Welcome and introduction

1) S. Wensley welcomed attendees to the fourth meeting of NTCAWG to continue the consideration of species covered by the Dangerous Wild Animals Act and discuss the role of the veterinary professions in supporting the health and welfare of NTCAs.

Minutes from previous meeting

2) The minutes from the previous meeting held on 30 November 2021 were accepted as an accurate record.

Themes

3) Attendees were content that the draft themes document accurately captured the thinking of the group to date.

Species covered by the DWA

4) Attendees were asked to consider the species covered by the DWA and whether there were any short-term asks we should be calling for in this respect. In discussion the following points were made:

- There were inconsistencies with the current list of DWA species, particularly with regard to some species that posed a public health risk as opposed to a physical safety risk and had not been included in the DWA.
- The list of species on the DWA should be reviewed by an independent group. Selection criteria for species on the DWA should take into account public health (e.g., risk of zoonoses), public safety and animal welfare.
- In any review it would be important for attention to still be paid to any risks to public safety to reassure the wider public that this had not been lost.
- Grandfather rights under the DWA and any future regulation of NTCA ownership should only apply to the individual animal, and there should be a requirement for appropriate reproductive control decided in consultation with a veterinary surgeon to prevent breeding.
- The veterinary profession should not shy away from presenting euthanasia as a humane and welfare-friendly alternative to long-term keeping in inappropriate conditions as part of grandfather rights.

5) It was agreed that the position should call for the following:

- In the short-term, there should be a review of species on the DWA. This should be conducted by an independent group and be based on scientific evidence. Species selection criteria should include public health (e.g., risk of zoonoses), animal welfare, as well as public safety.
In the longer term, future regulation of NTCA ownership (eg, positive lists or traffic light systems) should ensure that species selection criteria includes consideration of public health (eg, risk of zoonoses), animal welfare and public safety.

**Provision of veterinary care**

6) Attendees were reminded of the agreed underpinning principle in relation to the roles of the veterinary professions:

- Enhancing, protecting and securing the health and welfare of animals is the fundamental purpose of the veterinary professions. The veterinary professions should therefore work to advance the health and welfare of NTCAs at individual, community, national and international levels.
- The veterinary professions are animal welfare-focused, as distinct from client-focused or vet-focused. Improving animal welfare is the profession’s explicit aim and primary motivation – working with clients and animal-using industries, and being commercially viable, are enablers for the veterinary professions to improve animal welfare.
- The veterinary professions should be supported to manage and improve the health and welfare of NTCAs through undergraduate and post-graduate education, and access to appropriate veterinary medicines.

7) **Undergraduate education and training**

Attendees were asked to consider whether current undergraduate education and training sufficiently equips new graduates (both vets and vet nurses) to confidently provide care for NTCAs and identify how undergraduate education and training could be improved to support graduate confidence in this area. The following points were raised in discussion:

**Veterinary surgeons**

- NTCA teaching across the UK’s vet schools was variable and depended on the school.
- In some schools NTCA teaching is optional or provided in extracurricular activities eg. clinical clubs, as opposed to being built into the curriculum.
- The focus on referral casework in some vet schools may set an unrealistic expectation as to what is expected from a graduate in first opinion practice.
- It was important to reset the expectation that just because you can’t do everything for an animal doesn’t mean you can’t do anything (ie. provide first aid or euthanasia).
- As the majority of graduates go into first opinion practice after graduation it is reasonable to expect that on graduation students should be equipped to provide first aid and euthanasia to NTCA species.
- It is important that first opinion practitioners are able to confidently: handle NTCAs, conduct a clinical examination, use the cascade appropriately (due to a lack of licensed products for NTCAs) and be able to identify what is normal for the species.
- The working group’s recommendations would need to be mindful of the breadth of species and content vet school curricula are already required to cover. It was not pragmatic to simply recommend additional teaching in NTCAs as consideration would need to be given as to what could be removed from the curriculum. It was also important to consider the wellbeing of students if another component were to be added to the curriculum.
- Recognising that there is already pressure to cover a breadth of common species in vet school curricula, emphasis could be placed on transferrable skills and how these can be applied to NTCA species eg. by using NTCA species in case work ups.
- Models of future regulation of NTCA ownership (eg positive lists or traffic light systems) could require that specific species with complex needs (eg, those requiring a licence) only receive veterinary care from Advanced Practitioners. This may take the pressure of first opinion vets who feel that providing more in-depth care/treatment to these species would be outside their area of competence.
• Clients expect vets to be able to provide care for their animal, it is important that they don’t start to believe there’s a two-tier level of care for NTCAs within the profession
• Some first opinion practices also lack the facilities and equipment to provide appropriate care for NTCAs
• If practitioners are not confident and competent in handling NTCAs it can be dangerous both for the animal and the staff member.
• Consideration could be given to the proportion of time allocated within the veterinary curriculum to certain species and the likelihood of graduates seeing these species in first opinion practice
• It was noted that BVA supported a degree of partial tracking so that graduates retain their omnipotential upon graduation.

Vet nurses
• RCVS was currently consulting on Day One Competences for VNs. This was an opportunity to reiterate that equal weighting should be given to NTCA species alongside cats and dogs, and that there should be parity in the teaching time allocated to these species.
• Diploma level teaching for NTCAs was good, however access to practical experience depended on where nurses are in the country.
• Veterinary nurse diploma courses were largely delivered through VetSkill. In terms of NTCA teaching, VetSkill courses only covered cat, dog, rabbit and guinea pigs. There was no scope in the course for reptile, small mammal or avian species. Teaching is integrated across anatomy and physiology, disease etc, so there is no set teaching for NTCAs within the course.

8) It was agreed that in the position BVA should set out that all vets should be able to confidently:
• handle NTCAs;
• conduct a clinical examination;
• use the cascade appropriately (due to a lack of licensed products for NTCAs);
• identify what is normal for the species;
• understand NTCA husbandry requirements; and
• provide first aid, pain relief and euthanasia.

9) To achieve this, vet schools should continue to embed the teaching of basic care for NTCAs within their curricula. Species covered could align with permitted species set out within any future models of regulating NTCA ownership

10) Support for first opinion practitioners
Attendees were asked to consider how first opinion vets could be supported to confidently provide first aid and emergency care to NTCAs. In discussion the following points were raised:
• Delegates that attend free courses are usually the ones that already have an interest in the area
• There is already a range of resources out there for first opinion vets eg. BSAVA foundation manuals, formulary and PDP resources. Professional associations could have a role in bringing these together and signposting to these
• It would be useful for BVZS to develop a simple resource for GP vets around providing first aid and euthanasia
• Peer-to-peer support was incredibly useful; the bond between first opinion practices and exotic referral practices should be cultivated and facilitated.
• First opinion practices should be encouraged to build relationships with pet shops, breeders and owners in the local community to facilitate and benefit from knowledge exchange
• At an association-level, representative bodies should build relationship with representative bodies in the NTCA sector to foster dialogue, and facilitate knowledge exchange.
11) It was agreed that in the position BVA should:
   - Signpost to existing resources to support first opinion practitioners and encourage the profession to make use of these
   - Encourage the profession (both at individual and association-levels) to build relationships with species/breed clubs, representative bodies and pet retailers to foster a relationship of trust and facilitate knowledge exchange.

Action: Working group members to send H. Atkin examples of resources to signpost to in final position

Post-graduate training
12) Attendees considered the current landscape regarding post-graduate training in NTCAs for vets and vet nurses, in particular concerns around the current barriers to achieving specialist status in the UK.

