

## New Regulations for racing greyhounds in England

The welfare of racing greyhounds became a topic of public interest around five years ago when concerns were raised over the welfare of dogs both at the racetrack and once their racing lives had finished. Following these concerns, the Government gave a commitment, under the Animal Welfare Bill 2006, to introduce secondary legislation specifically to safeguard the welfare of racing greyhounds.

Considerable work has since been undertaken in the area, including two prominent investigations: an independent review of the greyhound racing industry, led by Lord Donoughue, and a six-month inquiry into the welfare of racing greyhounds, by the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare. Additionally, many working groups and meetings between industry representatives and welfare groups have taken place, along with a full public consultation of a set of draft Regulations in 2009. The culmination of this work is the 'Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010', published in March 2010 and in effect from April 2010.

The new Regulations hope to both improve the welfare of racing greyhounds in England and improve the traceability of greyhounds once they leave the sport. To this end, a number of minimum standards have been introduced and any person operating a greyhound racing track will now be required to obtain a licence from their local authority. In order for a licence to be granted a number of key conditions will have to be satisfied, including:

- A veterinary surgeon must be present at all race meetings, race trials and sales trials to inspect any dog before it runs and to provide first aid treatment where necessary;
- Appropriate facilities must be provided for the veterinary surgeon, including: a lockable room, lockable drug cabinet, hot and cold running water, fridge, freezer, and an examination table — these facilities must be in close proximity of the track and for the sole use of the attending veterinary surgeon;
- All tracks must provide ventilated kennelling for at least 20% of the dogs present and kennels must be of a minimum size (although the minimum dimension will not apply to kennels built before the Regulations came into force);
- All racing greyhounds must be uniquely identified by both a microchip and, if born after the date the Regulations come into force, via an earmark — these details must be placed on a national database;
- All tracks must keep records of all greyhounds raced or trialed, along with current owner and trainer details — records must be kept for a minimum of ten years; and
- The attending veterinary surgeon must record any injury sustained by a greyhound whilst racing and a record of this injury must be kept at the track for a minimum of ten years.

The Regulations are predominantly aimed at 'independent' tracks. There are 33 racing tracks in England and the majority (26) are regulated by the Greyhound Board of

Great Britain (GBGB). The remaining seven operate independently. The GBGB have their own welfare standards (which already comply with the Regulations) and they have recently received UKAS accreditation to act as a regulator of welfare standards at a national level. Tracks registered with the GBGB will be exempt from the licence requirement in the Regulations whilst independent tracks will be required to obtain a licence from their local authority.

**The Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010** (March 2010). A4, 10 pages. Published by the Stationary Office Limited. A copy of the Regulations can be found at the Office of Public Sector Information website: [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi\\_20100543\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi_20100543_en_1).

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## Wild bird care in the garden: a scientific look at large scale, do-it-yourself, wildlife management

In May, veterinary surgeons, epidemiologists, wildlife biologists, conservationists, animal welfare scientists and other concerned individuals met at the Zoological Society of London to discuss wild garden birds and the impact that human interaction with these birds has on their health and welfare. Of particular interest was the practice of supplementary feeding.

The symposium started with an introduction by Dr James Kirkwood (UFAW) detailing the background to this meeting, the genesis of which was the formation of the Garden Bird Health Initiative in 2003. The GBHi aims were to develop and publish guidelines about how to best feed garden birds in order to maximise the benefits for their welfare and conservation and, with the help of a network of members of the public used as its 'eyes and ears', to undertake a major garden bird health surveillance and research project. One of the areas of particular interest was the epidemiology of infectious diseases amongst those birds that visit feeding stations.

The talks that followed reflected this enterprise and its interests. Dr Kirkwood was followed by Chris Whittles (CJ WildBird Food Ltd) who gave a short history of garden bird feeding, focusing particularly on the role and quality of food being put out for garden birds; from suet balls and low grade peanuts in red plastic net bags in the 1960s, to the current diverse range of polycarbonate and metal tubular feeders and foods such as mealworms, peanut cakes, nyjer seed and sunflower hearts.

