

## **Animal Athletes: Welfare of Animals in Sport** [Racehorses and Greyhounds].

A report on the Scottish Centre for Animal Welfare Sciences [**SCAWS**] workshop chaired by **Sir Colin Spedding** and sponsored by BEVAT; Dogs Trust, UFAW, Fort Dodge, ISAE and BSAS held on the 24<sup>th</sup> Sept 2008 at the Moredun Research Institute, Edinburgh, EH26 0PZ.

### **Contributors (Speakers and Discussants)**

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The programme was directed at particular welfare **concerns** and their **solutions**. Discussion of concerns ranged widely and solutions reported here include actions already taken as well as new possibilities.

1. *General.*
2. *The place of racing in British culture.*
3. *Attitudes to the welfare of race horses and greyhounds.*
4. *Breeding and welfare.*
5. *Welfare during the animals' racing career.*
6. *The risks of racing.*
7. *Welfare after retirement from racing.*
8. *Availability of veterinary and research expertise.*
9. *Funding.*
10. *Summing up.*

### **1. General:**

#### *Concerns:*

- The quality and effectiveness of regulations and their enforcement.
- The physical and mental well-being of the animals.
- The quality of Animal Welfare assessment i.e. its validity, reliability, sensitivity and practicability.
- The application of research carried out over the last 40 years, has it been taken forward and what are the outcomes?
- The availability of statistically supported evidence about the numbers of animals born, reared, raced, injured, retired and their age at death.
- The balance of responsibilities of the racing Industries v Government and the Law.
- Should all race-tracks be registered?
- That emotion and intuition may be accepted as the only evidence in welfare disputes when scientific evidence and experienced judgement are also available.

#### *Solutions:*

- Animal Welfare is clearly one of the challenges to these industries that is being given a high priority.
- Improvements have been undertaken by the governing bodies and Government. More is expected under the new Animal Welfare Acts and their accompanying

secondary legislation; particularly as a result of the 'duty of care' which lies at their hearts.

- The Government wants to encourage self-regulation and to legislate only when it is absolutely necessary.
- Racing to continue to be run by the industries with regular external 'independent' overview.
- Awareness that most Animal Welfare problems are due to inappropriate management by people.
- Improved regulations and guidelines are being generated independently for the governing bodies of these industries e.g. Lord Donoughue's report commissioned by the BGRB and NGRC.
- Increased use of published evidence and sponsorship of research to obtain the evidence necessary for production of better guidelines.
- High quality codes of practice, consistent with existing scientific evidence are likely to be developed for secondary legislation under the Animal Welfare Act(s).
- The principles behind any regulation need to be clearly stated, appreciated and accepted.
- Agreed guidelines for all racing animals would be 'ideal' but would be difficult to manage particularly at an international level.
- A regulatory task force and inspectorate of optimal size and expertise is required to enforce guidelines but consideration of the cost to benefit ratio will be critical for its development.
- Better appreciation that the emotional well-being of the competitive animal has great relevance to their ability to perform.
- Improved knowledge and understanding of the needs of these animals including their social, temperamental, emotional and physical needs by more research.
- Education and research into how these racing animals perceive and react to their environment and the people in it, e.g. by better appreciation of how the animal views its 'world' either as herd prey animal or as a pack predator.
- Assessment of welfare can be carried out subjectively by experienced; vets, trainers and animal welfare specialists but the reliability of their assessments could be improved by training and regular testing against agreed standards.
- Improved methods of assessment of well-being might include quantitative measurements of changes in behaviour and pathophysiology, e.g. detailed investigation of the incidence of stomach ulcers in free range v boxed/kenned animals.
- The 'Safety net', provided by the retired animals' trusts, is necessary and continuing support from the industries is expected.
- 'Chipping' for individual identification and improved standards for record keeping are being instituted by the governing bodies of these industries. Ideally these records will be collected and analysed to permit statistical evidence to be easily available for public scrutiny and research. Better record keeping is essential to help the industries fulfil their obligation to accurately estimate the scale of any problems that exist. Ideally the origin of every pup/foal and its life-time history should be recorded.
- Registration or licensing of all tracks in England is being considered for secondary regulation under the new Animal Welfare Act.

