Book Reviews

Through A Vet's Eyes: How We Can All Choose a Better Life for Animals

S Wensley (2022). Published by Gaia, an imprint of Octopus Publishing, 50 Victoria Embankment, London EC4Y 0DZ, UK. 368 pages Hardback (ISBN: 978-1856754743). Price £13.99 (Kindle: £9.99).

As undergraduate vets in the 1970s, my fellow students and I were frequently told that the primary role of the veterinarian was "to produce meat and milk." That is, after the privations of the 1940s and 1950s, we were to join the effort to maximise the supply of domestically produced food from farmed animals. Despite the oath we all took on graduation to ensure the welfare of the animals in our care, animal welfare was not taught as part of the syllabus and I recall being profoundly shocked when one of the lecturers warned us about the RSPCA, "They are bad news."

While the alleviation and avoidance of suffering was an important part of the course, much of what we were taught was about how to manage the impact of farming and intensification on the lives of our clients' charges. A cynical view has it that most vets spend most of their time facilitating society's exploitation of animals. This includes ensuring they grow well so we can eat them, ensuring they recover from going lame so we can ride them, and ensuring they aren't diseased so they don't poison us. The rest of the work involves straightening out the inherited and acquired defects brought about by irresponsible breeding and incompetent care. That might have been true of the graduates of the 1970s and 1980s but it isn't now.

I believe things have changed in the last 40 odd years. There have been two complete generations of veterinarians since I graduated, and they are very different animals in comparison to me and my contemporaries. This attitudinal change to what is tolerated and acceptable in our relationship with the animals in our lives is well-illustrated by Sean Wensley's recent book *Through a Vet's Eyes*. Recent graduates are, in my experience, much more likely to put animal welfare at the front and centre of their thinking and in their professional lives. Sean is no exception.

There are many books about animal welfare — some like Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* take a philosophical approach and others, like UFAW's venerable series, stay resolutely close to the science. Others, like Philip Lymberry's *Farmageddon* campaign mercilessly almost to the point of seeking to radicalise the reader. In contrast, *Through a Vet's Eyes* strikes a clever balance between these often competing positions. While many of the animal welfare themes the book covers are familiar to us — there are chapters featuring the debate over the welfare of caged laying hens, of pets with inherited but avoidable defects and the routine mutilation of farmed animals, humane slaughter, etc — it is Sean's take on each of these issues that sets it apart. The writing is clear, witty and precise, reflecting Sean's knowledge and passion for the welfare of the animals he comes across.

Sean's other passion — his love of watching wildlife — book-ends each chapter. His knowledge and insight into the natural world, nurtured since his teens, provide a useful and often poignant counterpoint to his experience with farmed and captive animals. All too often we justify and perpetuate the arbitrary categories into which we place the animals around us without sufficient recognition that frequently it is the same animal but simply in different circumstances. Sean cuts through this and makes no assumptions about the experience of animals in different circumstances. This is used to good effect in the first chapter via his description and explanation of the similarities in the forelimb of a variety of different mammals. If the anatomy of limb of the cat, the horse and ourselves are fundamentally similar and the same can be said of our brains, then we ought to be giving the benefit of the doubt to the animals we keep, exploit and eat.

To be clear, this is not an academic text and, although it is well-referenced and carefully researched, it is essentially Sean's thoughtful and highly personal take on how we exploit animals. It is accessible and easy to read: I like how the reader is introduced to complex problems; while there is no sense that one is being talked down to, the text is unflinching in its descriptions of the procedures and problems that bedevil the advocates of better animal welfare. Despite this, the book sticks to the evidence and there is sufficient detail about the science (and sometimes the gore) to remind us that using biology, anatomy and physiology are the keys to improving animal welfare.

Every routine procedure is questioned — from the dehorning of cattle, to the confinement of pigs and dairy cows, to the methods of slaughter, to the castration and tail-docking of lambs, Sean explores the process and offers alternatives drawing on the evidence of harm and lack of value in many of the routine mutilations and practices. It is encouraging to see these routine abuses being raised and questioned by a veterinarian and particularly in a book aimed squarely at the lay reader. All of us need to understand better what goes on during the production of our food.

The chapter on horses, entitled 'Hummingbirds and horses', goes further and questions the very essence of our routine exploitation of a species: Sean's time working with horses in California stimulates an almost forensic examination of the effects of our keeping and using horses for our pleasure and for furthering our business interests. Horses suffer a variety of welfare problems which only exist because of the way in which we exploit them — for example, racing injuries, gastric ulcers, the effects of stabling on equine behaviour, etc. Sean examines each and concludes that an ethical approach should be used to determine the balance between harms and benefits. This means, like most of the animals we exploit to an extreme, we can only improve their welfare if we demand less of them. Less speed, less rapid growth, less meat and less extreme conformation.

