
Position Statements



THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

October 2025

Authored by: Animal Welfare Committee

BC SPCA Position Statements

Preface

The following BC SPCA position statements represent the views or opinions of the BC SPCA on various practices involving the use of animals. BC SPCA position statements aim to provide clarity regarding the stance of the Society on such issues.

The BC SPCA can only legally enforce provisions outlined in [animal cruelty legislation](#), such as the *B.C. Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* and the animal cruelty sections of the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Accordingly, we do not have the legal authority to enforce these position statements, but instead use them to educate and influence animal guardians and policy makers to improve the welfare of all animals.

These positions are grounded in the [animal welfare philosophy](#) outlined in the [Mission and Charter of the Society](#) and are evidence-based, using the best available scientific and professional knowledge about the welfare of the animals. The Society uses these positions to raise awareness about animal welfare issues and to advocate for changes to policies and practices that will result in real improvements to the lives of animals in British Columbia and throughout Canada.

All references cited as per *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* format ([APA-7](#))

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Companion Animal Position Statements



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

COMPANION ANIMAL WELFARE

Being the guardian of a companion animal can be very rewarding and can help people develop empathy for all animals. The BC SPCA believes that people and domesticated companion animals can both benefit from this relationship. The BC SPCA also believes that people who keep companion animals are responsible for ensuring these animals experience good welfare throughout their lives in accordance with the Five Freedoms.

Approved by the Board of Directors – June 2009

DEFINITIONS

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Domesticated animals: Species that have been selectively bred by humans over hundreds or thousands of generations in order to alter their genetics to create animals who are dependent, docile, predictable and controllable, and who no longer occupy an ecological niche in the wild.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMAL TRAINING

When training or handling animals, the BC SPCA advocates the use of force-free, humane training techniques utilizing evidence-based learning theories which foster trust and build positive human-animal relationships.

The BC SPCA is opposed to training methods or devices which employ coercion and force. Aversive, punishment-based techniques may alter behaviour, but the methods fail to address the underlying cause and, in the case of unwanted behaviour, can lead to undue anxiety, fear, distress, pain or injury.

Approved by the Board of Directors – July 2016
(replaces Positive Reinforcement Training, October 2004)

BACKGROUND

Behaviour research on animal training techniques supports a force-free methodology. Humane (force-free) training is defined as training or caring for an animal without using pain, fear, or physical or verbal intimidation techniques. Animals learn best when training follows the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behaviour's recommendations: "focus on reinforcing desired behaviours [positive reinforcement], removing the reinforcer for inappropriate behaviours, and addressing the emotional state and environmental conditions driving the undesirable behaviour."

The BC SPCA does not support the use of devices and techniques that cause anxiety, fear, distress, pain or injury, such as choke chains, prong and shock collars (dogs); action devices and performance packages (horse soring); and bullhooks (elephants).

For dogs, studies indicate that humane training techniques are more effective than punishment-based approaches with the benefits that dogs are more likely to perform well in novel tasks, to be more playful, and to interact more positively with strangers.

Research also indicates that over the long term, dogs trained through punishment may develop a fear response to the handler, less bonding with the guardian, less playful behaviour, less inclination to engage positively with strangers and show an increase in fear-associated behaviours, including aggression. Humane dog training is an inherently safer methodology for both animals and people.

When working with any animal, preventing behaviour issues is the first approach that should be undertaken. In the case of companion animals, this includes understanding animal learning

theory, knowing the critical socialization periods of an animal's development and recognizing animal emotional states. This also includes facilitating realistic guardian expectations based on an animal's unique temperament and the issues of concern.

"Dominance theory" to explain problem behaviours in dogs has recently re-gained public popularity. This is an incorrect and harmful concept when applied to human-animal relationships. Traditional dominance theory training uses force and intimidation as a way to assert "pack leader" or "alpha dog" status over dogs to control their behaviour. Tools and techniques used may include restricting movement, striking (hitting or pinching), pinning down or kneeling on animals; the use of physically or verbally harsh corrections on animals; and the aggressive use of choke chains, prong collars or devices that shock animals (collars, fencing, prods, etc.). Some trainers and guardians who do not necessarily subscribe to dominance theory based training may still use these inappropriate aversive training techniques when working with dogs, horses, cats and other animals.

These techniques cause anxiety, fear, distress and, in some cases, pain or injury. Because fear and anxiety are often the underlying causes of behaviour problems in companion animals, these techniques often make the behaviour issue even worse.

Background updated – July 2016

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DEFINITIONS

Dominance: A relationship between individual animals that is established by force/aggression and submission to determine who has priority access to multiple resources such as food, preferred resting spots and mates.

Force-free training: See humane training.

Humane training: Training or caring for an animal without using pain, fear, physical or verbal intimidation techniques.

Positive reinforcement: Adding something the animal wants which increases the likelihood the behaviour will reoccur. For example, a treat or other reward is given to a dog when he fetches his ball, which builds his desire to want to continue to fetch.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

CAT WELFARE

The BC SPCA is dedicated to promoting the health and welfare of cats, and celebrating their close bond with people. At the same time, the BC SPCA acknowledges that cats continue to be undervalued by society and born in numbers that far exceed available homes. Therefore, through research, education, advocacy and outreach, the BC SPCA works to address cat overpopulation with the goal of creating humane communities where all cats are recognized for their intrinsic worth, and where humans and cats co-exist and enrich each other's lives.

Cat guardians should provide their animals with the Five Freedoms for the duration of their lives. Provisions for good welfare vary from cat to cat depending on their unique personality, age and health requirements. The BC SPCA recommends housing that balances the behavioural needs of cats with protection of wildlife. Most cats can experience good welfare indoors in an environment that minimizes stressful stimuli and offers species-specific enrichment. Controlled outdoor access can provide additional enrichment and protection from health and safety risks outside such as disease, predation and vehicles, while preventing harm to wild animals.

In addition, guardians should contribute to the reduction of cat overpopulation through spay/neuter and ensure their cats are permanently identified to assist in reunification should they become lost or stolen.

Approved by the Board of Directors – December 2022

BACKGROUND

All cat guardians should have a plan and provide for the health and welfare of their cats, with considerations made for:

- An indoor environment that provides areas for toileting, playing, resting and sleeping, places for hiding, perching and scratching, and comfortable temperatures and low noise levels^{1,2};
- Safe, suitable outdoor access (e.g., catio, leash walks) that prevents them from preying on wildlife;
- Enrichment that provides opportunities for physical and mental stimulation to prevent boredom and frustration (e.g., puzzle feeders and toys that encourage hunting behaviour³);
- Adequate nutrition provided in a way that mimics their natural feeding behaviour (e.g., multiple small meals⁴);

- Opportunities to initiate or avoid social contact with people and other animals with whom they are bonded¹;
- Appropriate preventative medical care including regular veterinary examinations, vaccinations, parasite control and dental care;
- Immediate veterinary care in medical emergencies;
- Prevention of breeding (e.g., spay/neuter of animals not intended for breeding);
- Permanent identification (e.g., microchipping);
- Low-stress transportation (e.g., appropriate carrier design, preparation and training^{5,6});
- Humane (i.e., non-punishment-based) handling and training;
- Grooming appropriate to the breed;
- Transportation, housing and care in the event of a natural disaster or other non-medical emergency; and
- Aging and euthanasia.

Cats are social and can benefit from the company of other cats, especially related individuals such as siblings.⁷ However, in multi-cat households, particular attention must be paid to the number and distribution of resources, including food, water, litter boxes, scratching posts, and perching and hiding spots, to minimize competition and stress.² Generally speaking, there should be at least one of each resource per cat. Resources should be separated from each other such that each cat is able to engage in the same activity at the same time without feeling threatened.

Management of outdoor cats

Outdoor cats fall along a spectrum of socialization level towards people (e.g., friendly or feral), ownership status (e.g., owned, semi-owned or unowned), confinement (e.g., mostly indoors or free-roaming), level of care (e.g., subsidized or self-sufficient) and environment found (e.g., urban, suburban or wild habitat).⁸ Assessment of the categories to which an outdoor cat belongs often cannot be determined on casual inspection, and cats may move between categories over time.⁸

While poor welfare in outdoor environments is not a given⁹, risks that cats face outside include attacks and predation by wild animals, fights with other cats, collisions with vehicles, diseases and parasites, frostbite and exposure to toxins. Cats are also a significant predator of birds, mammals and other small wildlife.

To address concerns associated with outdoor cats, the BC SPCA supports a collaborative, multifaceted, targeted and culturally sensitive approach that includes both shelter-based and community-based strategies. While these strategies account for both owned and unowned cats, unowned cats likely contribute the most to cat overpopulation and account for the majority of concerns.⁸

Such strategies may include:

- Sharing information on the importance of spay/neuter and identification of cats;
- Development and enforcement of harmonized animal responsibility bylaws that promote and resource spay/neuter and identification of cats;

- Programs to support low-income cat guardians in accessing and affording spay/neuter, identification and other veterinary services;
- Sharing information and resources to support guardians in minimizing their cats' impact on wildlife and transitioning and keeping their cats indoors;
- Shelter-neuter-return (SNR) programs for free-roaming cats entering shelters in good body condition to be returned to their existing community homes following surgical sterilization;
- Trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs for free-roaming cats to be trapped and returned to their point of origin following surgical sterilization, together with rehabilitation and rehoming of friendly adults and socialization and adoption of feral kittens;
- Protection of at-risk wildlife species and habitats through case-by-case relocation of existing cat colonies that are adjacent to ecologically sensitive areas and exclusion techniques to prevent establishment of new cat colonies;
- Advocacy for increased availability and affordability of pet-friendly housing; and
- Research into novel, minimally invasive means of sterilizing cats.

When selecting strategies, consideration should also be given to how the strategies may interact with or perpetuate societal systems of oppression. For instance, vulnerable guardians may be disproportionately impacted by punitive approaches involving fines and fees. Those who struggle to afford or access services for their cats may be more likely to be permanently separated from their animals by these approaches.¹⁰

Background updated – December 2022

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DEFINITIONS

Cat colony: A term given to community cats living in large aggregates around a food source. Note that not all community cats exist in colonies. Instead, they are typically found in smaller groups of two or three cats, so these groups would not accurately be described as a 'colony'.

Domestic cat: The only domesticated member of the family *Felidae*. Generally speaking, cats have not undergone major changes during domestication and their form and behaviour remain very similar to that of their wildcat ancestors. Many also remain capable of surviving in the wild and can revert to a feral existence.