The next speaker, Dr Darryl Jones (Griffith University) discussed attitude to wild bird feeding in Australia. Unlike the UK, where supplementary feeding of birds is generally regarded as a positive activity, he reported active opposition to the practice, especially amongst those who were more conservation-minded. In Australia, the birds visiting feeders tend to be more carnivorous and meats and cheeses are a feature of the food put out. Conservationist groups are concerned that such food supplementation may artificially increase the density of these predatory species, as well as

the general nutritional adequacy of the foods being provided, the possible spread of disease, and most significantly, the possibility of birds becoming dependant on these anthropogenic foods. Dr Jones pointed out, however, that there is very little data that supports these concerns; experiments with Australian magpies have, for example, showed little/no such dependency. Rather, supplementary feeding has been found to encourage earlier breeding, more frequent breeding attempts, and increased productivity. Dr Jones concluded that for all its ubiquitousness there is precious little known about the impact of supplementary feeding and that we are engaged on a worldwide experiment that needs to be better studied.

Dr Stuart Bearhop (University of Exeter) then described how variation in the uptake of food supplements by wild birds could be tracked by using stable isotopes, an approach which offers the possibility of the sort of questions raised by Dr Jones as to dependency on anthropogenic foods to be answered. His study of blue tits showed no effect of fat or fat and vitamin E on breeding at population level but an effect at individual level, the level at which natural selection occurs, where supplemented birds laid earlier and produced more chicks.

The effect of supplementary feeding was also the focus of the contribution by Dr Stuart Reynolds (University of Birmingham), who looked at its impact on breeding performance in great tits and blue tits. He found that although intake of supplements by individual birds was trivial — he likened it to the birds ‘snacking’ on supplements — it was found to still have a marked and multiple effect on the birds’ breeding outputs. He showed that in fed woodlands, the first egg-laying date in both species was advanced, but brood size reduced. In addition, hatching success was reduced in fed treatments for blue tits, which experienced decreased fledging. He concluded that birds might consider food supplements as an ‘insurance’ food resource that could influence breeding phenology and that defence of food supplements may bring birds into more direct conflict with others as they encourage more frequent crossing of territory boundaries.

The next talk, by John Mallord (RSPB), discussed the role of food supplementation in helping declining species. Since 1994, there has been a sharp drop (66%) in the population of house sparrows in Greater London and there are suggestions that this might be due, in part, to shortages in invertebrate food affecting nestling survival. Sixty-six sites were identified around London, half of which were provided with mealworms twice a day from mid-April to mid-August from 2005 to 2009, equating to 3 million worms (or 380 kg) each year. Supplementary provision of mealworms was found to increase productivity. The effect was greatest the smaller the colony, with the largest colonies showing little or no effect. Dr Mallord put this down to the fact that the same number of mealworms was provided irrespective of colony size and calculated that to maintain population stability 150 mealworms are needed per (male) bird per day. He

concluded that invertebrate food is indeed a limiting factor of reproductive success in house sparrows.

As the previous talk demonstrated, monitoring breeding success of urban birds is very important to understand whether management efforts are working. David Leech from the BTO presented results from the UK Nest Box Challenge, launched in 2007, which seeks to gather data on productivity of birds nesting in urban and suburban gardens. Using the online data filing system, volunteers are able to record data on clutch size, nest box occupancy and other aspects such as garden features, and presence of predators and other species. Among the preliminary results it has emerged that tits occupancy is lower in coniferous gardens, and that blue tits are more abundant than great tits in urban areas. Blue tit laying date occurs 1.5 days later per every 100 km further north in the UK, and blue tits and great tits lay earlier in urban areas.

The following speaker, Mike Toms (BTO), presented results from the UK Garden Birdwatch Survey, which similarly allows volunteers to record the type and number of birds that visit their gardens. Started in 1995, it receives over 5 million submissions a week, and allows changes in abundance to be monitored and related to other factors outside the garden to understand the cyclic use of gardens by birds. For example, blackbirds seem to disappear from gardens in autumn, when they look for berries elsewhere, and coal tits and siskins use gardens less frequently if natural food sources are more plentiful. A related survey also showed the additional interesting finding that eye size is a good predictor of when birds first become active relative to the sunrise, with birds with larger eyes arriving to gardens first.

The rest of the meeting was then taken up with talks examining garden bird health and risk factors for infection. Dr André Dhondt (Cornell University) presented the problem of the bacterium, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, infection in house finches in North America. This novel strain of Mycoplasmal conjunctivitis causes only a mild problem to poultry but severe symptoms in wild birds. Disease prevalence varies seasonally, peaking in autumn and in late-winter/beginning of spring, while it is at its lowest during the breeding season. Two years after the disease first appeared in the east of the USA in 1996, the population of eastern finches, which were introduced in 1940, had declined by over 50%, while in the west the population remained stable. It seemed that in the west, where the species is native and more genetically heterogenous, birds were more resistant to the disease, although this may have also been due to a less virulent strain present in the west. Individuals that are stressed by food or social competition also seem more susceptible to contracting Mycoplasmal conjunctivitis. Genetic heterozygosity also influences response to the infection.

