

## LETTERS

### The 'needs' of birds and mammals in the science of animal welfare

Sir, Poole (*Animal Welfare* 1992, 1: 203-220) appears to argue that the welfare of mammals is in some way more important than that of non-mammalian species eg birds, on the grounds that mammals are unique in possessing 'psychological needs'. We are concerned that an adoption of Poole's basic argument may lead to a 'two-tier' approach to the study of vertebrate welfare, where mammals are seen as possessing certain needs that birds do not. We believe any such argument to be flawed and that bird species should be considered no less important when regarding issues of welfare. We agree with Dawkins' criticisms (*Animal Welfare* 1992, 1: 309) of Poole's original article and would like to raise the following specific points in support of (and in addition to) Dawkins' response:

1. We agree with Dawkins (1992) that mammals are *not* unique in working for goals when there is no clear physiological reason to do so. For example Bubier (*DPhil Thesis*, University of Oxford, 1990) has shown that hens still 'peck and scratch' in woodchip litter under a number of different conditions even when there is no physiological need to do so, ie for the direct acquisition of food.
2. Poole argues that mammals have an identifiable daily time budget and that an individual experiences a need to fulfil its 'programme' and will 'strive to achieve this goal'. This is not exclusive to mammals; hens and other bird species also possess a daily

time budget, (eg Dawkins 1989 [*Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 24: 77-80], Bubier 1990), which is equally likely to need to be fulfilled in the same way.

3. The necessity for mammals to live in stable social groups is emphasized. Numerous bird species also form such groups. Social behaviour has long been recognized as an important welfare consideration in birds (eg Hughes 1977 [*British Poultry Science* 18: 9-18], Dawkins 1982 [*Applied Animal Ethology* 8: 365-375], Nicol 1989 [*Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 22: 75-81], Bradshaw 1992 [*Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 33: 77-81]), and stable social order is seen as an important welfare objective for intensively housed birds.
4. We agree with Dawkins (1992) who pointed out that there are no grounds for Poole's implication that only mammals deserve to have their environments enriched. Bubier (1990) has shown that environmental enrichment in groups of laying hens decreases aggressive pecking, an extremely important welfare consideration.

Should we assume laying hens have the potential to suffer less than pigs when kept under intensive farming systems? We would assert the answer is an unequivocal 'no' and conclude there is no evidence whatsoever to support a two-tier approach in the study of welfare of birds and mammals.

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