Feral cat: A domestic cat who has partially or fully adapted to living in wild habitats.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

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2. Freedom from pain, injury, and disease
3. Freedom from distress
4. Freedom from discomfort
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.

Free-roaming cat: A term given to a cat who is found outdoors unconfined.

Guardian: A person who or an organization that is primarily responsible for the welfare, care and management of an animal. An owner may be referred to as a guardian, but the term guardian is preferred in order to express that the relationship is one of responsibility for the care of an animal, not just ownership of property.

Humane training: Training or caring for an animal without using pain, fear, physical or verbal intimidation techniques.

Shelter-neuter-return: A program through which free-roaming cats are brought to an animal shelter, spayed and neutered, then returned to the outdoor locations where they were found.

Trap-neuter-return: A program through which free-roaming cats are trapped, spayed and neutered, then returned to the outdoor locations where they were found.

BCSPCA

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

POSITION STATEMENT

COMPANION ANIMAL CONFINEMENT

The BC SPCA is opposed to confinement practices that are likely to diminish the welfare of companion animals. Individuals who house and care for companion animals, even temporarily, should provide for the Five Freedoms and maintain animal welfare standards that are transparent and current with existing scientific research and legislated standards.

These principles apply to animal guardians, as well as all animal-related businesses, including grooming salons, commercial dog walking operations, pet stores, daycares, veterinary clinics, breeder operations and other animal service providers.

Approved by the Board of Directors – February 2018

BACKGROUND

Companion animals must sometimes be temporarily housed in spaces that are different from and more confining than their usual housing, such as on airplanes, in boarding facilities, or in the case of emergency response. Confinement in too small a space for too long a period can deprive animals of the regular opportunity to meet their basic psychological and physical needs. If these needs are not met, companion animals may develop abnormal behaviours that are indicative of reduced welfare – stereotypic behaviour or injurious behaviour such as self-mutilation, for example. They may also be at risk for injuries such as intestinal obstruction.

However, individuals and businesses who confine animals must still aim to provide the best possible welfare for the individual animal. Decisions about when, where and for how long to confine an animal must consider the species' biological needs and the needs of the individual animal, such as:

- environmental needs (e.g., a clean space with an appropriate temperature);
- physiological needs (e.g., access to food and water, the need to stretch out and sleep, access to space to defecate and urinate away from sleeping area);
- behavioural needs (e.g., motivation to play or burrow, social interaction);
- how well the individual animal tolerates stress.

Appropriate confinement housing also considers the impact of weather, temperature, noise, light, odours, visual stimulation and space. Additionally, animals experience better welfare when appropriately separated by health status, age, sex, species, temperament and predator-prey status.

Confining some species, such as dogs and cats, to a cage for travel or daily use beyond the time they are capable of coping can result in a fear of the cage. For any animal, including those such as rabbits and rodents who are routinely kept in cages, using too small a space for long-term housing deprives them of exercise and social interaction. This can lead to anxiety, boredom, frustration or depression. Where long-term cage confinement is used for health or safety reasons, animals will require increased attention to basic species' needs through provision of safe out-of-cage time and/or additional enrichment items/activities.

Some examples of confinement practices that result in poor welfare include:

- Animals housed in pet stores during their critical period of development without adequate socialization are at risk of being unable to cope with social and novel situations later in their lives. Research has shown that puppies obtained from pet stores demonstrate more aggression, fear, separation anxiety, and inappropriate urination and defecation.
- In pet stores, daycares, grooming salons, veterinary clinics, kennels and cattery facilities or any other animal holding area, overcrowding can lead to the spread of disease and increased aggression; unsanitary conditions can cause a decline of health; and lengthy confinement can result in forced urination and defecation in sleeping areas. Stress can be induced from housing predatory and prey species within sight, smell or hearing range of each other, as well as from displaying animals to the public without providing them a way to hide or move away from unwanted physical or visual contact.
- In daycares, dog walking businesses, veterinary clinics and kennel or cattery facilities, confinement may force unfamiliar animals to share space without adequate introductions or assessments for individual needs and compatibility.
- In grooming salons, using a cage dryer without continuous monitoring of the animal's well-being and temperature of the cage area can lead to heatstroke and death.
- In veterinary clinics, exam rooms shared and not cleaned between animals can lead to stress, as can animals observing or hearing other animals undergoing stressful procedures.

Background updated – February 2018

See also:

[Animal Training](#)

[Cat Welfare](#)

[Companion Animal Welfare](#)

[Companion Animal Handling and Restraint](#)

[Dog Welfare](#)

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DEFINITIONS

Cage: Enclosure which keeps an animal in confinement.

Cattery: A boarding or breeding establishment for cats.

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Confinement: Restricting an animal's freedom of movement. This may include temporary, short-term, or long-term confinement for the purposes of transport, housing, or procedures (e.g. veterinary or grooming procedures).

Distress: A severe negative affective state caused by physical and/or psychological factors. Physical distress may arise when an animal is hungry, thirsty, too hot, too cold, diseased, injured or in pain to an elevated degree. Psychological distress may arise when an animal experiences fear, anxiety, frustration or depression to an elevated degree.

When used in a legal context¹ by animal protection officers and veterinarians:

"An animal is in distress if it is

(a) deprived of adequate food, water, shelter, ventilation, light, space, exercise, care or veterinary treatment,

(a.1) kept in conditions that are unsanitary

(a.2) not protected from excessive heat or cold,

(b) injured, sick, in pain or suffering, or

(c) abused or neglected."

¹ *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 372 (Section 12:1)

Housing: Dwelling place of an animal.

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Stereotypy: Behaviour patterns that are repetitive, unvarying and have no obvious goal or function. Stereotypies are considered abnormal behaviours, and are usually indicative of stress. Note that while some authors hypothesize that stereotypies are a coping mechanism for an animal to reduce his/her stress in a poor environment, they are also a sign of severely impaired welfare.

Stress: The physiological response to a stimulus in order to help an animal cope with his/her environment. The stress response can be associated with either positive emotions (e.g., excitement, arousal) or negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), depending upon the nature of the stimulus or the animal's perception of that stimulus. Chronic stress is detrimental to an animal's health and welfare.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

COMPANION ANIMAL HANDLING AND RESTRAINT

The BC SPCA is opposed to handling and restraint practices that result in injury or additional fear.

Individuals who handle or restrain companion animals should provide for the Five Freedoms and maintain welfare standards that are transparent and current with existing scientific research.

The method of handling or restraint used should:

- be the least physical and most effective method available;
- be applied for the minimum amount of time necessary (i.e. only the amount of time needed to perform a specific procedure);
- minimize fear, pain, stress and suffering for the animal; and
- protect both the animal and handler from injury.

This position statement applies to animal guardians and all animal-related businesses, including grooming salons, commercial dog walking operations, pet stores, daycares, veterinary clinics and boarding and breeding operations.

Approved by the Board of Directors – February 2018

BACKGROUND

Handling and restraint cause stress to animals. Excessive and/or lengthy restriction of movement can quickly change an animal's experience of stress into distress. An animal may continue to be in distress even if they appear to recover rapidly after the handling episode has ended. If routine handling procedures are aversive, animals are likely to develop anxiety and show exaggerated stress responses when approached for handling again.

Handling and restraint will affect individual companion animals differently. The following considerations will assist in minimizing stress to the individual:

- Weigh the long-term benefits against the short-term use of restraint.
- Select a handling method suitable to the species and individual animal.

- Observe the animal's response to determine the level of stress or distress they are experiencing.
- Maintain a calm, quiet, confident presence and caring attitude.
- Seek training for methods of restraint that can minimize stress, including positive reinforcement and reward-based training techniques. In some situations, chemical restraint may be preferred or required as administered or prescribed by a veterinarian.

Animals can be harmed when individuals who handle or restrain animals are not:

- trained in proper techniques in order to know how much restraint is necessary;
- in full control of their emotions; or
- feeling empathy for the animal.

To prevent harm to animals, businesses that offer services which involve handling or restraint should ensure that all staff receive adequate and ongoing training in animal handling and behaviour with a focus on minimizing the use of physical restraint. When restraint is necessary, it should be planned and communicated to all involved prior to use. Excellent resources for restraint and handling include the Low Stress Handling and Fear Free certification programs. Some examples of animal handling and restraint practices that result in poor welfare include:

- Rapid, forced handling of animals without allowing them to become acclimatized to an exam room, a grooming space and/or a practitioner.
- Use of devices such as choke chains, prong collars and electric shock collars
- Inappropriate use of devices such as muzzles to prevent barking or aggression (i.e., when continued exposure to the trigger is present).
- Transporting animals without appropriate restraint or in unsuitable enclosures.
- In pet stores, handling that prevents an animal from hiding or moving away from the contact.
- Unsupervised handling of animals by young children.
- In dog walking operations and daycares, forcing unfamiliar dogs to share space and/or leashes without adequate introductions or assessments for individual needs and compatibility.
- In grooming salons, using restraint devices that choke the animal, using force to intimidate the animal into compliance.
- Any restraint for procedures that offer no benefit to the animal, cause stress to the animal or cannot be performed properly under physical restraint alone (e.g. anesthesia-free pet dentistry, shaving double coated dogs or plucking ear hair).
- In veterinary practices, prolonged forced restraint when an animal is fearful, resistant or undergoing a painful procedure.
- Scruffing cats or turning rabbits on their backs (called 'hypnosis,' 'trancing' or 'tonic immobility') for purposes of restraint.

Background updated – February 2018

See also:

[Animal Training](#)

[Cat Welfare](#)

[Companion Animal Welfare](#)

[Companion Animal Confinement](#)

[Cosmetic and Other Non-Therapeutic Alterations](#)

[Dog Welfare](#)

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DEFINITIONS

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Distress: A severe negative affective state caused by physical and/or psychological factors. Physical distress may arise when an animal is hungry, thirsty, too hot, too cold, diseased, injured or in pain to an elevated degree. Psychological distress may arise when an animal experiences fear, anxiety, frustration or depression to an elevated degree.

When used in a legal context¹ by animal protection officers and veterinarians:

“An animal is in distress if it is

(a) deprived of adequate food, water, shelter, ventilation, light, space, exercise, care or veterinary treatment,

(a.1) kept in conditions that are unsanitary

(a.2) not protected from excessive heat or cold,

(b) injured, sick, in pain or suffering, or

(c) abused or neglected.”

¹ *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 372 (Section 12:1)

Handling: The manner of treating or dealing with an animal in order to interact or control his/her actions. Handling can include physical contact and sound, visual and scent signals.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals. The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them

Restraint: The use of manual or mechanical means to limit some or all of an animal's normal voluntary movement.

