

Containments for Pets and Laboratory Animals

Our topics for this week are:

- Small animal containment general requirements
- Confinement and behavior
- Ethics and liabilities of animal confinements
- Recovering escaped animals

All domestic animals have basic containment needs that should be provided by handlers: adequate and accessible food and water; room to stand and raise their head, stretch, turn around, move forward, lie down, roll, and groom themselves without restriction; regular exercise; and social contact with humans and others of their own species. If the confinement is long-term, an area of seclusion (hide box) and means of continually stimulating mental activity, environmental enrichments, should be provided.

10 Aspects to consider for small animal containment are:

- Light exposure
- Temperature
- Exercise space and mental stimulation that encourage natural behavior patterns
- Companionship
- Bedding
- Rest and sleeping area
- Suitability of containment materials for the species
- Species normal behavior
- Ability to prevent escape
- Location for enclosure

Containment and handling of animals used for federally funded research in the U.S. requires oversight by an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee that ensures compliance with the Public Health Service Policy and Animal Welfare Regulations. The welfare of research animals is also guided by the National Research Council's Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Inspection Service inspects animal facilities to evaluate for compliance with the Animal Welfare Act.

CONFINEMENT AND BEHAVIOR

Confinement of animals should not result in physical injury or mental disability. Excessive confinement that does not permit normal physical movements, stimulation of the mind, interaction with other living beings, or establishment of a zone of personal space can lead to

stereotypical behaviors, abnormal aggression, cannibalism, or self-mutilation. Areas of confinement of animals should be large enough to permit normal movement, mental stimulation, and frequent interaction with other living beings, plus a zone of personal space.

Confined animals should be monitored for stereotypical behaviors, abnormal aggression, self-mutilation, and cannibalism. Additional room in the confinement should be created before, or at least by the time these abnormal behaviors exceed 2% of animals maintained as a group.

Environmental enrichments are enclosures or activities that stimulate natural social interactions, provide exercise, and encourage decision-making activities for the species. These can include companionship or social interactions with other animals and humans, investigating hiding and exploration structures, playing with appropriate toys, having variable feeding routines, and playing with food mazes or puzzles. Small animals in the wild spend up to 60% of their waking hours searching for food. Besides the nutrition gained, hunting for food provides important mental challenges. Finding hidden food and extracting it from a food toy simulates natural food hunting. Companion dogs receive much mental stimulation from time with a handler going on long walks, jogging, chasing a ball or Frisbee, and other play activities.

Environmental enrichments are routinely provided to animals in zoos and research institutions. Privately owned small animals are too often not provided with appropriate containments and environmental enrichments.

CONTAINMENT, ETHICS, AND LIABILITY

Good animal handling begins with safe and secure containment of the animal. Safety of the animal and of the handler depends on appropriate, well-maintained enclosures. Failure to provide or maintain adequate enclosures can result in injury to the animal while it is contained or attempting to escape, or it can result in successful escape with subsequent injury or loss of the animal or injury to humans, or both. Poor staff training on animal handling and inadequate facilities to avoid patient escape are among the 10 most common legal problems of veterinarians.

Dangerous Dogs

Locks on cages and runs are needed when containing dangerous dogs. Easily read warning signs should be attached to the cages. Runs should have contiguous roofing with the walls to prevent dogs from climbing corners and going over a wall. Secondary barriers, such as a series of closed doors, to rooms with cages and runs should be present. Whenever a dangerous dog is taken out of a locked cage or run, a short chain leash and a closed ended, wire muzzle should be used.

Rural Settings

It is common for people who live in rural settings to think that is appropriate to let their dogs constantly run free, but this is a risk to the health and welfare of the dogs and to people or other animals they may interact with outside the dog's property or range of voice command from its owner. When dogs are not on a leash or under voice control, they should be kenneled or inside a fence because of liability risks relating to danger they might impose to other people, animals, or property, and for their own safety against larger, more aggressive or stronger, roaming dogs or predator wildlife.

Escape of Reptiles

Many exotic reptiles can damage the ecosystem if they escape containment. Concern for this possibly led to legislation against wild-type red eared slider turtles as pets in Florida. In addition to causing an imbalance in the ecosystem by preying on indigenous wildlife, some escaped reptiles can pose a hazard to humans or domestic animals. Conversely, the escape of pet reptiles into a hostile environment with predators or into an adverse climate can lead to the premature death of the escaped reptile. The escape or release of exotic animals into a foreign environment is called *biopollution*. Thousands of Burmese pythons have been released or have escaped into the Florida everglades and pose a serious problem to the ecological balance of southern Florida.

Recovering Escaped Small Animals

Animal shelters and veterinary clinics should be contacted when small animals escape outdoors and their whereabouts are unknown. Escaped animals that are located should not be chased. Dogs or cats, if well socialized, may come to a familiar handler. The handler should slowly approach the animal. At a nonthreatening distance the handler lowers his body and calmly calls the animal. Offering food treats, if available, can be helpful. If the animal approaches, the handler should attempt to pet the animal for 20-30 seconds before putting a leash on it or picking it up. The handler should NOT lunge at the animal or attempt to snatch it with his hands.

Another approach that can be effective for all small animals, including small mammals, birds, and reptiles, is to put the escaped animal's cage with the door open and treats inside in a garage or shed and leaving a people door open, not the overhead sliding door for vehicles. Optionally or additionally, a preferred animal associate (buddy animal) can be placed in a nearby closed cage in the garage or shed. This can allow trapping the escaped animal in the garage or shed by closing the door at the opportune time and then capture in the animal directly or in its cage.

Now, let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- There are 10 aspects to consider in evaluating animal containments
- Excessive confinement predisposes to stereotypic behaviors
- Environmental enrichments are essential for the mental health and normal behavior of confined animals.
- Animal owners and handlers are liable for damages caused by escaped animals in their care.

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint* published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at www.betteranimalhandling.com

Don't forget serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.

References

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