

Reports and Comments

New interactive website on common marmosets

A new open-access internet resource providing information on common marmoset (*Callithrix jacchus*) behaviour and promoting their welfare in captivity has recently been developed. This website is intended for use by a broad audience, including private owners, educators, academic researchers, zoo, laboratory and veterinary professionals. Designed to be welcoming and fun to use, as well as instructive, the site is interactive and illustrated extensively with photographs and over 120 video clips.

The common marmoset is the most-used New World primate in laboratory research and testing worldwide and is also probably the primate that is most frequently kept by private owners. Although the website conveys relevant advice about these animals, the private ownership of marmosets is strongly and persuasively discouraged (a footnote on the first page reads: “Disclaimer: Marmosets should not be kept as pets, given the difficulties of providing for their complex social and physical needs. Their use in laboratory research and testing is controversial and the ethical framework of the 3Rs — Replacement, Reduction and Refinement — must be applied if they are used”). Being able to understand and assess the welfare state of marmosets in captive contexts is essential for ethical reasons, and in laboratory research and testing is important for the quality of scientific output, and to assess the efficacy of planned Refinements to housing, husbandry and procedures (the 3Rs of Replacement, Reduction and Refinement being the principles underpinning humane research).

The three main divisions of the website aim, respectively, to promote: (i) an understanding of the range of behaviour in this species; (ii) placing this behaviour in the context of its natural habitat; and (iii) promoting good welfare in captive environments. Topics covered in the ‘care in captivity’ section include grouping and breeding, feeding, health, interaction with human caregivers, positive reinforcement training and the vital importance of conspecific companionship. An interactive section demonstrates the features of good housing for common marmosets. Videos illustrate practical examples of cognitive, sensory, food and social enrichment and highlight the welfare benefit of encouraging natural behaviour. In a second section, video footage and a photo gallery show the daily experience of marmosets living ‘in the wild’. The third section presents a novel modern, multimedia update of the ‘ethogram’; a detailed online database of much of the behavioural repertoire of this species covering calls, behaviours, postures, facial expressions, sensory capabilities and developmental stages. Videos and images supplement and clearly illustrate the text descriptions. Welfare interpretation is also communicated and an interactive quiz invites visitors to test their knowledge.

This website is hosted by the University of Stirling, UK, and the project was funded by the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in

Research (<http://www.nc3rs.org/>), and the Primate Society of Great Britain’s Captive Care Working Party. It does not cover veterinary aspects but is an interesting and valuable resource on the biology and care of these animals.

Common Marmoset Care (2011). Website created by CFI Watson and HM Buchanan-Smith and developed by Richard Assar. Available at <http://marmosetcare.com/>.

BVA AWF publishes tail-docking guidelines for veterinarians

Docking involves removal of part, or all, of an animal’s tail and historically the docking of dogs’ tails in England became popular when a tax on non-working dogs was introduced in 1796. Working dogs were exempt from taxation therefore their tails were docked to show their working status. The tax on non-working dogs was later repealed but tail docking continued over the years for various reasons, including: aesthetics, to reduce tail injury, and to increase hygiene.

On the 6th April 2007, tail docking in England became illegal under Section 6 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (England). However, particular working breeds of dog (hunt, spaniel and terrier) are exempt from the tail-docking ban providing certain conditions are satisfied. Tail docking must be carried out by a veterinary surgeon when a dog is no more than five-days old and the puppy must be presented with the dam (to prove breed). A statement must also be made to prove that the dog is intended to work in one of the specified areas, as described in The Docking of Working Dogs’ Tails (England) Regulations 2007 (eg pest control, emergency rescue, armed forces, police). Similar legislation has also been passed in Wales and Northern Ireland (with some variation in the detail of exemption) and in Scotland (where there is a total tail-dock ban and no exemption).

The official stance of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (the regulatory body of veterinary surgeons in the UK), is that tail docking is an unjustifiable mutilation and unethical unless carried out for therapeutic or acceptable prophylactic reasons.

Tail docking of dogs can be a tricky topic for veterinary surgeons to manage with their clients and it can also be confusing given the slight differences in legislation throughout the UK. In an attempt to make the issues surrounding tail docking clearer, the British Veterinary Association Animal Welfare Foundation (BVA AWF) has produced a guidance leaflet entitled: *The Practical and Legal Approach to the Docked Puppy*. The BVA AWF is an animal welfare charity which aims to improve animal welfare through applying the “knowledge, skill and compassion of veterinary surgeons in an effective way”.

The guidance leaflet informs veterinarians, using a question/answer format and an easy flow chart, of their options if they are presented with a puppy that has been