Scruffing: Picking up or physically restraining an animal by their neck skin.

Stress: The physiological response to a stimulus in order to help an animal cope with his/her environment. The stress response can be associated with either positive emotions (e.g., excitement, arousal) or negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), depending upon the nature of the stimulus or the animal's perception of that stimulus. Chronic stress is detrimental to an animal's health and welfare.

BCSPCA

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

POSITION STATEMENT

COMPANION ANIMAL OVERPOPULATION

As a result of overpopulation, thousands of companion animals suffer each year in British Columbia. The vision of the BC SPCA is for every companion animal born in B.C. to have a home and be part of a family, where guardians value their animals and provide them with knowledgeable care in accordance with the Five Freedoms of animal welfare. The BC SPCA supports the use of multi-faceted strategies to identify and address the root causes of companion animal overpopulation, including the spaying and neutering of cats, dogs and rabbits by licensed veterinarians.

Approved by the Board of Directors – February 2015

(replaces Pet Overpopulation, January 1996)

BACKGROUND

The Society employs a number of strategies to address companion animal overpopulation:

1. Developing communication, education and advocacy messaging that works towards a shift in cultural attitudes;
2. Maintaining low-cost spay and neuter clinics and programs;
3. Promoting and supporting trap-neuter-return initiatives for feral cats;
4. Encouraging municipalities to enact bylaws that are designed to deter companion animal breeding likely to compromise their welfare;
5. Sterilizing all animals that are adopted to the community from BC SPCA facilities, including the use of pediatric spay/neuter as appropriate; and,
6. Supporting research around the efficacy and broad application of contraceptive technologies in Canada, and promoting commercial development for non-surgical sterilization methods.

Companion animal overpopulation is a community-specific problem across B.C. Each community in the province has historically taken a different approach to animal care and control with differing results. Species-specific approaches, particularly the emphasis on dog control over cat control, have resulted in species-specific problems. Communities without adequate information, bylaws and enforcement around containing and sterilizing animals continue to struggle with indiscriminate breeding.

The indiscriminate breeding of companion animals leads to overpopulation: too many animals and not enough homes. Animals are brought in to animal shelters that quickly fill to maximum capacity. Lack of access to, or full, animal shelters can lead to abandonment. Abandoned companion animals can suffer from lack of shelter, starvation, frostbite, disease, parasites and wildlife predation and are subject to abuse from the human population. Abandoned companion animals also predate on wildlife, resulting in the suffering of these animals and their orphaned offspring, while contributing

to a decline in wildlife populations.

Background updated – February 2021

DEFINITIONS

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Feral cat: A domestic cat who has partially or fully adapted to living in wild habitats.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.

Guardian: A person or organization that is primarily responsible for the welfare, care and management of an animal. An owner may be referred to as a guardian, but the term guardian is preferred in order to express that the relationship is one of responsibility for the care of an animal, not just ownership of property.

Suffering: An enduring negative affective state. Suffering is associated with feelings such as pain, hunger, fear and anxiety. All sentient beings are capable of suffering.

Trap-neuter-return: A program through which free-roaming cats are trapped, spayed and neutered, then returned to the outdoor locations where they were found.

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state.

Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear and frustration).



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

COSMETIC AND OTHER NON-THERAPEUTIC ALTERATIONS

The BC SPCA is opposed to any physical alteration of an animal's body for cosmetic or behavioural reasons, except procedures performed by a licensed veterinarian to alleviate suffering, or for reasons of welfare. Surgical procedures such as tail docking, ear cropping, devocalization and declawing impact, with varying severity and duration, an animal's ability to experience the Five Freedoms. Guardians are advised to look to alternative solutions that will alleviate the underlying behavioural issue rather than mask the symptoms.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2014

(replaces previous version, January 1996)

BACKGROUND

Existing research and anecdotal evidence from the veterinary community suggest that there can be behavioural and physiological complications associated with cosmetic and non-therapeutic alterations such as tail docking, declawing, ear cropping, devocalization, dewclaw removal and dental cropping procedures. Of particular concern are those procedures not performed by a veterinarian using proper anaesthesia and analgesia.

Spaying and neutering, as well as permanent identification for the purpose of returning lost animals to their guardians, are exempted from this position due to the associated welfare benefits to overall community animal management.

Background updated – September 2014

DEFINITIONS

Cosmetic alteration: Body modification procedure conducted on an animal with the intention of changing the animal's appearance.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;

2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.

Non-therapeutic alteration: Body modification procedure conducted on an animal without the intention of treating disease or maintaining health.

Suffering: An enduring negative affective state. Suffering is associated with feelings such as pain, hunger, fear and anxiety. All sentient beings are capable of suffering.

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state.

Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear and frustration).



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

DANGEROUS DOGS AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The BC SPCA recognizes that aggressive behaviour from dogs may pose a serious threat to public health and safety to people, other animals, and communities. Decision-making regarding dangerous dogs in communities lies with local and provincial governments. The BC SPCA supports strategies that aim to identify, address, and prevent root causes of aggression, which requires efforts from humane organizations, local (including First Nation, municipal, and regional district) and provincial governments, and animal professionals (e.g., veterinarians, dog trainers, behaviourists, breeders). The BC SPCA opposes ineffective strategies like breed-specific bans and instead advocates for evidence-based solutions. The BC SPCA also believes that working with dog guardians and communities is essential to promote responsible care and enable people and animals to thrive together.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2025

(replaces previous version, October 2004)

BACKGROUND

Designations

Several terms are used to define dogs that are a potential threat to public safety. Under British Columbia's Community Charter, a "dangerous dog" means a dog that: (a) has killed or seriously injured a person, (b) has killed or seriously injured a domestic animal, while in a public place or while on private property, other than property owned or occupied by the person responsible for the dog, or, (c) an animal control officer has reasonable grounds to believe is likely to kill or seriously injure a person¹. Some municipalities may further specify the term "dangerous dog" in their bylaws². However, the BC SPCA recommends that local governments not use the term "dangerous dog" in their bylaws, as it can create confusion during the enforcement of legislation.

Each local government can create designations for dogs through bylaws. For example, in Tumbler Ridge, "High risk" means any dog that has: (a) aggressively pursued or threatened a person or animal, while running at large inside the district's boundaries; or (b) demonstrated a propensity, whether within the District's boundaries or elsewhere, to attack or injure a person or animal without provocation³.

New Westminster uses the term "aggressive dog" to describe a dog that: (a) has, without provocation, displayed aggressive behaviour toward a person or domestic animal while in a public place; or (b) has,

without provocation, caused a minor injury to a person or domestic animal⁴.

In Lake Cowichan, a “vicious dog” refers to: (a) a dog that has attacked, bitten or caused injury to a person or has demonstrated a propensity, tendency or disposition to do so; or (b) a dog that has bitten, killed or caused injury to a domestic animal; or (c) a dog that has aggressively pursued or harassed a person or domestic animal; or (d) a dog with a known propensity to attack or injure a person without provocation⁵.

The BC SPCA encourages local governments to create various designations based on the severity of aggressive behaviour to allow for flexibility in enforcement and restrictions on dogs and their guardians. For example, Coquitlam uses the tiered designation terms “aggressive” and “vicious” while also recognizing the Community Charter’s “dangerous” definition⁶.

Factors affecting dog aggression

Dog aggression can refer to a wide range of behaviours (e.g., growling, snapping); however, in severe cases, aggressive behaviour may result in a bite involving familiar or unfamiliar animals or humans. Most dogs do not show aggressive behaviours in all contexts, meaning that aggressive behaviour may be a learned response to specific situations rather than a general characteristic⁷.

The BC SPCA believes that approaches to the issue of dangerous dogs must consider the underlying factors that contribute to aggressive behaviour, including:

- **Early life experiences:** Puppies that grow up in environments that lack social or environmental stimuli (including puppies that are weaned from their litter too soon) are more likely to have behavioural or health concerns associated with fear and aggression⁸.
- **Lack of socialization:** Animal- and human-directed aggression are not necessarily co-occurring in dogs, so training and socialization that improve interactions with other animals and people are both important. Providing positive interactions during the puppy socialization window (approximately 3 – 12 weeks) can enable dogs to cope with stress and reduce the risk of aggressive behaviour in later life⁸.
- **Use of aversive training methods:** Dogs that are trained using solely reward-based methods have fewer behavioural problems compared to dogs that are trained using some form of aversive methods⁹. Positive reinforcement training and socialization can reduce the risk of aggressive incidents¹⁰.
- **Understanding dog body language and behaviours:** Misunderstanding of fearful body language and stress-related behaviours increases the risk of dog bites, particularly during human-dog play¹¹.
- **Stressful circumstances:** Risk of dog bites is heightened when dogs are stressed or fearful^{12,13}.
- **Dog-children interactions:** Children are the most common victims of reported dog bites to humans. Most of these incidents occur by a dog known to the family¹⁴. Young children have difficulty identifying fear in dogs, and even when they do, may still approach or interact with them, which can lead to escalation of dog behaviour¹⁵.

- **Roaming pets:** Dog bites often occur when family dogs escape from homes or yards¹⁶.
- **Health issues:** Medical issues that cause pain or distress for the animal increase risks of dog bites¹⁶. Veterinary professionals may recommend neutering dogs to reduce risks of certain aggressive behaviours^{17,18}. However, the effectiveness of neutering on reducing aggressive behaviours may vary based on multiple complex factors, such as breed, sex, health, and environment¹⁸.

Breed-Specific Legislation

The BC SPCA opposes Breed-Specific Legislation (BSL) as a strategy for reducing dog aggression. BSLs are laws that restrict or prohibit certain dog breeds with the intent to reduce aggression and dog attacks in communities. Most commonly, BSL regulates the guardianship of pit-bull type dogs¹⁹.

To varying degrees, studies have found that some dog breeds are disproportionately involved in dog-human bites, particularly severe dog bites or bites involving children^{20–24}. However, the efficacy of BSL in reducing dog bite cases is not clear^{25–28}. Other studies do not identify breed as a factor affecting aggression^{29–31}. In addition, obtaining reliable data on dog bites is complicated due to a lack of comparisons to the reference population, lack of breed registration, and incorrect identification of breed, particularly with pit-bull type dogs^{19,32}.

Evaluation of BSL in other areas has suggested that the legislation results in significant costs due to enforcement and care of animals affected by BSL in shelters, while social benefits of BSL (e.g., perceived safety and positive perceptions of the city) are felt by a minority of the public³³.