## **2. The place of racing in British culture**

### *Concerns:*

- That racing of horses and greyhounds are unnecessary activities.

*Solutions:*

- Recognition that while racing remains within the law it cannot be said to be unnecessary and that Greyhound and Horse racing are very popular sports.
- Recognition of, where the use of animals for sport lies in our culture and if this is changing.
- Recognition that racing dogs and horses are doing a valuable job within our culture and that, to help avoid mis-informed protest, the governing bodies of these industries need to make the public more aware of this.
- Recognition that animals such as dogs and pigs though biologically similar are granted very different places in British culture.
- Recognition that if the racing of horses and greyhounds is considered unnecessary it is up to those concerned to seek to change the law and that the new Animal Welfare Act is evidence of the effectiveness of this process.

### **3. Attitudes to the welfare of race horses and greyhounds**

*Concerns:*

- Uninformed comment and emotional arguments based on, anthropomorphism and the unwillingness of some people and organisations to accept racing as a legitimate activity.
- Awareness that though emotional commitment can be a good guide to what is wrong the important challenge is what to do about it.
- Poor definition of terms and poor appreciation of what the welfare of these animal athletes involves.
- Acceptance of responsibility for each animal by its owner(s) and improved awareness that this includes 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and subsequent owners.
- That there is still a wide gap between the attitudes of people involved in racing and those involved with the welfare of horses and dogs outside racing; and that this contributes to limited understanding of each for the other.

*Solutions:*

- Do not underestimate the complexity of the challenges involved in changing attitudes especially when people's personal beliefs are involved.
- Better understanding of the attitudes of people involved in racing and those outside of racing.
- Better and up to date appreciation of public attitudes by regular assessment using validated survey methods.
- Use of secondary legislation under the new Animal Welfare Act to respond to changes in public attitudes.
- Development of a 'task force' to help establish new attitudes.

### **4. Breeding and welfare:**

*Concerns:*

- Overbreeding and indiscriminate breeding not only produces more animals than are needed by these industries but can also lead to exaggeration of unwanted genetic traits.
- The number of horses that do not get to race and what happens to them: many racing dogs and horses are imported from Ireland and regulation of these industries in Ireland are of concern.
- Rapid turnover and short working lives are concerns because they require more animals to be bred.

- The licensing of breeders and their acceptance of responsibility for improvement of the gene pools.
- The selection of traits that make it more difficult to ensure the life-time welfare of the animals e.g. animals that cannot go on to a 2<sup>nd</sup> career because of behavioural or physical traits.
- That the health, robustness and welfare of racehorses have declined over time.

*Solutions:*

- Licensing of breeders to ensure responsible breeding.
- Breeding for durability as well as performance.
- Identifying the most appropriate sires.
- International collaboration over the regulation of breeding to help ensure supply and demand are balanced.
- Recognition that although these animals are bred for one purpose i.e. racing, it is possible to select animals for breeding that can enjoy a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> career as a companion animal.
- Improved track safety and veterinary treatment and care resulting in extended racing careers, lower turnover and therefore reduced demand for replacement animals.