13) Barriers to achieving specialist status
   The following points were raised in discussion:
   - As RCVS are no longer an awarding body of qualifications, there is no NTCA-focused RCVS diploma, that vets can undertake from practice. BVVS members have reported finding themselves ‘stuck’ at advanced practitioner level without a pathway to specialist unless they undertake residency.
   - An alternative pathway to specialist status would be welcomed in NTCAs to enable those in general practice to advance their career and have opportunities to develop.
   - European colleges in other disciplines (e.g. sheep health and production) offer well-structured routes to specialisation that can be undertaken in general practice. This could be used as an example in the final position
   - However, it was recognised that before an alternative pathway could be established, the European College would need to achieve a consensus view on the definition and scope of NTCA specialists
   - It was noted that the majority of clients don’t understand the difference between a GP vet and one with an Advanced Practitioner qualification.
   - Consideration could be given to the development of an academic qualification for first opinion practitioners that was led and awarded by a university
   - Consideration could be given to establishing different tiers of specialism to allow further career development opportunities for vets in first opinion practice, however this would need to be considered across all species, not solely NTCAs.
   - It was noted that future regulation of NTCA ownership may provide a mechanism through which to formally recognise Advanced Practitioner status by requiring licensed animals to be registered with Advanced Practitioners
   - There are very few residencies available in NTCA species

14) Opportunities to specialise and develop in NTCAs for VNs
   The following points were raised in discussion:
   - There was currently the Vet Nursing of Zoo and Exotic Species Certificate, which covered five modules in detail. At present however the certificate was theory-based, and did not include case work.
   - There was the opportunity to build on this certificate to develop an advanced nursing diploma in NTCAs, including the opportunity for case work.
   - There was also a vet nurse qualification for NTCA anaesthesia.

15) It was agreed that the BVA position should articulate the current barriers to achieving specialist status for vets. The position should recognise that an alternative pathway should be established and opportunities to specialise for both vets and VNs was important for career satisfaction, recruitment and retention, and professional development.
16) Provision of clinical CPD for vets and vet nurses
Attendees were asked to consider whether the current provision of NTCA CPD was sufficient, and whether there any gaps. The following points were raised in discussion:

- There was a wide range of CPD for first opinion practitioners. Some providers have reduced their provision as take up is variable
- It was felt that vets in practice who have limited time will prioritise CPD related to more commonly kept species seen in practice
- The more specialised vets become the harder it is to find CPD at an appropriate level, however there are specialist societies to join, and attendance at European and other international meetings would be useful
- It is important to manage expectations around what CPD courses will be able to provide delegates with. A growth development mindset should be cultivated, where there is recognition that development is not instant and relies on practice and consolidating knowledge through experiential learning.
- There is often a misunderstanding about the different forms CPD can take and that it should only be course-based. It is important to emphasise that CPD is fundamentally about reflection and outcomes. This could include case discussions, reading around a case, podcasts, peer-to-peer support.

17) It was agreed that the BVA position should highlight:
- There was not a shortage of CPD, however it can be difficult to access CPD at higher levels of specialisation
- CPD is not just about courses and vets and vet nurses should be encouraged to recognise that CPD can take different forms.
- The importance of having a growth mindset and recognising the importance of development through experiential learning and peer-to-peer support on NTCA cases

AOB
18) Welfare of fish during transport
W. Wildgoose highlighted concerns around welfare standards for the transportation of fish that were purchased online, particularly as it was also noted that at the previous meeting K. Hinde’s presentation revealed that 80% of fish were sold through Ebay. It had been reported that some fish were being sent through the post as opposed to through approved carriers who were able to maintain optimum water quality and oxygen levels. It was recognised that Royal Mail prohibit the sending of fish and have an enforcement department, however some vendors still abuse this route as it is cheaper than transporting fish via an approved carrier.

19) It was agreed that the BVA position should include recognition that transportation conditions for all live animals that are transported (including as part of online sales) must be appropriate, using approved carriers, and with due consideration given to minimising stress and subsequent susceptibility to disease following transportation.

Date of next meeting
20) The next meeting would be held Thursday 20 January 11.00-15.00 by Zoom.