Suggested strategies

The BC SPCA believes that approaches to respond to dog aggression in our communities must address the underlying factors that contribute to aggressive behaviour, as well as facilitate solutions through education and data collection.

- **Education and awareness:** Dog guardians and community members should be educated about dog welfare, the underlying factors that contribute to aggressive behaviour, and reading dog body language to best prevent and mitigate unsafe situations. Children and their families should be educated about safe interactions with dogs.
- **Improve access to and use of reward-based training and behaviour services:** Positive socialization and training can help provide dog guardians with the skills and knowledge to effectively manage behavioural issues that can lead to aggression. Dogs with a known history of aggressive behaviour (often reported as ‘dangerous’) should be trained in collaboration with reward-based trainers who adhere to ethical, evidence-backed methods, such as those outlined in the [BC SPCA AnimalKind Standards](#).
- **Regulate breeding:** Legislation should ensure that environments that breed and raise puppies promote socialization in sensitive early life stages.

- **Increase access to veterinary care:** Regular veterinary care can help mitigate aggressive incidents that may result from health issues in dogs. Reducing barriers that prevent neutering of dogs can reduce risks of undesirable behaviours associated with intact animals.
- **Address cruelty and neglect:** Jurisdictions should strengthen and enforce laws that address environments that contribute to canine aggression.
- **Improve data collection:** Agencies should collaborate to accurately record dog bite incidents. Promotion of effective pet licensing programs would also improve data about the general dog population.

Behavioural euthanasia of dogs with aggressive behaviour

In cases where aggression is severe or unpredictable and cannot be effectively treated or managed, the potential for harm may outweigh the ability to provide a safe and humane quality of life for both the animal and those around them. Finding these dogs new homes is not always possible or responsible while keeping the dogs and their community safe. Dogs with aggressive behaviour may also be struggling with fear and stress, worsened by their limited ability to safely explore the world. In these cases, guardians, in collaboration with their veterinarian and trainer, may consider behavioural euthanasia as the most humane and safest option for the dog, their family, and the community. This approach reflects a One Health/One Welfare perspective: recognizing the need to safeguard the health and well-being of people, animals, and the wider community.

Dangerous dogs in BC SPCA care

Aggression can be a natural behaviour in dogs in response to certain situations. However, in some cases, it can pose a serious and ongoing risk to people or other animals. Dogs deemed dangerous, aggressive, or vicious, whether by provincial or local designation (other than Breed-Specific Legislation), or due to a serious incident during care with the BC SPCA, particularly when they present a significant and ongoing risk to the safety of staff and volunteers while in care, are considered not adoptable under BC SPCA guidelines. This decision is never made lightly and is made by a team of qualified professionals that may include veterinarians and behaviour professionals. When no safe or humane outcome is possible, or there are legal obligations, behavioural euthanasia is the most responsible and ethical option to protect public safety, staff and volunteers, the organization, and animal welfare³⁴. Euthanizing an animal can have a deep emotional impact on everyone involved. It is important to acknowledge the psychological toll of losing an animal and to approach it with empathy and compassion, not only for the animal but also for the people making and carrying out these difficult decisions.

Background updated – September 2025

See also:

[Animal Training](#)

[Selective Breeding of Companion Animals](#)

[Tethering of Dogs](#)

Companion Animal Handling and Restraint
Responsible Companion Animal Sourcing

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**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

DOG WELFARE

The BC SPCA is dedicated to promoting the health and welfare of dogs, and celebrating their close bond with people. The Society also values the varied services that dogs provide to humans and other animals, including but not limited to: companionship, work, recreation and research.

Guardians of both companion and working dogs are expected to provide their animals with the Five Freedoms for the duration of their lives. When training or handling dogs, the BC SPCA advocates the use of force-free, humane training techniques (see also *Animal Training*). The Society supports legislation that protects the health and welfare of dogs, and the use of the highest professional accreditation standards and programs that evaluate and improve the care and handling of dogs.

The use of working dogs is only acceptable if, in addition to the criteria described above:

- the work does not cause the dog to experience levels of psychological distress that diminish welfare;
- the work does not result in ongoing injuries;
- dogs have an appropriate coat type, body size and temperament for the activity and physical environment they are working in;
- dogs receive sufficient rest from the work;
- housing and transport do not compromise welfare;
- the work does not inflict injury or suffering on another animal for the purpose of recreation, sport or entertainment; and
- there are suitable plans in place considering the individual needs of the animal for surplus dogs, dogs that do not meet breeding standards and dogs retired from the work.

Approved by the Board of Directors – July 2017
(replaces Sled Dogs, February 2010)

BACKGROUND

All dog guardians should have a plan and provide for the health and welfare of their dogs, with considerations made for: sanitary and comfortable bedding and housing; transportation; socialization; adequate nutrition; appropriate preventative medical care including vaccinations and parasite control; breeding or prevention of breeding; training, mental stimulation, daily physical exercise, enrichment,

and opportunities for play to prevent boredom and frustration; regular opportunities to evacuate waste; appropriate grooming to the breed; fear-free handling; immediate veterinary care in medical emergencies; retirement and aging considerations; and euthanasia. In addition, guardians should contribute to the reduction of dog overpopulation through spay/neuter and ensure dogs are permanently identified to assist in reunification should they become lost or stolen.

Whenever dogs are being used for work, they may face additional risks to their physical and psychological well-being. Such risks concern the ways in which they are bred, raised, housed, trained and transported, as well as the activities themselves. To address specific issues to working dogs, the BC SPCA would support:

- regulations governing the care and treatment of working dogs including policies mandating rehoming of working dogs at the end of their working life if they can thrive in an adoptive home; and
- policies and funding aimed at replacing the use of dogs in science and explosive detection.

Background updated – July 2017

See also:

[Animal Fighting](#)

[Animals in the Film and Television Industry](#)

[Animals in Recreation, Sport & Entertainment](#)

[Animal Training](#)

[Animals Used in Science](#)

[Selective Breeding of Companion Animals](#)

[Cosmetic and Other Non-Therapeutic Alterations](#)

[Tethering of Dogs](#)

[Dangerous Dogs and Public Safety](#)

DEFINITIONS

Enrichment: A feature of an animal's social and physical environment that improves the animal's *welfare* beyond the animal's most basic needs for survival.

Guardian: A person or organization that is primarily responsible for the *welfare*, care and management of an animal. An owner may be referred to as a guardian, but the term guardian is preferred in order to express that the relationship is one of responsibility for the care of an animal, not just ownership of property.

Humane: Actions that promote good *welfare* and minimize *suffering*.

Humane Training: Training or caring for an animal without using pain, fear, physical or verbal intimidation techniques.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state.

Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g. pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear and frustration).

Working Dog: Dogs kept for any purpose related to work activities, commercial profit, recreation, or public good.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

FERAL RABBITS

Non-native, domestic European rabbits that are free-living in the environment as abandoned pets, or offspring of such animals, are legally designated “feral rabbits” under the *BC Wildlife Act*. The BC SPCA still considers these rabbits as domesticated animals.

The BC SPCA is opposed to the abandonment of domestic rabbits into the wild, which is a criminal act under the Criminal Code of Canada¹ and an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act². The BC SPCA strongly encourages municipalities to enact bylaws that prevent the sale or adoption of unsterilized rabbits and manage free-living domestic (“feral”) rabbits.

The BC SPCA does not support the lethal control of free-living domestic (“feral”) rabbits for nuisance reasons (including culls). When control is needed, the BC SPCA strongly encourages the use of non-lethal, non-contact, prevention and exclusion techniques. In addition, the BC SPCA supports activities that aim to humanely trap, sterilize, and re-home adoptable rabbits in approved homes or sanctuaries that can provide for their needs for the remainder of their lives.

Approved by the Board of Directors – February 2017
(replaces previous version, December 2008)

BACKGROUND

Free-living domestic (“feral”) rabbit populations are generally the result of rabbit guardians releasing their animals into the wild, and the rabbits’ subsequent breeding. Currently in B.C., once established in the wild, domesticated rabbits (European rabbits, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*) become recognized and regulated as wildlife under the *BC Wildlife Act* and are listed as Schedule C animals of the *Wildlife Act Designation and Exemption Regulation*. The BC SPCA supports the removal of free-living domestic (“feral”) rabbits from the landscape and advocates for local governments to manage the animals under animal control bylaws and adoption services.

The welfare of free-living domestic (“feral”) rabbits is suboptimal because the availability of resources is often limited; injured or diseased animals do not receive care; and unsterilized animals lead to females being constantly impregnated despite poor resource availability. Further, as a domestic species, these rabbits do not have the defensive instincts to avoid predators or vehicles. The BC SPCA understands the management of free-living domestic (“feral”) rabbit populations, whether in urban centres or on rural properties, is a complicated issue: a humane, multi-approach strategy may use euthanasia, as well as placement of some sterilized animals in homes or sanctuaries.

If free-living domestic (“feral”) rabbits are to be live-trapped, humane trapping practices include: placing traps in locations sheltered from the weather; ensuring that rabbits are not left for more than

4 hours in a trap without access to food and water; or if food and water is provided in the trap, checking traps at least once per every 24 hours; and releasing any lactating females that are caught until baby rabbits have been located and removed. Euthanasia should only be carried out by a nusan rehabilitator or under the supervision of a veterinarian. Euthanasia of injured or diseased rabbits surrendered to BC SPCA branches will be conducted in accordance with veterinary advice.

Background updated – August 2022

REFERENCES

¹ *Criminal Code*, RSC 1895, c C-46, s 445.1.

² *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, RSBC 1996, c 372.

DEFINITIONS

Abandonment (of an animal): The act of leaving an animal in a situation where the animal must fend for herself/himself. Abandonment is illegal.

Adoptable: Having characteristics that indicate an animal can have a positive relationship with humans and other companion animals. An adoptable animal's needs are not beyond what can be provided by a caring and responsible guardian. The animal does not pose a risk to humans or other companion animals. These animals should be placed for adoption.

Euthanasia: An act of humane killing causing a minimum of pain, fear or stress.

Feral animals: Domesticated animals who have partially or fully readapted to natural, wild habitats.

Free-living animals: Wild or domestic animals who are currently not living in captivity and may be independent of humans.

Humane: Actions that promote good welfare and minimize suffering.

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state. Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear, frustration).



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

IDENTIFICATION OF COMPANION ANIMALS

The BC SPCA endorses humane forms of companion animal identification (ID). Companion animals with ID are much more easily returned to their guardians and multiple forms of ID further enhance the chance of a successful return of the animal.

