

BVA and BSAVA policy position on the use of aversive training devices in dogs and cats

Introduction

BVA and BSAVA support and recommend positive training methods as the most effective training intervention for companion animals in terms of health, welfare and behavioural outcomes.^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13}

¹ NJ Rooney, S Cowan, 2011. [Training methods and owner–dog interactions: Links with dog behaviour and learning ability](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2011.03.007). Applied Animal Behaviour Science. Volume 132, Issues 3–4

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2011.03.007>

² Arhant, C. et al., 2010. [Behaviour of smaller and larger dogs: Effects of training methods, inconsistency of owner behaviour and level of engagement in activities with the dog](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2010.01.003) Applied Animal Behaviour Science

Volume 123, Issues 3–4 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2010.01.003>

³ Herron, M.E., Shofer F.S., Reisner I.R., 2009. [Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviors](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2008.12.011) Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Volume 117, Issues 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2008.12.011>

⁴ Blackwell, E.J., Twells, C., Seawright, A., 2009. [The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behavior problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2007.10.008) Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research, Volume 3, Issue 5

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2007.10.008>

⁵ Deldalle, S., Gaunet, F., 2014. [Effects of 2 training methods on stress-related behaviors of the dog \(Canis familiaris\) and on the dog–owner relationship](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2007.10.008). Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research

Volume 3, Issue 5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2007.10.008>

⁶ Cooper, J. J. et al., 2014. The welfare consequences and efficacy of training pet dogs with remote electronic training collars in comparison to reward based training. PLoS ONE, 9(9), p.e102722. Available at:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4153538/>

⁷ Dale, Podlesnik & Elliffe, 2017. Evaluation of an aversion-based program designed to reduce predation of native birds by dogs: An analysis of training records for 1156 dogs. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 191, pp.59–66. Available at: <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/2292/23641/whole.pdf?sequence=2>

⁸ Guilherme Fernandes, Olsson & Vieira de Castro, 2017. Do aversive-based training methods actually compromise dog welfare?: A literature review. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 196(C), pp.1–12.

⁹ Masson et al., 2018. Electronic training devices: Discussion on the pros and cons of their use in dogs as a basis for the position statement of the European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology. Journal of Veterinary Behavior, 25, pp.71–75. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1558787818300108>

¹⁰ Lysons, R. 2015. A review of recent evidence in relation to the welfare implications for cats and dogs arising from the use of electronic shock collars. Available at:

<https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2017-12/electronic-collars-in-dogs-and-cats-review-of-welfare-implications.pdf>

¹¹ European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology. Electronic Training Devices: ESVCE Position statement.

Available at: <https://www.flvetbehavior.com/uploads/7/7/3/4/77348517/esvce-position-statement-e-collar.pdf>

¹² Schalke, E, Stichnoth, J, Ott, Stefanie, Jones-Baade, 2006. Renate Clinical signs caused by the use of electric training collars on dogs in everyday life situations. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science - APPL ANIM BEHAV SCI*. Vol. 105 doi: 10.1016/j.applanim.2006.11.002

¹³ Cooper, Jonathan and Wright, Hannah and Mills, Daniel and Casey, Rachel and Blackwell, Emily and Van Driel, Katja and Lines, Jeff (2013) Studies to assess the effect of pet training aids specifically remote static pulse systems on the welfare of domestic dogs. Project Report. Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Available at: <http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/14566/>

Under the UK Animal Welfare Acts^{14,15,16} humans responsible for animals must ensure that the animals under their care are protected from unnecessary pain, suffering, injury and disease. This includes unnecessary pain or suffering inflicted with inappropriate and aversive training methods or containment systems.¹⁷

We have concerns about the use of aversive training devices to control, train or punish dogs and cats. Aversive training devices include electric collars which are used as a means of punishing or controlling behaviour of companion animals is open to potential abuse and incorrect use of such training aids has the potential to cause welfare and training problems.

BVA and BSAVA position on electric pulse training collars used to deliver an electric shock in dogs and cats

BVA and BSAVA are calling for a complete ban on the sale and use of electric pulse training collars used to deliver an electric shock in dogs and cats in order to help protect animal welfare. Instead, we support and recommends positive training methods.

