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## **The concept of behavioural needs in contemporary fur science: do we know what American mink (*Mustela vison*) really need?**

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### **Abstract**

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*This paper discusses the ethical implications of applying the concept of behavioural needs to captive animals. This is done on the basis of analysing the scientific literature on farmed mink and their possible need for swimming. In the wild, American mink (*Mustela vison*) are semi-aquatic predators, lending initial support to the claim that captive mink with no access to adequate swimming facilities experience a thwarted behavioural need. Scientific studies show a disparate picture. Consumer-demand experiments, where the animals have been conditioned to work for environmental resources, consistently show that mink place high value on swimming water, whereas other studies indicate the opposite, which has led scientists to question whether this preference constitutes a genuine behavioural need. In this paper, we take a methodological turn and discuss whether the oft-used concept of behavioural needs provides the best possible account of what is indispensable to an animal. Seen from a more complex understanding of behavioural needs, we suggest that lack of swimming opportunities for farmed mink constitutes a welfare problem. Further, it is argued that the decision of which paradigm to use in research on animal needs has not only ethical consequences, but is in itself a value-based choice.*

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**Keywords:** American mink, animal housing, animal welfare, behavioural needs, ethics, swimming