Where practical, companion animals should have at least one form of permanent identification. The BC SPCA recommends that all cats, dogs and rabbits have a microchip which is registered in a database. Additionally, the BC SPCA encourages non-permanent forms of ID such as pet ID tags on collars.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2015
(replaces previous version, August 2009)

BACKGROUND

The Society employs a number of strategies to promote companion animal identification. To begin with, all cats and dogs adopted from BC SPCA branches are microchipped and registered with the BC Pet Registry. The BC SPCA's BC Pet Registry is a provincial permanent identification database which records microchip, tattoo and license information for cats, dogs and rabbits.

While there are multiple pet ID companies and systems operating across Canada, there is little to no integration between them, often complicating or delaying the return of animals to their guardians. BC Pet Registry offers a centralized, secure database for guardians to register their pets, thereby allowing veterinary clinics and animal shelters to access a single source of information.

By investing in permanent identification, the Society aims to reverse a trend that sees thousands of lost or stray animals enter shelters across the province each year, with no way of locating their guardians due to insufficient identification.

Microchipping is a more effective form of permanent identification as it is less time-consuming than a tattoo, does not fade or blur with age and does not require general anesthesia to administer.

Furthermore, the BC SPCA develops communication, education and advocacy messaging that urges guardians to have their animals properly identified. The Society also encourages municipalities to enact bylaws that make companion animal identification mandatory and to hold low-cost microchip clinics to make ID accessible to all.

Background updated – September 2015

DEFINITIONS

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Microchipping: An electronic system for permanently identifying pets using an integrated circuit inserted under the skin of an animal.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

RESPONSIBLE COMPANION ANIMAL SOURCING

The BC SPCA supports the responsible sourcing of companion animals to avoid the welfare concerns that can occur when the care practices of animal providers do not prioritize welfare. The Society advocates that individuals wishing to acquire a companion animal first consider adopting from shelters or rescue organizations that prioritize animal welfare in their animal care practices and rehoming processes. The Society also supports the purchase of companion animals from breeders who prioritize animal welfare in their animal care and breeding practices, and assess the suitability of potential guardians prior to sale.

SALES OF COMPANION ANIMALS FROM PET STORES

The BC SPCA is opposed to the breeding, transport, confinement and sale of companion animals where their welfare and socialization are likely to be compromised. The Society encourages pet stores to partner with a shelter or rescue organization to implement an adoption model that prioritizes animal welfare throughout the rehoming process, and includes an assessment of the suitability of potential guardians prior to adoption.

TRANSPORT OF COMPANION ANIMALS FOR SALE OR ADOPTION

The BC SPCA supports measures that minimize animal stress during transport. The Society encourages prospective guardians to acquire a companion animal directly from the place the animal was born (if from a breeder) or is currently housed (if from a shelter or rescue). This minimizes stress to the animal, and allows the prospective guardian to see how the animal has been kept, the condition and behaviour of other animals from the same provider, and learn about the specific needs of the species, breed and individual animal being acquired.

COMPANION ANIMAL REGULATIONS

To safeguard the welfare of companion animals and ensure consumer protection for prospective guardians, the BC SPCA supports:

- The adoption of companion animal breeder legislation, regulations and inspections;
- The adoption of companion animal importation and transportation legislation, regulations and inspections;

- The adoption of municipal bans on commercial pet sales and/or a system of licensing and inspection for pet stores;
- Mandatory identification of cats, dogs and rabbits; and,
- The ongoing development and use of the highest professional accreditation standards and programs for breeding, rescue, transport, housing and sale of companion animals.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2022

(replaces previous version, July 2014)

BACKGROUND

Companion animals may be acquired from a variety of sources including breeders (“hobby” and commercial), pet stores, and local and international animal rescues and shelters. There are very few regulations governing companion animal providers, which results in a lack of welfare protections for the animals and consumer protection for potential guardians. Without consumer protections, potential guardians may “adopt” from breeders who are falsely advertising as rescue organizations, or may acquire their animal without adequate knowledge about the animal from shelters and rescues hosting so-called “mass adoption” events.

When animals are being bred or exchanged (i.e., sold or adopted), they are vulnerable to experiencing poor welfare for reasons including: their genetic background; history of socialization and/or prior life experiences; the environment they are housed and transported in; lack of caregiver knowledge about the species or individual animal; and lack of adequate veterinary care. For example, negative experiences and/or lack of stimuli for puppies in early life is associated with negative consequences for health and behaviour¹. The importance of these early life experiences (e.g., maternal care, socialization) is also well-established in other mammalian species¹. Therefore, the quality of care that young animals receive from the companion animal provider will contribute to their future health and behaviour.

Potential guardians should be aware that animal care practices can differ from provider to provider. For instance, one study showed that health requirements followed by long-distance dog transfer programs (i.e., pre-transfer veterinary care requirements, quarantine policies) varied widely between providers resulting in different health outcomes for the dogs². Similarly, not all companion animal providers assess potential guardians for suitability for the animal (“matching”), even though suitability assessments are associated with increased attachment, and greater likelihood that a companion animal will be kept³.

Companion animal providers who follow evidence-based best practices will protect the welfare of their animals and increase the chances that potential guardians will be satisfied with the animal they acquire. Therefore, when assessing a companion animal provider prior to acquisition, potential guardians should consider the following factors which demonstrate that the provider prioritizes animal welfare:

- Use of care and housing practices that ensure the Five Freedoms for every animal and willingness to show animal housing to potential guardians;
- Transparent communication about animal information, including:
 - Health status (e.g., vaccination, any medical conditions, veterinary records)
 - Behavioural and life history (e.g., amount and types of socialization that puppies received, whether dogs are from rural or urban areas, whether cats had outdoor access or were indoor only)
 - In case of adoption from a shelter or rescue, full history of the animal may be unknown; however, this lack of information should be disclosed to the potential guardians;
- Use of animal transport procedures that comply with relevant transport regulations and ensure the Five Freedoms for every animal:
 - Survival rates for animals who are transported from their place of origin to another location for sale or adoption is known by the provider (animals are often transported to retail locations in cramped containers, and it is not uncommon for a proportion of animals to die in transport)
 - Distances animals travel is disclosed
 - Import permits are acquired (if applicable);
- Use of suitability matching procedures, including breed suitability, to assess purchaser/adopter and match them with suitable animals; and,
- Availability of post-adoption/post-purchase support from the animal provider.

If obtaining from a breeder, additional factors include:

- Use of breeding practices that protect animal health by selecting healthy animals for breeding, and/or eliminating animals with poor conformation from the breeding program through spaying/neutering in order to reduce heritable conditions that affect animal health and welfare (e.g., Brachycephalic syndrome causing breathing difficulties, musculoskeletal disorders, or behavioural concerns, such as fearfulness) and,
- Use of care and housing practices that ensure the Five Freedoms for the breeding animals (parents), and willingness to show animal housing to potential guardians:
 - An environment without the Five Freedoms results in poor health and welfare for the parent animals and can negatively affect the health and welfare of offspring animals, and is unethical.

Minimum acceptable standards of care for companion animal providers have been developed by various provincial and national organizations, and include the *Code of Practice for Canadian Kennel Operations*⁴; the *Code of Practice for Canadian Cattery Operations*⁵; *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*⁶; *Accreditation Standard for Humane Societies and Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*⁷; and *Animal Rescue Standards of Practice*⁸.

See also:

[Companion Animal Welfare](#)

[Companion Animal Confinement](#)

[Selective Breeding of Companion Animals](#)

[Transporting Live Animals](#)

[Wild and Exotic Animals Kept as Pets](#)

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- ⁸ Paws for Hope Network Partners. (2020). *Animal Rescue Standards of Practice*. Accessed 19 July 2022. Retrieved from <https://spca.bc.ca/programs-services/leaders-in-our->

DEFINITIONS

Adoption model: The use of a pet store, pet supply store or other appropriate retail setting to house and adopt homeless animals in partnership with an animal sheltering or rescue organization. In an adoption model, adopters are interviewed and matched with the best candidate. Adoption representatives inquire about the adopter's history with animals and ensure that the adopter has the knowledge and living conditions to be able to provide for the animal's Five Freedoms. Under this adoption model, the retail setting provides for the housing and welfare needs of the animals. In addition, all animals receive appropriate veterinary care, and all dogs, cats and rabbits are spayed or neutered prior to sale. Furthermore, provision is made to enable the adopter to return the animal in the event the adoption proves unsuccessful.

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Distress: A severe negative affective state caused by physical and/or psychological factors. Physical distress may arise when an animal is hungry, thirsty, too hot, too cold, diseased, injured or in pain to an elevated degree. Psychological distress may arise when an animal experiences fear, anxiety, frustration or depression to an elevated degree.

When used in a legal context¹ by animal protection officers and veterinarians:

"An animal is in distress if it is

(a) deprived of adequate food, water, shelter, ventilation, light, space, exercise, care or veterinary treatment,

(a.1) kept in conditions that are unsanitary

(a.2) not protected from excessive heat or cold,

(b) injured, sick, in pain or suffering, or

(c) abused or neglected."

¹ *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 372 (Section 12:1)

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.

Guardian: A person who or an organization that is primarily responsible for the welfare, care and management of an animal. An owner may be referred to as a guardian, but the term guardian is preferred in order to express that the relationship is one of responsibility for the care of an animal, not just ownership of property.

Stress: The physiological response to a stimulus in order to help an animal cope with his/her environment. The stress response can be associated with either positive emotions (e.g., excitement, arousal) or negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), depending upon the nature of the stimulus or the animal's perception of that stimulus. Chronic stress is detrimental to an animal's health and welfare.

Suffering: An enduring negative affective state. Suffering is associated with feelings such as pain, hunger, fear and anxiety. All sentient beings are capable of suffering.

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state. Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear, frustration).



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

SELECTIVE BREEDING OF COMPANION ANIMALS

The BC SPCA is opposed to any selective breeding practices that are likely to compromise the welfare of companion animals. In particular, the BC SPCA opposes selection for physical features or behaviours that directly or indirectly result in suffering. Such practices have the potential to affect multiple generations and thus large numbers of animals, and may impinge – with varying severity and duration – on their ability to experience the Five Freedoms. Moreover, animals with known detrimental genetic predispositions should not be bred.

The BC SPCA recognizes the value of the relationship between guardians and their companion animals, and believes these animals should have the best possible chance of experiencing good welfare throughout their lives. Accordingly, the BC SPCA believes that breeders of companion animals should prioritize health, temperament and quality of life, and avoid those practices that lead to poor physical and psychological welfare.

