

Reports and Comments

Netherlands Council on Animal Affairs considers responsibilities for the welfare of free-living wild animals

The Netherlands Council on Animal Affairs (Raad voor Dierenaangelegenheden; RDA) has recently published a report (details below) which addresses the question: “what should society’s (individual or collective) responsibility be towards the welfare (including the health) of non-captive animals; and how can, may and must this responsibility be fulfilled in practice?” The RDA recognises that the frameworks (for dealing with kept and free-living animals) have differed radically. There has been a hands-off policy regarding free-living animals, protection of these being at the ecosystem level with the goal of population conservation level, whilst for kept animals, the focus is at the individual welfare level. However, increasingly, the distinction between free-living and kept is becoming blurred. In The Netherlands, for example, previously kept animals (farmed herbivores) were, at one time, released into the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserves to live largely as wild animals with few or no interventions for their welfare. Also, due to increasing urbanisation, the welfare of many free-living wild animals is increasingly dependent on human activities and this brings some responsibilities for them.

These issues are coming more clearly into focus in many countries but, perhaps, are particularly in the spotlight in The Netherlands as it is the only country whose laws include the stipulation that humans have a legal obligation to “provide proper care if an animal is in need of help” regardless of whether the animal is kept or free-living and wild.

It is concluded that “Our moral responsibility for the welfare of animals is context-independent and in principle is to be separated from the way we interpret and fulfil that responsibility, with consideration of other values and practical aspects”, and the Report includes a decision tree to help in judging whether or not to intervene for welfare in various circumstances. It is also recommended that when plans are being made that might be expected to affect free-living wild animals, environmental impact assessments should cover not just population-level effects but impact on welfare also, and assessments should include measures to mitigate the welfare effects and should describe the resulting “societally acceptable compromise”.

Duty of Care Naturally: On the Welfare of Semi-Captive and Wild Animals (November 2012). A4, 27 pages. Raad voor Dierenaangelegenheden (Council for Animal Affairs), PO Box 20401, 2500 EK, The Hague, The Netherlands. Available at: http://www.rda.nl/home/files/duty_of_care_naturally_rda_2012_02.pdf.

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Guidelines for reintroductions and other conservation translocations

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has published these updated and revised Guidelines to take onboard developments since the previous (1998) Guidelines. There have been many planned and monitored reintroductions in the last two decades and much has been learned about the scientific, societal and practical issues. It is pointed out in Annex 1, which outlines the background, that: “The wider scope of the revised Guidelines reflects the fact that conservation is becoming increasingly interventionist, with biodiversity actively managed. A major factor influencing this is climate change, set against a backdrop of massive habitat destruction and fragmentation”.

The Guidelines are divided into two sections. The first 28 pages deal with the Guidelines for the reintroductions and the second part is a further 34 pages of annexes providing further information under the same section headings. Animals (and plants) are translocated for many reasons. This Report deals only with those undertaken for conservation reasons. These may be to repopulate areas from which the species has been lost, to reinforce small populations, or to move animals from parts of their habitat so as to mitigate the effects of habitat loss or degradation or to protect them from specific risks in those areas. Animals may also be translocated for conservation reasons to establish a population outside its natural range (eg if habitat within its range has been lost), or to replace an extinct species to perform some key ecological function in a habitat.

There are a variety of potential risks: some to the animals translocated and released and some to the habitats and/or fauna at the release sites. For example, released animals may introduce novel infections or parasites into the ecosystem at the release site (with adverse conservation and welfare impacts). The Guidelines emphasise the need for clearly defined goals, careful planning, and feasibility and risk assessments, and include a section on deciding when translocation is an acceptable option. It is recommended that, in reaching decisions, the level of risk must be balanced against the expected benefits but that: “Where a high degree of uncertainty remains or it is not possible to assess reliably that a conservation introduction presents low risks, it should not proceed, and alternative conservation solutions should be sought”. The Report also covers social aspects, noting that “community attitudes can be extreme and internally contradictory” and that planning needs to encompass socio-economic aspects, community attitudes and values, and motivations and expectations.

