

It is estimated that 10 percent of animals used in experiments worldwide experience severe suffering, which is 10 million individuals. The RSPCA believes that no laboratory animal should experience ‘severe’ suffering.

The RSPCA encourages scientists, animal care staff, animal ethics committees, lab animal vets and regulators to work together to end severe suffering. The RSPCA *Focus on severe suffering* initiative provides practical support

to help enable the scientific community to better understand animals’ life experiences, reduce suffering and communicate about improvements they have made. Since *Focus on severe suffering* was launched, experimental procedures causing severe suffering in the UK have fallen by 61 percent.

Ethical review

The RSPCA believes that all animal experiments should be subject to robust ethical review. This should effectively challenge whether, and how, animals are used. The RSPCA also advocates that every establishment involved with lab animals should commit to developing a culture of care.

Every establishment that uses, breeds or supplies laboratory animals in the UK must have a local ethics committee by law. These are called Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Bodies (AWERBs). Their tasks include reviewing project proposals that involve scientific procedures using animals, advising on applying the 3Rs, and helping to make sure that all staff dealing with animals are properly trained, competent and caring. An effective AWERB should create an environment in which everyone recognises that animal use is the last resort, and scientists are fully supported in searching for, and using, humane alternatives. It should also ensure that animal use is avoided wherever possible, animal welfare and science are improved, and the establishment is open about its animal use.

The RSPCA works to help support AWERBs and their members, so that they are able to make a real difference for lab animals. Other countries have similar committees, known as Animal Ethics Committees (AECs), Animal Welfare Bodies (AWBs) or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (IACUCs); the RSPCA often helps to support these too, champions the work of local ethics committees and strongly supports the involvement of independent (or ‘lay’) members.

The RSPCA believes that every establishment that uses, breeds or supplies lab animals should commit to developing, and demonstrating, a good culture of care. The culture of care means fully embracing the responsibilities to improve animal welfare, scientific quality, care of staff and openness with all stakeholders, including the public. The AWERB is also responsible for helping with this.

Wildlife

Wildlife management

The RSPCA opposes the taking and killing of wildlife and other free-living animals and the infliction of any suffering upon them unless the *Ethical principles* (see below) are met.

The RSPCA promotes a culture of coexistence with wildlife and other free-living animals. The RSPCA seeks to protect all animals from any form of suffering, while advocating for legal protection for wildlife.

In the context of wildlife management, we are referring to animals who are living freely in nature. Species involved may be indigenous (e.g. red foxes), introduced (e.g. grey squirrels) or feral (e.g. mink, goats, pigeons), and so they may be domesticated or non-domesticated. Such animals are subject to various management and control measures for a range of reasons, often arising from human activities. Management or control often has the goal of reducing animal numbers or restricting their range. Measures used to achieve this can involve lethal methods (e.g. poisoning, trapping and killing) or non-lethal methods (e.g. fertility control, exclusion, translocation), but in either case animal suffering can be caused.

While management is necessary in some circumstances, it is the RSPCA's position that this must be fully evidenced and conducted in an ethical way. To this end, the RSPCA advocates the adoption of the *International consensus principles for ethical wildlife control* (Dubois et al 2017) – known as the *Ethical principles* – as a guiding framework to ensure an ethical and evidence-based approach to managing wildlife and other free-living animals. The *Ethical principles* are as follows.

- **Principle 1:** Change human behaviour to try to address the root causes of conflict with wild animals (e.g. deterrence methods such as preventing access, removing food sources, or increased human activity).
- **Principle 2:** Provide evidence that substantial harms are caused to people, property, livelihoods, ecosystems and/or other animals.
- **Principle 3:** Set clear, achievable and outcome-based programme objectives that are continuously monitored.



- **Principle 4:** Prioritise animal welfare by using methods that cause the least harm to the fewest animals.
- **Principle 5:** Ensure that community values (i.e. the social acceptability of practices), underpinned by scientific and practical information, are central to decision-making and long-term programme success.
- **Principle 6:** Ensure all actions are part of a systematic management programme with long-term monitoring.
- **Principle 7:** Ensure that management programmes are based on the specifics of a situation rather than negative labels applied to animals. The welfare of animals labelled as ‘vermin’, ‘pests’ or ‘alien species’ can often receive less consideration.

■ **Badger cull**

As a case in point, scientific evidence does not support the culling of badgers to eradicate bovine TB in England and Wales. Instead, evidence supports a focus on cattle-based measures such as more frequent and improved cattle testing. The RSPCA, therefore, wants an immediate and permanent halt to badger culling.

Snares and traps

The RSPCA opposes the manufacture, sale and use of all snares and traps using live decoys, and any trap that causes suffering. The RSPCA opposes all body-grip, glue or drowning traps because they cause severe suffering.

Snares are indiscriminate wire nooses that are attached to a stake or heavy object, which acts as an anchor to stop the animal escaping. Snares include those that use stops and ratchets etc. and anything described as ‘humane cable restraints’. Non-target species such as badgers, cats or dogs, as well as target species such as foxes and rabbits, can get caught in snares.

In line with the *Ethical principles*, trapping or killing should only be used as a last resort and only after *Ethical principles* numbers one to four have been met. Live traps provide a non-lethal alternative, but are capable of causing suffering. The long-term outcomes of released animals are not well known. Where live traps are used, they must be able to restrain animals without causing pain, injury or distress and the trap must be visited frequently to minimise suffering. Where captured animals will be killed, this must be done humanely.