Approved by the Board of Directors – April 2011

BACKGROUND

As a result of selective breeding, many companion animals experience unacceptably high levels of disability and disease. Examples include (but are not limited to):

- skeleton and joint disorders (e.g., dysplasia of hip joints or elbows; fractures; luxation of elbow or patella; persistent fontanella)
- trachea collapse
- disorders of the vertebral column
- breathing difficulties
- blockage of lachrymal ducts
- disposition to birth difficulties
- abnormal positions of legs, which can cause difficulties in movement and joint degeneration
- abnormal positions of teeth, which can cause difficulties in feeding and caring for young
- abnormal size and form of eyes or eyelids (e.g., ectropium; entropium; large, protruding eyes), which can cause irritation, inflammation and degeneration as well as prolapse of eyes
- very long ears, which can be disposed to injuries
- markedly folded skin, which can lead to eczemas and, in the case of furrows around the eyes, irritation and inflammation of eyes

DEFINITIONS

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.

Selective breeding: The act of choosing to breed certain animals in order to produce offspring with specific traits of value to humans.

Suffering: An enduring negative affective state. Suffering is associated with feelings such as pain, hunger, fear and anxiety. All sentient beings are capable of suffering.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

TETHERING OF DOGS

The BC SPCA opposes tethering dogs without due regard for their welfare, given the risk of misuse; however, the BC SPCA recognizes that tethering dogs may be required in limited circumstances.

In such instances, it is the responsibility of the guardian to ensure that if a dog is to be tethered, it complies with applicable laws and regulations and is done in a way that minimizes potential negative welfare impacts.

Tethering limits choice, control and the ability to display species-specific behaviours. This may lead to negative emotional states such as fear, anxiety, and frustration.

If a tether is to be used, the BC SPCA recommends a running tether over a fixed tether.

Best practices for a tether include:

- Providing access to food and safe water¹;
- The tether is of size, weight and/or material that will not cause discomfort or injury^{1,3};
- The attachment to the tether is either a flat collar, martingale collar, or harness that is correctly fitted to the dog²;
- The minimum length of tether is 1.83m or 6ft 3in to enable the full and unrestricted movement of the animal^{1,2};
- The dog is tethered away from obstructions or other animals that would cause injury to the animal should the tether become entangled⁴;
- The tether is not in proximity of high traffic areas, including vehicles, people and other animals⁴;
- The tethering period is less than four (4) hours within a 24-hour period²;
- The dog has access to shelter to protect against extreme weather¹ and is tethered in terrain that is reasonably dry and flat⁴.
- The dog is supervised or checked on frequently
- The tether keeps the dog within the boundaries of the guardian's property

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2025

(replaces previous version, December 1982)

BACKGROUND

Tethering is securing an animal to an anchor point to confine them to a desired area⁴. There are two primary types of tethers: 1) fixed tether, in which the anchor point is fixed and 2) running tether, in which the anchor point moves freely along a wire⁴. Tethering of dogs has the potential to negatively impact a dog's welfare.

As of 2022, 24 states in the United States have laws against chaining and/or tethering⁵. The total number of jurisdictions with tethering laws or bylaws in Canada is unclear. A 2025 BC SPCA review of British Columbia municipalities found that 11 municipalities had bylaws banning the tethering of dogs, while an additional four municipalities have bylaws regulating their use.

The BC SPCA recommends alternatives to tethering of dogs, including:

- Secure fencing when possible (e.g. yards or dog runs)
- Leashed walks to allow the dog opportunities to explore new environments
- Off-leash time in designated off-leash areas, if appropriate
- Increased training and enrichment to address behaviours that make it challenging to keep the dog indoors

The BC SPCA recognizes that in certain circumstances, tethering may be the only option to contain a dog safely; for example, a dog guardian without a fenced yard or run may consider tethering to allow the dog outdoor access, tethering may be used to contain a dog who can escape a fenced area, to keep them away from hazards in a yard, or while camping or travelling. However, tethering dogs outdoors increases the likelihood of exposure to extreme weather, increased risk of injury or disease, and potential adverse interactions with wildlife, humans, or other dogs⁶.

In instances when dogs must be tethered, they should not be tethered using equipment that is likely to cause the dog physical or psychological harm, including but not limited to:

- Where they are attached to the tether with anything other than a flat collar, martingale collar, or harness that is correctly fitted to the dog²;
- Where a choke or prong collar forms part of the restraint²;
- Where a rope, cord, or chain is tied directly around the dog's neck².

Sled dog activities are regulated in British Columbia. Sled dog housing and care, including tethering, must be in compliance with the Sled Dog Standards of Care Regulation and Code of Practice³. Those who house sled dogs on tethers are encouraged to meet the recommendations in this position statement to further enhance the welfare of their dogs.

Limited research exists in dogs to show the impacts of tethering compared to different confinement methods, such as fencing. However, there is evidence in other species that tethering by the neck causes increased stress and behaviour changes^{7,8}. Preliminary data found that sled dogs who were housed tethered without the opportunity to exercise off-tether displayed increased repetitive behaviours compared to those housed untethered⁹.

Tethering dogs for extended periods increases the likelihood of isolation from other dogs and people. Raising and housing dogs under conditions of social and environmental restriction can result in negative behavioural outcomes such as increased barking, running away and aggression⁶. A study of risk factors for dog bites found that dogs chained in a yard were 2.8 times more likely to bite than unchained dogs¹⁰. In a study assessing characteristics of dog bites in children arriving at a trauma centre, 18% of dog bites occurred when a dog was tethered and within reach of the child¹¹. Another study found that, in fatal dog bite cases where the dog belonged to the victim, 38% of the fatalities involved a chained dog¹².

While limited research exists in this area, this position statement was developed using a risk mitigation approach based on the available scientific evidence, bylaws, and position statements from organizations around the world.

Background updated – September 2025

See also:

[Animal Training](#)

[Selective Breeding of Companion Animals](#)

[Dangerous Dogs and Public Safety](#)

[Companion Animal Handling and Restraint](#)

[Companion Animal Confinement](#)

[Responsible Companion Animal Sourcing](#)

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DEFINITIONS

Guardian: A person who or an organization that is primarily responsible for the welfare, care and management of an animal. An owner may be referred to as a guardian, but the term guardian is preferred in order to express that the relationship is one of responsibility for the care of an animal, not just ownership of property.

Tethering: Securing an animal to an anchor point to confine them to a desired area⁴.

Flat collar: A simple collar that lies flat around a dog’s neck and does not tighten when pulled. Can be a variety of widths.

Martingale collar: A collar with a loop of chain or fabric that allows the collar to tighten slightly when pulled. These collars are often used to prevent escape, especially for dogs who have narrow heads.

Choke collar: A looped collar, often made of chain, that tightens when pulled.

Prong collar: Sometimes also called a pinch collar, these collars are often made of metal and have numerous protrusions circling the neck. When pulled, the collar tightens slightly and the protrusions cause pressure around the neck.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

TRANSPORTING LIVE ANIMALS

The BC SPCA is opposed to the practice of transporting live animals in or on the open portion or cargo of a truck or other moving vehicle which is not equipped with a secured cage or animal carrier of a type suitable to adequately protect the animal from death, injury or undue discomfort.

Approved by the Board of Directors – January 1997



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

WILD-DOMESTIC ANIMAL-HYBRIDS

The BC SPCA is opposed to the keeping, breeding, sale, display or trade of hybrid wild animals (including exotic species), such as, wolf-dogs, savannah cats, zorses (horse-zebra) and other wild-domestic crosses.

Interbreeding between a wild and a domesticated animal negates thousands of years of domestication. This results in animals who are difficult to train and handle, present challenges for animal care workers (e.g., veterinarians and animal control officers) and have limited options for re-homing if a guardian is no longer able to care for them. These animals often experience poor welfare and exhibit signs of stress and frustration when their needs are not met.

The BC SPCA acknowledges that there are many wild-domestic hybrids currently living in homes but does not support ongoing breeding of these animals. Guardians of wild-domestic hybrid animals must strive to meet the Five Freedoms by employing husbandry practices and providing species-specific enclosures that meet their environmental, dietary, social and behavioural requirements, as well as by seeking appropriate veterinary care.

The BC SPCA encourages the adoption of legislation, regulation and policies that prohibit their importation, breeding, display and sale, protect their welfare, and minimize their risk to the environment and human health and safety.

Approved by the Board of Directors – February 2023
(replaces Wolf-Dog Hybrids, August 2009)

BACKGROUND

Given the unique needs of wild-domestic animal hybrids, animal welfare organizations are not equipped to handle and house them, and this places strain on their limited resources. Indeed, many animal welfare and protection organizations worldwide are opposed to wild-domestic hybrids out of concern for the welfare of the animals, the environment and public safety.^{1,6,7,8,9}

As they retain their wild instincts, wild-domestic animal hybrids require special consideration for handling, housing and veterinary care beyond the general care given to their domestic breeds.⁵ Prospective hybrid guardians may overlook or neglect the needs of the wild species, resulting in behavioural problems including aggression, health issues and escapes, overwhelming guardians.^{1,3,5,11}

While these issues may be manageable when animals are younger and smaller, guardians may struggle with behavioural changes associated with reaching sexual maturity at the same time the animal is growing larger and stronger. The BC SPCA is opposed to non-therapeutic procedures (e.g., declawing, removal of canine teeth) for behavioural reasons that are often used to make wild-domestic animal hybrids more manageable.

Hybrid animals vary in their “wildness” depending on their genetic composition. While it may be possible for some fourth-generation (F4) animals to be housed and homed following standard protocols, first, second and third-generation (F1-F3) hybrids are especially difficult given their wild nature, behaviour and health issues.¹⁰ Animal shelters and other animal care organizations are faced with the difficult task of determining if animals are a wild hybrid. Animals who can be confirmed 100 per cent wild animals as defined in the *BC Wildlife Act* are subject to existing legislation for possession.

Hybrids cannot easily be identified by visual examination alone. In many cases, animals marketed as varying levels of hybrid are simply domesticated animals with little to none of their wild counterpart genetics. Genetic tests are available for animals such as wolf-dog hybrids, but are sometimes inconclusive.^{1,11} Due to the close genetic relationship between dogs and wolves, hybrids may be undetectable by these tests beyond three generations.¹¹ For their own welfare and for public safety, suspected hybrid animals should undergo thorough behavioural assessments to assess their suitability to be placed in a home or accredited sanctuary. The absence of validated assessments contributes to the challenge of identifying appropriate homes, and unfortunately, there is often limited capacity for animal care organizations or accredited sanctuaries to take in these animals due to their wild nature and specialized needs. Even zoos, sanctuaries and other permanent captive settings may struggle to meet the physiological, emotional and behavioural needs of the animals (see: *Wild and Exotic Animals in Zoos, Aquariums and Other Permanent Captivity*).

