



Press Release: Controlling Predators without Killing Them

The debate about controlling predators – for example, killing foxes, could before long take a very different direction, according to research published in the latest issue of UFAW's quarterly *Animal Welfare*. It raises the possibility of changing the behaviour of foxes and other predators without harming them.

The research is reported in *Non-lethal control of fox predation: the potential of generalised aversion*. In it Professor David Macdonald of Oxford University's renowned WildCRU (Wildlife Conservation Research Unit) and his colleague Dr Sandra Baker describe their work with three captive red foxes.

They offered the foxes, as part of their normal diet, milk laced with varying concentrations of Bitrex™, one of the bitterest substances known. The experiment was designed to induce in the foxes a generalised aversion to milk, whether treated or not. The researchers succeeded in conditioning the animals so that they avoided milk, whether treated or not.

They acknowledge the very small number of animals they worked with, and the particular circumstances of their captivity. But they say: "The fact that the foxes were successfully conditioned under these circumstances offers support for the potential of trials in the wild with more realistic bait... the next logical step is to test the generalised aversion process with a wild population. We have further developed our methods for this purpose and related work is now under way with wild animals."

The researchers say killing predators is not in itself an animal welfare issue, "but some of the methods regularly used are judged to be inhumane". They say an estimated 100,000 foxes or more are killed annually on British farms, largely to preserve game. Mink, stoats, weasels and feral cats are also legally killed to protect gamebirds.

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Notes to Editors

Non-lethal control of fox predation: the potential of generalised aversion, by D W Macdonald and S E Baker, *Animal Welfare*, Volume 13: 77-85

Other reports in this issue of *Animal Welfare* include:

- improved methods for establishing unconsciousness and death in stranded whales and other cetaceans
- why the common practice of cutting piglets' teeth after birth may be bad not just for welfare but for production
- the need to think twice before releasing captured grey squirrels into supposedly safe habitats
- the negative impact training methods involving punishment have on dog welfare.

For more details and for copies of the report, please contact UFAW's director, Dr James Kirkwood, at the address above.

Animal Welfare is published four times a year by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare. If you would like a copy of the issue in which this report appears, or to be put on our press list, please contact UFAW (details above).

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE

INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

UFAW, founded in 1926, is an internationally recognised, independent, scientific and educational animal welfare charity concerned with promoting high standards of welfare for farm, companion, laboratory and captive wild animals, and for those animals with which we interact in the wild. It works to improve animals' lives by:

- Promoting and supporting developments in the science and technology that underpin advances in animal welfare
- Promoting education in animal care and welfare
- Providing information, organising meetings, and publishing books, videos, articles, technical reports and the journal *Animal Welfare*
- Providing expert advice to government departments and other bodies and helping to draft and amend laws and guidelines
- Enlisting the energies of animal keepers, scientists, veterinarians, lawyers and others who care about animals

"Improvements in the care of animals are not now likely to come of their own accord, merely by wishing them: there must be research ... and it is in sponsoring research of this kind, and making its results widely known, that UFAW performs one of its most valuable services."

Sir Peter Medawar CBE FRS, 8th May 1957

Nobel Laureate (1960), Chairman of the UFAW Scientific Advisory Committee (1951B1962)