**5. Welfare during the animals' racing career.**

*Concerns:*

- Quality of training, management and the underlying philosophies of what best meets the needs of the animal in relation to the purpose for which it is being kept i.e. winning races.
- How those responsible, for the animals, are educated to understand their needs? These specialist animals are easily misunderstood and this is of particular concern in relation to second and subsequent owners.
- Awareness of what is accepted as 'normal' and the guidance, on this, provided by the industries and government in codes of practise.
- Welfare in training establishments, including conflicts between access to opportunities for 'normal' behaviours including 'social' behaviours in 'traditional' and 'new' management systems.
- Development of stress-related problems such as common vices and stomach ulcers.
- The knowledge base and evidence for some training practices e.g. when to water Polo ponies; use and abuse of the whip.
- Frequency of racing, recovery times and the duration of an animals racing career.
- The economics of racing: the proportion of owners that do better than break even and how this affects the welfare of their animals.
- The use of performance enhancing drugs and pharmacological manipulation of animals to mask injuries e.g. use of steroids and analgesics.

*Solutions:*

- Improved appreciation of the feeling within the industries that welfare is good when racing and that the quality of life of racing animals is better than that of non-racing animals. The need for this to be maintained post-racing.
- Need for better quantitative measures of what good welfare is, and what is meant by thriving.
- Although the staff to animal ratio is high in racing, all staff might be made more aware of the animals' needs.

- Improvements in the assessment of the quality of trainers and that they work within the agreed guidelines and practices prepared by their governing bodies.
- It needs to be made clearer that the welfare of these animals is the responsibility of the owners and their agents i.e. trainers etc.
- Research is needed to improve understanding of whether use of the whip is of benefit; to racing, to the horse, and how it achieves any such benefit.
- Careful veterinary inspection before and after races and a 'passport' that records all racing activity, to determine and record the animal's health status and fitness to race.
- Subsidisation of facilities by governing bodies e.g. new boxes, kennels, drug testing.
- Opening up of racing establishments to public scrutiny.
- Regular assessment of the quality of life of animals in their training establishments by the governing bodies.
- Regularly updated charters and guidelines which set standards for racing animals.
- Better public education in understanding an average day in the life of a racehorse or greyhound might be supported by the governing bodies.
- Subsidisation of prize money to improve owners/trainers ability to finance improvements in the welfare of their animals.

## **6. The Risks of Racing**

### *Concerns:*

- The risks of particular kinds of racing as assessed by fatalities and incidence of injuries and the longevity of the animals' careers.
- That all risk cannot be eliminated but, there is a need to debate what level of risk is ethically acceptable?
- That the lack of reliable data on injuries in greyhound racing hampers research into the epidemiology of racing injuries.
- That there is limited appreciation that older horses and greyhounds can be at higher risk and that this needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting the statistics for fatalities and injuries.
- The longevity of racing careers due to injuries.
- Misconceptions of the risks of racing if increases in the number of injuries reported is the result of more sensitive diagnosis of such injuries.
- The matching of individual animals to the length and pace of races in which they are entered.
- Delays in euthanasia of animals seriously injured during racing and in training establishments. This is of particular concern if the owners' or insurers' permission is required and they are not quickly available.

### *Solutions:*

- There is new emphasis on research to investigate the reasons for injury and fatality. There is a drive to reduce the incidence of these events by better training, better control over when animals are fit to race and when tracks are fit for racing.
- There is ongoing research into ways of improving tracks including investigation of, the effect of ground conditions on the potential for injury, risk-factors associated with lower limb fractures, and research into bone structure, vitality and repair.

- Existing tracks are being improved by attention to: surfaces, camber, drainage and contour. Industry funded alterations to the track itself are generally designed to improve welfare and reduce the incidence of injury.
- Provision of guidance or legislation for appropriate track design when new tracks are built.
- Consideration is given to the welfare of the animal when trainers choose the length of races in which the animals are entered.
- Need for a better data base of injuries sustained during racing and training in order to identify risk factors and determine unacceptable risks.
- Increased awareness that the incidence of chronic disease and injury is greater in older horses and greyhounds.
- Need agreement on the criteria, including ethical judgements, for estimation of risks. For this, a balanced view is required to optimise performance, entertainment, risk and public acceptance.
- Need to standardise diagnostic criteria and the severity rating of injuries to permit comparisons both nationally and internationally.
- The British Horseracing Authority already records details of all falls and injuries on British racecourses. This database permits analysis of injury data to help identify factors contributing to the risk of injury. This might be extended to all registered race tracks for all athletic animals.
- Emergency euthanasia: to allow decisive and rapid action, in the absence of the owner's consent, responsibility can and should be taken by the attending vet and trainer.