Conserving the natural environment

The RSPCA is concerned about human-induced changes to the natural environment that cause suffering to wild animals.

Changes to the natural environment can lead to disturbance or loss of habitats and homes for wildlife. Species themselves do not suffer when in decline, but individual animals may suffer as a consequence.

The RSPCA focuses on preventing the suffering of individual wild animals, but recognises that welfare and conservation are often closely linked. In some instances, conservation programmes can compromise the welfare of animals, for example through culling or translocation operations. Where conservation actions and animal welfare do not align, the RSPCA expects clear scientific justification of proposed conservation measures, in which the highest welfare standards are considered. However in many cases conservation and welfare arguments support similar outcomes. Additionally, the RSPCA also opposes the use of poisons to control wild animal populations, and is concerned about the widespread agricultural and commercial use of chemical substances such as pesticides, which are potentially lethal to wild, farm and domestic animals.

The RSPCA supports a holistic ‘one welfare’ approach, recognising that good animal welfare and protection of the natural world are fundamental to healthy ecosystems in which both people and animals can thrive.

Captive wild animals

The RSPCA believes that wild animals should only be kept in captivity if they are likely to experience a good life.

Wild animals are kept in permanent captivity in a range of settings and for a variety of reasons. Wild animals can be found in zoos, sanctuaries, performing environments, private collections and people’s homes. The reasons given for keeping these animals include conservation, education, research, entertainment, personal interest and companionship.

Having not undergone the long evolutionary process of domestication, the needs of wild animals born in the wild and those born in captivity are essentially the same, even when several generations have been bred in captivity. Captive environments most likely to fulfil these needs mimic the

elements of the animal's natural environment that really matter to that animal. This can be very challenging. Evidence shows that for some species, providing them with a good life is not possible. This includes cetaceans such as dolphins and whales in dolphinariums, and elephants in zoos and other such facilities.

The RSPCA opposes the feeding of live vertebrate prey to captive animals. Aside from the pain and distress caused to the prey animal, the predator can be injured when catching and killing prey. Feeding live invertebrates to captive animals should only ever be done when there is no alternative to ensure the health and welfare of the animal. It should be noted that some wild-caught animals will not readily take dead prey immediately.

Trade in wild animals

The RSPCA opposes the trade in all wild-caught animals, and any products derived from them, regardless of the species' conservation status. The RSPCA is also opposed to the trade in captive-bred wild animals and any products derived from them, if suffering is caused as a result of breeding, keeping, transporting or selling the animal. For these reasons, the RSPCA is opposed to the fur trade.

Millions of animals are caught in the wild and traded for different reasons, including for use in research, keeping in zoos and as pets. The trade in wild animals poses significant risks to animal welfare as well as species conservation, animal and human health and the wider environment. There is strong evidence of welfare concerns for animals at every stage of trade, from capture and holding, to transport and sale at their destination. Many of these animals will not adapt well to life in captivity and can become extremely stressed as a result. Products derived from wild animals include souvenirs, clothing, decorative objects, food and medicines.

■ Fur trade

The RSPCA also opposes the fur trade and the import into the UK of fur products. Fur is sold almost entirely as a luxury product, but the trade, and all this involves, presents significant welfare concerns for animals. The way in which animals are farmed and trapped for their fur causes considerable suffering, which cannot be avoided. Fur farming was banned in the UK in 2000.

Wildlife rehabilitation

The RSPCA believes wild animals should only be kept and treated in Animal Welfare Establishments (AWEs) if there is a good chance they can be successfully rehabilitated back to the wild. If not, or the law prevents release, animals should be promptly and humanely euthanased to avoid further suffering.

Scientific evidence shows that it is unfair to put wild animals through the stressful and traumatic experience of rehabilitation if their chances of recovery and release are low, or if they are unlikely, upon release, to survive and experience a similar quality of life to their healthy wild counterparts. This includes animals who are permanently disabled or otherwise unfit for life in the wild (e.g. missing limbs, or animals who have bonded or habituated with humans).

Rehabilitating sick, injured and orphaned wild animals is a highly specialist role. It is the RSPCA's view that all AWEs should be legally required to operate to acceptable, evidence-based standards of treatment and care with highly trained staff, veterinary oversight and high levels of biosecurity. This must include using practices that maximise release success (e.g. avoiding imprinting and habituation to people) and avoid/minimise stressful experiences such as transport, exposure to people and noise.

Final summary

The complexity of the animal welfare issues highlighted in the *Policy book* demonstrates that improving animal welfare is the responsibility of all of us, from NGOs, governments, businesses to individual members of the public. From extreme breeding and to animals being used in entertainment and sport, there are many ethical dilemmas that need to be addressed, if animals are to have their welfare needs fully met. As scientific evidence surrounding animal welfare continues to evolve and change, we will keep the *Policy book* reviewed and updated to reflect these developments. The RSPCA has a long and proud history of advocating for and taking action for animals to improve their welfare. We are proud to celebrate the progress made in animal welfare, and will continue to work with the public and partner organisations to inspire everyone to create a better world for every animal.

Next steps

Detailed positions on specific issues can be found in separate briefings on the RSPCA's website. For additional enquiries about the RSPCA's policy positions please contact: policy@rspca.org.uk. The *Policy book* will be updated on an annual basis, or more regularly if the RSPCA's position on an issue significantly changes or new issues emerge.



RSPCA.

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Parkside, Chart Way, Horsham RH12 1GY ■ 0300 1230 100

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