Principles of release strategy, selection of release sites and of monitoring and continuing management are described and, lastly, there is guidance about dissemination of infor-

mation. Translocations and reintroductions are increasingly used in efforts to conserve populations and species and these IUCN Guidelines are valuable in setting out the principles and protocols that should be followed to maximise conservation benefits and minimise risks to welfare.

Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations (2013). A4, 58 pages. The Reintroduction and Invasive Species Specialist Groups' Task Force on Moving Plants and Animals for Conservation Purposes Version 1.0. ISBN: 978-2-8317-1609-1. IUCN/SSC (International Union for the Conservation of Nature/Species Survival Commission), World Headquarters, Rue Mauverney 28, 1196 Gland, Switzerland. Available at: <http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/2013-009.pdf>.

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National animal welfare strategy for New Zealand

New Zealand's Minister for Primary Industries, Nathan Guy, released a New Zealand Animal Welfare Strategy on 2 May 2013. The Strategy is not a detailed action plan, although it does give some initial priorities for the Government. Rather, it gives a national focus for improvements and future work directions for all New Zealanders involved with animals. It sets out a high-level framework for how New Zealanders treat animals and provides a formal foundation for New Zealand's animal welfare legislation and policy. The underpinning values are:

- It says that it matters to us and to animals how animals are treated;
- We have responsibilities toward animals in our care and animals affected by our activities; and
- Using animals is acceptable as long as it is humane.

Under two key outcomes — care of animals, and our reputation for integrity, the Strategy lists four main routes toward maintaining high animal welfare standards:

- Better planning to prevent animal welfare problems;
- Better animal husbandry, science and technology;
- Clear expectation and sanction, with help for people to comply; and
- Measuring animal welfare performance.

Animal Welfare Matters: New Zealand Animal Welfare Strategy (May 2013). A4, 8 pages. New Zealand Government. ISBN No: 978-0-478-40587-3 (online), ISSN No: 978-0-478-40588-0 (print). Publications Logistics Officer, Ministry for Primary Industries, PO Box 2526, Wellington 6140, New Zealand. Available at: <http://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity-animal-welfare/animal-welfare/new-zealand-animal-welfare-strategy>.

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Updated regional animal welfare strategy for the OIE's Asia, Far East and Oceania region

A second edition of the OIE Regional Animal Welfare Strategy for Asia, the Far East and Oceania was recently released by the Strategy's co-ordination group. The OIE

(World Organisation for Animal Health) has encouraged each of its five regions to develop animal welfare strategies, to promote the implementation of the OIE's animal welfare standards. The first edition of the Strategy was endorsed in May 2008. This region was the first to issue an animal welfare strategy — a significant step for animal welfare considering that it makes up more than half the world's population of people and animals. Other regions are now doing the same.

The Strategy provides OIE member countries with a direction for future improvements in animal welfare standards and practices through education, regulation and research and development. Key to its success is the development of practical and applied implementation processes and the ongoing support of governments, welfare organisations, practitioners, scientists and industry. The Strategy is to be published in several languages, to cover the diverse members in this geographic region. The vision for the region in the strategy is: "A region where the welfare of animals is respected, promoted and incrementally advanced, simultaneously with the pursuit of progress and socioeconomic development".

The OIE is an intergovernmental organisation charged with promoting animal health, including by setting standards to manage animal disease risks in international trade. Its mandate broadened to include animal welfare in 2001 and its 178 members have since adopted nine standards for terrestrial animals and three for aquatic animals, covering transport, killing and on-farm management of livestock (including poultry), and population management of stray dogs, particularly relating to rabies control (see <http://www.oie.int/en/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-key-themes/>).

Regional Animal Welfare Strategy for Asia, the Far East and Oceania (2013). A4, 15 pages. OIE Regional Animal Welfare Strategy Coordination Group. Available at: <http://www.rr-asia.oie.int/programme/regional-programme/good-governance-of-veterinary-services/animal-welfare/>.

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Launch of new UFAW support for international developments

The importance of science in elucidating and tackling animal welfare problems is increasingly recognised, but priorities, concerns and approaches vary between nations and cultures. In July, over 160 delegates from 33 countries — including Brazil, China, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan and Russia — came to the UFAW Symposium held at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain to explore such issues.

As part of this meeting, there was a session to discuss how UFAW might help to further build capacity in animal