Becki Lawson (Institute of Zoology) presented the case of trichomonosis, an emerging infectious disease caused by the protozoan *Trichomonas gallinae*, which is usually found in columbiforms and raptors. From 2005, post mortem exami-

nations carried out as part of the GBHi scheme showed that greenfinches and chaffinches had started to be infected and die from *Trichomonas gallinae*. From 2006, high rates of mortality in the greenfinch were beginning to be reported through the BTO Garden Birdwatch Scheme linked to this disease and August and September were identified as the peak months of a seasonal epidemic. The Breeding Bird Survey also showed a decline in the breeding population of greenfinches in 2007. The range of susceptible species is increasing in the UK, and affected birds examined now include dunnocks, tits, and a blackbird. It is thought that the infection is likely to have started from sympatric feeding with columbiforms, and to persist through contact between passerines. Keeping the feeding station clean and disinfected is advised to help reduce the risk of infection.

Dr Scott McBurney (University of Prince Edward Island, Canada) talked about his work on tracking trichomonosis in Canada, where it is also an emerging infectious disease, first recognised in 2007. Here, finches are the birds most affected and the peak for the disease occurs in July, but a lack of volunteers reporting sick and dead birds is constraining data collection. In order to study the disease, birds were caught at three sites, and oral and cloacal swabs taken. *Trichomonas gallinae* was detected, but only from oral swabs, cloacal swabs and bird baths tested negative. More importantly, *Trichomonas* was isolated from seed removed from a bird feeder at a site where trichomonosis was identified as causing mortality, the first time this has been found. Further research is being carried out.

Dr Tom Pennycott (Scottish Agricultural College) changed disease focus and reported on his work monitoring salmonellosis, which began in 1995. He explained that throughout the year garden birds have to fight pathogens, with infections peaking at different times: *Salmonella* spp from November to March, *Escherichia coli* O86 peaking from March to May, and *Trichomonas gallinae* from July to November. From 2005, he reported a steady fall in cases of salmonellosis, with the greenfinch, the species that had previously accounted for the highest levels of infection (95% of infected birds), now only accounting for 40% of detected cases. Similarly, one third of *E. coli* cases used to involve greenfinches, but now accounted for only 14% of the species affected. Dr Pennycott hypothesised that this may be due to the decline in greenfinches caused by *Trichomonas gallinae*, resulting in fewer of these birds available to be infected by other pathogens.

Dr Lisette Coiffait (BTO) summarised some of the findings of other work carried out surveying bird mortality initiated as a result of the GBHi. This highlighted disease as a possible problem associated with supplementary feeding of birds. A study carried out from October 2006 to March 2008 showed that most gardens did not have diseased birds but those that had, saw sick birds for 1–2 weeks. Out of a total of 255 dead birds, it was found that 58% had died of a disease (trichomonosis in 68% of cases and salmonellosis in 20%). Greenfinches and chaffinches were the two species most frequently found dead and submitted for post mortem examinations, which showed that the greater majority died from infectious disease. Disease incidence also seemed associated with the provision of large quantities of food but it was difficult to confirm that provision as such directly increases disease risk. Other factors that contributed to gardens experiencing a higher disease incidence included high numbers of tube feeders but no provision of bird baths. Dr Coiffait called for more controlled studies to further elucidate the most important factors influencing disease risk.

Finally, Dr Kate Arnold (University of York), presented the results of an experiment on neophobia in tits, which showed that the stronger species of tits (great) showed preference for familiar colours and pushed weaker species (coal) to novel, and potentially more risky, feeders. She concluded that changing the colour of feeders in gardens can increase the chance of subordinate species feeding.

The symposium provided an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas and highlight areas that should be the focus of future research. Gardens are becoming increasingly important habitats for wildlife in urban environments, and as the speakers demonstrated, it is essential that scientific knowledge is advanced to help garden animal welfare. At present, there is much still to be discovered.

**Wild Bird Care in the Garden: A Scientific Look at Large Scale Do-it-Yourself Wildlife Management** (May 2010). UFAW International Animal Welfare Symposium. Abstracts and poster presentations available at: <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/wild-birdcareinthegarden.php>.

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