Wild-domestic animal hybrids are often difficult to contain in an average home or enclosure setting, and pose a risk to their keepers and the public, as well as native wildlife and pets if they escape.⁴ Escaped animals may also be at risk of being involved in vehicle collisions, resulting in injury or death for the animal and/or people involved in the collision.

Legislation and regulations

The keeping of most wild animals as pets in B.C. is illegal under the provincial *Wildlife Act*; however, hybrid animals are not protected by this legislation or the provincial *Controlled Alien Species Regulation*. Similarly, hybrid animals are largely not addressed in protections set out for domesticated companion animals. The BC SPCA supports provincial regulation changes to address this gap. In the interim, municipal governments can explicitly prohibit the keeping of wild animals or wild-domestic hybrids as pets by adopting bylaws with a “positive” list of allowable animals instead of a list of prohibited species (sometimes referred to as a “negative” list).² Positive lists are easier to understand and enforce, as the lists are much smaller, including only those species that are allowed. Before a species can be added to a positive list, there needs to be sufficient justification that the animal makes a suitable pet and, until such time, the species is prohibited. With negative lists, however, species are

often only prohibited in response to problems such as a threat to public health or safety, an inability of shelters to accommodate the species, or a lack of readily available, scientific husbandry and housing information. Adopting positive lists allow governments to keep up with a constantly changing industry, while negative lists require continual review and updating and cause difficulty keeping pace.

See also:

[Wild and Exotic Animals Kept as Pets](#)

[Wild and Exotic Animals in Zoos, Aquariums and Other Permanent Captivity](#)

[Responsible Companion Animal Sourcing](#)

[Position Statement on Cosmetic and Other Non-therapeutic Alterations](#)

Background updated – February 2023

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DEFINITIONS

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Domesticated animals: Species that have been selectively bred by humans over hundreds and or thousands of generations in order to alter their genetics to create animals who are dependent, docile, predictable and controllable, and who no longer occupy an ecological niche in the wild.

Exotic animals: Species that are non-domesticated, non-native wild animals, whether captured from the wild or captive-bred.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed by the Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
3. Freedom from distress
4. Freedom from discomfort
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.

Hybrid wild animals: Individual animals who are the offspring of wild animals (whether native or exotic) who have bred with either domesticated animals or other species of wild animals (e.g., wolf-dog hybrids, savannah cats).

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state.

Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear and frustration).

Wild animals: Species that have not been domesticated. Wild animals have evolved in complex ecosystems resulting in mutual interdependencies with other animals and the surrounding environment. Wild animals may be exotic or indigenous, and wild-born or captive-bred.

* Normally, the BC SPCA prefers the term “companion animal” to the term “pet” as it signifies the mutually beneficial relationship that can exist between domesticated animals and humans. However, given that exotic animals are not domesticated, the term “pet” is used in this position statement instead.

Farm Animal Position Statements



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

FARM ANIMAL WELFARE

The BC SPCA supports only those farming practices that aim to provide good welfare for the animals raised while acknowledging it is not possible to prevent farm animals from experiencing all pain or discomfort in their lives. The BC SPCA believes that both the physical and psychological health of farm animals contribute to their welfare, which is synonymous with their quality of life.

To provide good welfare, the BC SPCA strongly encourages farmers to strive to meet the Five Freedoms by employing management practices and housing systems that address both the physical and psychological needs of the animals. In particular, the BC SPCA supports the reduction of farming practices that cause pain, injury or negative emotions (e.g., fear, anxiety, frustration) due to stress and supports replacement of such practices with ones that minimize or eliminate these negative effects. Further, the BC SPCA supports the implementation of practices that provide farm animals with opportunities to express behaviours that promote well-being (e.g., dust bathing, nest building, grazing).

The BC SPCA also supports the mandatory labelling of animal-derived food products with accurate claims about the methods of production used in order to enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions.

Approved by the Board of Directors – August 2018
(replaces previous version, September 2007)

BACKGROUND

Animal welfare is considered to be good when animals are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings like pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear and frustration. Pleasurable activities and behavioural needs include the ability to express positive natural behaviours like grazing, foraging, self-grooming, play and socializing with animals of their own kind.

In accordance with our position statement on Farm Animal Welfare, the BC SPCA has concerns about the following types of practices in animal agriculture:

- Housing any animal in an environment likely to cause pain, injury, reduced health or prolonged discomfort, thus compromising welfare
- Housing any animal in an environment that does not permit expression of strongly motivated behaviours that promote well-being, such as perching and dust bathing behaviour among

poultry, nest building behaviour among pregnant sows and grazing behaviour among ruminant animals like cattle and sheep

- Breeding animals to accentuate certain physical characteristics when the outcome compromises animal welfare
- Use of pharmaceutical drugs for non-therapeutic treatment or to support husbandry systems that compromise animal health
- Conducting painful surgical procedures without the use of sedation, anaesthetic or post-operative analgesic, or by using electro-immobilization alone, which does not prevent animals from experiencing pain, stress or fear
- Stressful or painful animal handling methods
- Feeding diets that are inappropriate for the species or stage of production, or that compromise animal welfare
- Feeding diets containing avian or mammalian byproducts to the same animal type
- Extended periods of feed and/or water withdrawal, such as before and during transport, in holding or to elicit specific production responses
- Transportation of animals for long durations, in crowded conditions or under extreme weather conditions, especially when the animals are too young, nursing, heavily lactating, sick, injured or otherwise at risk of pain, injury, suffering or death
- Subjecting animals to noisy, unfamiliar environments leading to stress, fear or increased risk of injury or disease
- Sale of animals through live auctions
- Inhumane killing or slaughter, as defined in the BC SPCA position statement on [Humane Killing](#)

It therefore follows that specific industry practices to which the BC SPCA is opposed include (but are not limited to):

- Confining egg-laying hens in cages
- Raising veal calves individually or in crates that restrict freedom of movement
- Keeping dairy cows continuously tethered (tied up) in stalls without daily exercise periods
- Keeping pigs tethered or in crates/stalls for the duration of the breeding, gestation and/or farrowing (birthing) periods
- Housing animals under high stocking densities
- Housing animals on hard or bare flooring (without bedding) or in pens or on floors with potentially injurious protrusions
- Housing animals in facilities with poor ventilation, inadequate temperature control, extended periods of insufficient lighting or poor sanitation
- Use of pharmaceutical drugs (e.g., antibiotics) to improve some aspect of performance, such as growth or feed efficiency
- Administration of pharmaceutical drugs to healthy animals as a non-therapeutic, preventative treatment in order to counterbalance the effects of husbandry systems that pose health challenges (e.g., high stocking densities). Although preventative, the appropriate use of vaccines and parasite control is considered therapeutic and is therefore acceptable.
- Performing surgeries such as disbudding, dehorning, tail docking and castration without the use of a sedative, anaesthetic or post-operative analgesic, or by using electro-immobilization alone to restrain animals during these procedures
- Inappropriate methods for moving, restraining, holding or carrying animals, such as the use of electric prods, striking animals and holding or carrying animals upside down for extended periods of time
- Forced moulting of poultry
- Forced feeding of waterfowl (e.g., for the production of foie gras)

- Display of animals at exhibitions and petting zoos where the Five Freedoms are not being met (Note: 4H clubs and petting zoos providing the Five Freedoms and that do not use auction houses / sale barns for transfer of ownership, are acceptable)
- The raising and breeding of wild animals, whether native or exotic, due to the difficulty in meeting the behavioural needs of these animals in captivity as well as the stress and risk of injury imposed by subjecting them to routine farm animal husbandry practices and transportation (e.g., raising of farmed ostrich, emu, zebras, kangaroos, elk, deer)

In partnership with Humane Canada (formerly known as the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, or CFHS), the BC SPCA participates in the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) process for developing Codes of Practice for the care and handling of farm animals. Code content is determined by consensus of key industry stakeholders such as farmers, transporters, processors, veterinarians, animal welfare scientists, the food retail and service industry and representatives from the humane movement.

Code 'requirements' define acceptable and unacceptable farming practices and are used in animal protection law enforcement in Canada. Code 'recommendations' encourage adoption of practices for continuous improvement of animal welfare but are not enforceable by law. BC SPCA participation in the NFACC Code process serves to advance Canadian standards for farm animals towards the Five Freedoms.

The BC SPCA and Humane Canada support the NFACC Codes as minimum obligations for farm animal care in Canada; however, this consensus agreement does not equate to unanimous endorsement of every aspect of each Code. In many instances, the BC SPCA and Humane Canada believe that farmers should meet higher standards than those required by the Codes. Such higher standards are described in the [SPCA Certified](#) program standards for the raising and handling of farm animals, which are fully endorsed by the BC SPCA and Humane Canada.

See also:

[Animals in Recreation, Sport and Entertainment](#)

[Animals Used for Clothing, Fashion and Art](#)

[Equine Welfare](#)

[Humane Killing](#)

Background updated – June 2021

DEFINITIONS

Anaesthesia: Temporary insensitivity to pain or loss of consciousness, especially as artificially induced by administration of gases or injectable drugs (called 'anaesthetics').

Analgesia: The inability to feel pain, without the loss of consciousness, especially as artificially induced by administration of gases or injectable drugs (called 'analgesics').

Animal husbandry: The practice of providing appropriate diet, housing, enrichment, etc. for animals under human care.

Anxiety: A negative emotion experienced in response to a perceived potential threat. Animals experience anxiety most often in new and unfamiliar situations and respond by heightening their vigilance in order to assess the potential for danger. The posture of an anxious animal varies by species. Anxiety differs from fear in that it is anticipatory, and may or may not have an identifiable stimulus.

Crate: A common type of confinement housing for individual animals that restricts the animal's movement. Typically, the animal can lie down, sit, stand up and take short steps forward or backward, but cannot turn around or roll over. *Syn: Stall.*

Distress: A severe negative affective state caused by physical and/or psychological factors. Physical distress may arise when an animal is hungry, thirsty, too hot, too cold, diseased, injured or in pain to an elevated degree. Psychological distress may arise when an animal experiences fear, anxiety, frustration or depression to an elevated degree.