Electric pulse devices are sometimes used in dog and cat training as a form of punishment to prevent a dog or cat from repeating bad behaviour. Evidence demonstrates that positive training methods are the most effective training intervention for companion animals in terms of health, welfare and behavioural outcomes. Research has shown that the application of electric stimulus, even at a low level, can cause physiological and behavioural responses associated with stress, pain and fear. ^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13}

In light of the evidence, we have concluded that electric pulse collars raise a number of welfare issues, such as the difficulty in accurately judging the level of electric pulse to apply to a dog or cat without causing unnecessary suffering. ^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 10, 11, 12, 13}

Since 2010, [The Animal Welfare \(Electronic Collars\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2010](#) have made it an offence for a device capable of emitting an electric shock to be attached to a dog or cat in Wales. In addition, in [2018 Defra announced a ban on the use of electric shock collars for cats and dogs](#) and the [Scottish Government issued guidance making it clear that training that the use of aversive training devices, including electric collars, may constitute the offence of causing unnecessary suffering under the Animal Welfare Act \(2006\)](#).

[Defra's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs](#) also advises that 'good training can enhance a dog's quality of life, but punishing a dog can cause it pain and suffering ... All dogs should be trained to behave well, ideally from a very young age. Only use positive reward-based training. Avoid harsh, potentially painful or frightening training methods'.

Recommendation 1: The UK Governments should bring into force a complete ban on the sale and use of electric pulse training collars for dogs and cats to protect animal welfare.

Recommendation 2: BVA and BSAVA support and recommend positive training methods as the most effective training intervention for cats and dogs in terms of health, welfare and behavioural outcomes.

BVA and BSAVA position on the use of electric containment systems for dogs and cats

We note a paucity of evidence examining the effectiveness and welfare impacts of the use of electric containment systems for dogs and cats in comparison to the evidence available regarding the use of electric shock collars. In light of this lack of evidence, we are not currently calling for a ban on the use and sale of electric containment systems (which use a collar to deliver a shock) for use on dogs and

¹⁴Animal Welfare Act 2006 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/pdfs/ukpga_20060045_en.pdf

¹⁵ Animal Health and Welfare Act (Scotland) 2006 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/11/contents>

¹⁶ Welfare of Animals Act (Northern-Ireland) 2011

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/16/pdfs/nia_20110016_en.pdf

¹⁷ Scottish Government, 2018. [Dog training aids: guidance](#)

cats. We would strongly support the undertaking of further independent peer-reviewed research, including a comprehensive literature of existing evidence, to robustly assess the effectiveness of electric containment systems and their impact on animal welfare.

Until further research is conducted however, we do not support the use of buried or hidden electric containment fences for dogs and cats that require animals to learn where the boundary is positioned through successive shocks in the absence of any physical or geographical demarcation. Pending further research outputs, the UK Government should only allow the sale and use of electric containment systems for dogs and cats which are either visible or audible to these companion animals.

Further, the sale of electric containment fences should only be permitted through approved vendors who must provide:

- Adequate instructions on the safe and responsible use of electric containment fences
- Clear information regarding the potential negative impacts on animal welfare if used incorrectly, referencing an owner's duty to ensure that the animals under their care are protected from unnecessary pain, suffering, injury and disease as set out in the UK Animal Welfare Acts.

Recommendation 3: The UK Government should urgently commission independent, peer-reviewed research to robustly assess the effectiveness of electric containment systems and their impact on companion animal welfare.

Recommendation 4: Pending further research outputs, the UK Government should only allow the sale and use of electric containment systems for dogs and cats which are either visible or audible to these companion animals.

Recommendation 5: Pending research outputs, the Government should only allow the sale and use of electric containment systems for dogs and cats through approved vendors who adhere to required criteria.

Alternative aversive training methods

BVA and BSAVA recognise that alternative aversive training methods also have the potential to result in negative welfare outcomes eg. choke collars, choke chains and prong collars, as well as collars using a noise, vibration, ultrasonic sound or spray of water or citronella. As outlined above, we support and recommend positive training methods as the most effective training intervention for cats and dogs in terms of health, welfare and behavioural outcomes.

We note the current lack of research and evidence regarding the welfare implications of the use of other aversive methods of training and control which may be equally stressful for a dog. We recommend that further evidence is collected on their use and effectiveness.

Until further research is undertaken to robustly assess aversive training collars which do not deliver an electric pulse eg. anti-bark spray collars, BVA and BSAVA are calling for a code of practice, as well as the regulation of the sale of these devices and manufacturer's instructions, to ensure that the potential adverse effects of use are highlighted to animal owners and trainers.

Recommendation 6: Further research should be undertaken to robustly assess the effectiveness of collars which deliver an aversive stimulus other than an electric pulse eg. anti-bark spray collar systems and their impact on animal welfare.

Recommendation 7: In the parts of the UK where their use remains legal, BVA and BSAVA call for a code of practice, as well as the regulation of the sale of other collars which deliver an aversive stimulus, such as anti-bark collars and detailed manufacturer's instructions, to ensure that the potential adverse effects of use are highlighted to animal owners and trainers