## **7. Welfare after retirement from racing**

### *Concerns:*

- With whom the responsibility lies?
- With what is classified as an ex-racing animal?
- If there is a problem, how big the problem is and the quality of the evidence, i.e. how many animals are looking for second careers each year and how many go into breeding, die, etc.
- The governing bodies are encouraged by what they consider to be positive trends. However, without reliable and validated quantitative data, this may not be considered enough.
- The vested interests of animal welfare organisations that may lead them to exaggerate the size of the problem, and, on the other hand, the vested interests of the industries that may lead them to minimise the size of the problem.
- Owners/trainers are not always realistic about what potential 'average owners' of a retired ex-racing animal can manage and find rewarding.
- That all ex-racing animals can be lumped together despite being aware that the temperament of some can present serious problems
- That racing stresses, strains and injuries can seriously affect the post racing careers of ex-racing animals.
- About, the value placed on ex-racing animals by potential owners, because, for some animals the lower their value the poorer is their treatment.
- With problems of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and subsequent ownership.
- For, the quality of geriatric care including that required for chronic diseases.
- That early euthanasia can be a waste of a useful second career.
- That use of the word rehabilitation with reference to ex-racing animals may be of concern because it can, erroneously, be interpreted as labelling the animals, as delinquents.

### *Solutions:*

- I.D cards/passports and more comprehensive and accurate record keeping.
- Need for owners to acknowledge that it is their responsibility to find an acceptable solution.
- Need for governing bodies of the industries to help owners by developing guidelines for them and by developing/supporting organisations that help the owners to find a new, useful, career for their animal as a companion or in a less demanding sport.
- Agreement is required on who will take responsibility for supervision of this process and how it will be carried out.
- There was evidence of increasing support from the industries for organisations that can rapidly assess the potential of ex-racing animals and can find new owners who will accept responsibility for the animal's second career.
- Retired Thoroughbred and Greyhound charitable trusts were considered to provide a welcome 'safety net' but might only be able to provide short-term solutions for acute problems. They may not be well enough developed to provide a complete solution to this concern.
- The services provided by Charitable Trusts, could be improved, and increased in amount to help overcome this concern. However, it was clear that relying heavily upon the generosity of charitable donors was not considered appropriate and that the racing industries may need to help fund this development by increasing their contributions.
- Need to develop improved methods for assessment of potential owners and for rejection of those with insufficient experience of the needs of these racing animals.
- A small levy on 'Sales' of racing animals might provide funds to promote welfare of these animals if it was used to provide 'prizes' for success in their subsequent careers.
- The 'value' of ex-racing animals for second careers may be better appreciated by making it clear to potential owners that these animals have been selectively bred and trained as athletes. Though their genetic make-up may not have been distorted with the production of gross clinical abnormalities, individual animals can have physical and behavioural attributes which present significant challenges. Expert advice should be taken before new owners accept such challenges.
- Some animals cannot be found a second career and need to be humanely destroyed (euthanasia). However, there need to be very good safeguards to ensure euthanasia is genuinely used only as the last resort.
- It was considered necessary and acceptable to euthanise promptly and humanely animals in unacceptable pain/distress and, as the last resort, unwanted animals as a welfare solution. Euthanasia needs to be carried out by well-trained and competent people under veterinary supervision. Organisations and institutions that provide this service for ex-racing animals might be supported by the industries. They would dispose of animals humanely and it might be expected that they would make as much use of the dead animals as possible e.g. for veterinary education, post-mortem research or as animal protein.