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Companion animals — mainly dogs and rabbits — are similarly examined. The book includes a rather withering assessment of the nature of the relationship between dogs and their owners and a scathing criticism of the appalling nature of the extremes of dog breeding. Sean, however, is much too collegiate to pin the blame on anyone in particular for this sorry state of affairs. I've known Sean for several years and this approach is characteristic. He calmly calls for a collaborative approach involving scientists, veterinarians and breeders to find solutions. And it is this lack of preaching that makes the book all the more powerful. One might question whether this approach is appropriate for all the issues the book covers — I was expecting and hoping that Sean might show his teeth at some stage in the book, but they stay hidden. It's simply not in his nature.

The book's concluding chapter, 'The power of one', includes a useful guide for the interested reader — how to purchase animal products ethically, how to influence businesses and politicians — whether acting individually and collectively, Sean believes we can make a difference. As an individual, he advocates eating less and better meat in the expectation that this will both improve the welfare of farmed animals and reduce global heating. I wish I shared his optimism: the amount of cheap protein that derives from the hapless broiler increases every year and its growing dominance of agriculture is a cause for concern that won't be solved by a few of us buying the occasional free-range chicken.

A book like this is important not just for its content but for the fact that exists at all. The veterinary profession risks being characterised as an enabler of animal exploitation. Sean Wensley's new book gives the lie to this view. An increasing number of mainly young veterinarians are unhappy with the treatment of farmed animals and companion animals. Too few of us put pen to paper to express these thoughts. Sean is to be congratulated for doing just that and doing it in a way that is accessible and above all influential.

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Behavioral Biology of Laboratory Animals

Edited by K Coleman and SJ Schapiro (2022). Published by CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL 33487, USA. 560 pages Hardback (ISBN: 978-0-367-02923-4). Price £154.55.

The study of laboratory animal behaviour is of fundamental importance to biomedical research. It provides an insight into the onset, development, and progress of neurological, neurodegenerative, and behavioural diseases. It sheds light upon the influence of genes in our behaviour, their interaction with the environment, and how this is affected by mutations. It provides a gauge through which to evaluate induced changes when testing safety and efficacy of therapies. And, most importantly, an understanding of the natural behaviour of laboratory animals and their wild counterparts enables us to meet animals' behavioural needs and improve their welfare in a meaningful way.

Behavioral Biology of Laboratory Animals (edited by Kristine Coleman and Steven J Schapiro) thoroughly addresses the main behavioural features of the most common laboratory animal species, throughout 560 pages divided into 30 chapters. The roster of 49 contributors is predominantly female (73%) and from English-speaking countries (82%). The writing style is accessible, yet scientifically rigorous. Despite the lack of a glossary, the field-specific terminology is broadly known and will be readily familiar to the book's target-audience.

Whilst delivering an extensive scientific remit, each chapter in the book is evidently very clearly conceived and structured, expressing a clear aim to inform optimal husbandry and care decisions via the meeting of each species' specific behavioural needs.

The first five chapters are introductory and are followed by a series of species-specific chapters. After a quick overview, readers are introduced to fundamental animal behaviour and ethology concepts. Although those searching specifically for an ethology textbook would be better served looking elsewhere, these chapters have merit in the way they frame behavioural concepts in terms of their impact on laboratory animal care and welfare, thereby highlighting the relevance of identifying abnormal behaviour and of understanding behavioural clues when assessing welfare. These introductory chapters also provide the reader with the necessary information needed to operationalise the content in the species-specific chapters, in order to develop and implement monitoring protocols, behavioural management strategies, and measures for addressing behavioural problems. I would, thus, recommend that as a minimum, the introductory chapters should be read along with chapters featuring species of particular interest.

These species-specific chapters cover a range of species that, in total, constitute over 90% of the laboratory animals used in the EU (EU-28 in 2017, source: ALLURES database; European Commission). This comprehensive list includes the more common rodents, such as mice, rats, guinea pigs, and hamsters as well as those less commonly used, such as deer and white-footed mice, gerbils, and voles. Companion animal species (dogs and domestic cats), farmed animal species (sheep, cattle, pigs) and those somewhere in-between (horses, rabbits, and ferrets), are also included. The list of bird species covered is more restricted, but highly representative, as it includes chickens, quail, and zebra finches. Non-human primates are extensively represented, with marmosets, squirrel monkeys, owl monkeys, capuchins, rhesus and long-tailed macaques, vervet monkeys, and baboons each having a chapter devoted to them. Two of the chapters, namely the ones on amphibians and reptiles, encompass too wide a range of species for the pages provided, and are therefore somewhat underwhelming. However, both constitute a valuable contribution to science-based welfare and care of species for which there is a paucity of peer-reviewed papers.

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