## **8. Availability of veterinary and research expertise**

### *Concerns:*

- The quality and quantity of veterinary expertise available and its independence.
- Veterinary manpower for the assessment of each animal's fitness to race as well as its health and welfare during and after racing.

- Access to continuing professional development for vets, trainers and other staff.
- The rewards gained by vets, trainers and other staff from specialisation in the health and welfare these animal athletes.
- How relevant and necessary research will be done and how those requiring such research can access researchers with the necessary experience and facilities?

*Solutions:*

- Continuing recognition by owners and governing bodies of their veterinary surgeons' professional obligation to the animals in their care, and to the veterinary profession.
- Awareness that independent veterinary judgement of the animals' welfare takes precedence over an obligation to the owners and their economic interests.
- Vets servicing these industries might be employed by an independent authority to help them to maintain independence from all vested interests? This was not generally supported.
- Improved availability and accessibility of CPD courses and specialist degree courses in animal welfare might be supported by the industries.
- Improved incentives to specialise by improving the rewards e.g. by improving opportunities to advance knowledge and understanding and to obtain recognition for making improvements to the welfare of the animals.
- Improved funding of veterinary services and of specialist training by the industries.
- Improved access to research expertise and facilities through various institutions and organisations such as veterinary schools, research institutes, SCAWS, BSAS and ISAE.

**9. Funding:**

*Concerns:*

- That all the people and organisations benefiting financially from the industries are not contributing equitably to the funding of the welfare of these animals.
- Provision of insufficient funding to meet the needs for the welfare of these animals.
- Prioritisation of the distribution of funds made available to the governing bodies of the two racing industries.
- Public knowledge of which people within the governing bodies are responsible for decisions on priorities, what processes are involved and what timetable is followed.
- The sources of funds for the maintenance of organisations providing the 'safety nets'.
- The amount of funding for development and maintenance of research expertise and facilities for the advancement of knowledge and understanding of these animals and their particular biomedical challenges, including both physical and psychological challenges.
- The loss of funds granted for racetrack improvements if the track is sold on for development.

*Solutions:*

- Consideration of the best way to finance improvements in the welfare of these animals, including, funding from the tax payer, the industries and from charitable donations.

- Means need to be found to ensure that all people and organisations benefiting financially from these industries contribute equitably to the welfare of these animals.
- Agreement might be obtained upon the proportion of the industries' turnover that should be devoted to the present and future welfare of its animals.
- Clear exposition of their Animal Welfare priorities by the two governing bodies.
- Efficient use of limited funds to maximum effect.
- Consideration of the most efficient way of financing research e.g. could funds be better administered by another organisation with experience in the independent assessment and supervision of research?
- Better appreciation by the industries of the costs of maintenance of charitable organisations and research groups.
- Safeguards to prevent loss of funds granted for racetrack improvements if the track is sold on for development. It should be noted that capital grants awarded by the BGRB, for stadia improvements, must be repaid in the event that the stadium is sold for redevelopment.

#### 10. **Summing up** (Sir Colin Spedding):

- Scientific evidence should be used when available and any actions to improve animal welfare should not conflict with scientific evidence. When evidence is limited or absent, action should be taken using the judgement of the most experienced authorities available.
- Definition of terms and choice of words is important and the context must be appropriate, e.g. it is helpful if there is a concise definition of Animal Welfare that everyone can accept such as "*Meeting the needs of the animal*".
- Performances of racing animals will improve and winning will continue to be paramount. It will be necessary to look carefully at the problems and ethics of selecting for single traits that lead to 'other' unconsidered problems. A balanced approach is required.
- Workshops, like this, raise many aspects for discussion with the residual feeling being, what should be done? In order to make progress, it is necessary to focus on particular [soluble] issues and to encourage work on them, for example, an optimal design for race tracks with the welfare of the animals in mind.

**BSAS Website address for access to talks:** [www \(to be added when available\)](#).

Vince Molony [SCAWS Convener]  
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