When used in a legal context¹ by animal protection officers and veterinarians:

"An animal is in distress if it is:

- (a) Deprived of adequate food, water, shelter, ventilation, light, space, exercise, care or veterinary treatment
 - (a.1) Kept in conditions that are unsanitary
 - (a.2) Not protected from excessive heat or cold
- (b) Injured, sick, in pain or suffering, or
- (c) Abused or neglected"

Domesticated animals: Species that have been selectively bred by humans over hundreds or thousands of generations in order to alter their genetics to create animals who are dependant, docile, predictable and controllable, and who no longer occupy an ecological niche in the wild.

Electro-immobilization: The use of a small current of electricity passed through the body of an animal to paralyze the muscles and hold the animal still. While immobilized, the animal is conscious, aware and can feel pain, but cannot vocalize or struggle.

Emotions: Positive or negative feelings (e.g., happiness, fear, anxiety) that are distinct from sensations (e.g., warmth, hunger, pain). Animals experience emotions in response to stimuli from their environment. Emotions exist in order to help animals avoid harm or seek better welfare by triggering appropriate behaviours.

Exotic animals: Species that are non-domesticated, non-native wild animals, whether captured from the wild or captive-bred.

Farm animals: Domesticated animals who are typically raised on a farm. Examples include, but are not limited to, cows, sheep, pigs, horses, goats and chickens. These animals may be kept as companions or hobby animals. Although these animals may be raised for commercial purposes in some cases (farmed animals), not all farm animals are farmed (e.g., horses kept as companion animals or ridden as a hobby, backyard chickens for own use).

¹ *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 372 (Section 12:1)

Fear: A negative emotion experienced in response to a perceived real and immediate threat, usually accompanied by a physiological stress response. Unlike anxiety, fear always has an identifiable stimulus.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by the Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
3. Freedom from distress
4. Freedom from discomfort
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being

The Five Freedoms form the basis of the BC SPCA's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of all animals in human care. The BC SPCA acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.

Foie gras: A French term (pronounced “fwah-grah”) for the enlarged, fatty liver of ducks and geese achieved by inserting a feeding tube down the throat and force-feeding the bird a diet of mashed corn and fat.

Forced moulting: The practice of withholding food from poultry, most commonly egg-laying hens, for several days. This causes the hens to lose their feathers and roughly 30 percent of their body weight, and they stop laying eggs. Forced moulting is typically carried out near the end of a laying cycle once egg production has already begun to decline naturally. When food is restored after the moult period, it initiates a renewed period of egg laying and egg quality is improved.

Frustration: A negative emotion experienced when an animal is prevented from engaging in a behaviour that he/she is motivated to perform.

Non-therapeutic treatment: The use of pharmaceutical drugs on healthy animals without the intention of treating disease. Treatment is typically administered to improve some aspect of performance, such as growth or feed efficiency.

Physical health: The status of an animal's physiological function. Good physical health is characterized by the absence of clinical signs of disease and evidence of optimum body functions for all systems.

Psychological health: A state of psychological or emotional well-being. Emotional health is the preferred term of the BC SPCA.

Quality of life: *Syn: Welfare.*

Stall: *Syn: Crate.*

Stress: The physiological response to a stimulus in order to help an animal cope with his/her environment. The stress response can be associated with either positive emotions (e.g., excitement, arousal) or negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), depending upon the nature of the stimulus or

the animal's perception of that stimulus. Chronic stress is detrimental to an animal's health and welfare.

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state. Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear, frustration).

Well-being: Generally used to denote good welfare.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

EQUINE WELFARE

The BC SPCA is dedicated to promoting the health and welfare of horses and other equines, and celebrating their close bond with people. The Society also values the varied services that equines provide to humans and other animals, including, but not limited to, companionship, work, recreation, competition and research.

RESPONSIBLE CARE OF EQUINES

Equine guardians are expected to provide their animals with the Five Freedoms for the duration of their lives. Regardless of the purpose for which equines are raised, guardians should strive to ensure that:

- Equines have an appropriate temperament and level of experience, training and fitness for the activity and physical environment they are working in;
- The activity does not place excessive demands on equines (e.g., cause severe exhaustion);
- The activity does not result in ongoing discomfort, pain or injuries (e.g., from poorly fitted equipment);
- Equines receive sufficient rest from the activity;
- Risks to welfare from housing and transport (e.g., fear or frustration) are minimized;
- Other animals involved in the activity (e.g., cattle) do not experience physical or psychological distress; and
- There are suitable plans in place considering the individual needs of the animal for surplus equines, equines who do not meet breeding standards and equines retired from the activity.

It is unacceptable to put horses or other equines out on range without suitable food, water, shelter and continued care to meet their needs. This practice is considered to cause distress under the B.C. Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and may be considered an offense pursuant to the Criminal Code of Canada, particularly in an environment where grazing is scarce and the weather is extreme.

The BC SPCA does not endorse the use of horse handling and training techniques that use pain or fear to motivate behaviour change, which are unfortunately still common. The Society advocates the use of humane, reward-based methods to foster trust and build positive human-equine relationships (see also Animal Training).

To safeguard the welfare of equines, the BC SPCA supports:

- The adoption of legislation, regulation and policies that protect their health and welfare;
- The ongoing development and use of the highest professional accreditation standards and programs that evaluate and improve their care and handling; and
- Further research and development in all areas of their management that have an impact on welfare.

RESPONSIBLE BREEDING AND RETIREMENT OF EQUINES

The BC SPCA urges guardians and breeders of horses and other equines to exercise great caution in their breeding practices to prevent the production of surplus animals.

Should an individual guardian be unable to provide for the care of their equine, they should first seek to sell or give the animal directly to a suitable guardian or a responsible equine rescue or sanctuary. Should no appropriate placement be available, on-site euthanasia should be considered, as auctions, slaughter plants and transport may be the cause of significant stress. If transport is necessary, it should be conducted using equipment designed for equines and over the shortest distance possible.

In accordance with the BC SPCA position statement on Humane Killing, equines must be killed in a manner that either kills the animal instantly or that first renders the animal insensible to pain until death ensues. Both the behavioural nature and anatomy of horses and other equines can make humane handling and slaughter challenging. In order for equine slaughter to be considered humane, slaughter plants and government regulators must provide evidence that the facilities and methods used are appropriate for the species, as measured by legitimate third-party monitoring of animal welfare indicators such as vocalisation, electric prod use, instances of slipping or falling, stun efficacy and post-stun sensibility.

Approved by the Board of Directors – January 2021

(replaces Equine Welfare, July 2012)

BACKGROUND

There are more than 57,000 horses used for recreation (54%), racing (22%), sport (13%) and guide, ranch or other work (11%) in British Columbia.¹ Roughly 20,000 households around the province are involved in the equine sector.¹ While the average horse-owning household in B.C. has 3.3 horses¹, it is estimated that only two-thirds of guardians live on the same property as their horse².

Depending on the purpose for which they are raised, equines may face risks to their physical and psychological well-being. Such risks concern the ways in which they are bred, raised, housed, trained, handled and transported, as well as the activities themselves. However, regardless of purpose, all equine guardians should have a plan and provide for the health and welfare of their animals, with considerations

made for:

- Sanitary and comfortable bedding and housing;
- Adequate nutrition that includes a high ratio of high-fibre roughage and allows for foraging throughout the day;
- Appropriate preventative medical care including vaccinations, parasite control and dental care;
- Appropriate grooming and hoof care;
- Social contact with other equines that permits expression of natural behaviours such as mutual grooming and play;
- Access to spaces large enough for equines to use all gaits to roam and interact with other equines across distances;
- Enrichment that provides opportunities for physical and mental stimulation to prevent boredom and frustration;
- Humane (i.e., non-aversive-based) handling and training;
- Breeding or prevention of breeding (e.g., castration of animals not intended for breeding);
- Humane methods of permanent identification (e.g., microchipping);
- Transportation;
- Immediate veterinary care in medical emergencies;
- Transportation, housing and care in the event of a natural disaster or other non-medical emergency;
- Retirement and aging; and
- Euthanasia.

Should a horse or other equine no longer be desired for their original purpose, the guardian must be prepared to provide for their lifelong care or re-home them responsibly. The BC SPCA therefore encourages potential guardians to think carefully about their decision to acquire an equine, who can live for more than 30 years, and ensure they have the long-term funds needed to provide for their welfare.

Equine guardians should be aware that auctioning of their animal may result in the animal being purchased for slaughter rather than for recreational purposes. Auctions and slaughter plants are distressing environments for equines, exposing them to unfamiliar sights, sounds, smells, and housing and handling methods. Due to the potential for severe welfare harms, the BC SPCA strongly recommends that equine guardians instead consider placing the animal with another suitable recreational guardian or having the animal euthanized on-site.

Minimum acceptable standards of care for horses and other equines are defined in the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines³, available from the National Farm Animal Care Council. The Review of Scientific Research on Priority Issues⁴, which supports the Code, contains further information for equine guardians, including learning theory and training psychology.

See also:

[Animal Training](#)

[Animals in Recreation, Sport and Entertainment](#)
[Animals in the Film and Television Industry](#)
[Animals Used in Science](#)
[Cosmetic and Other Non-Therapeutic Alterations](#)
[Farm Animal Welfare](#)
[Humane Killing](#)
[Selective Breeding of Companion Animals](#)

Background updated – January 2021

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DEFINITIONS

Abandonment (of an animal): The act of leaving an animal in a situation where the animal must fend for her-/himself. Abandonment is illegal.

Anxiety: A negative emotion experienced in response to uncertainty about one's environment. Animals experience anxiety most often in new and unfamiliar situations and respond by heightening their vigilance in order to assess the potential for danger. The posture of an anxious animal varies by species.

Aversive-based training: Any training method, device or tool that an animal perceives as physically or emotionally uncomfortable.

Distress: A severe negative affective state caused by physical and/or psychological factors. Physical distress may arise when an animal is hungry, thirsty, too hot, too cold, diseased, injured or in pain to an elevated degree. Psychological distress may arise when an animal experiences fear, anxiety, frustration or depression to an elevated degree.

When used in a legal context¹ by animal protection officers and veterinarians:

“An animal is in distress if it is

- (a) deprived of adequate food, water, shelter, ventilation, light, space, exercise, care or veterinary treatment,
 - (a.1) kept in conditions that are unsanitary,
 - (a.2) not protected from excessive heat or cold,
- (b) injured, sick, in pain or suffering, or
- (c) abused or neglected.”

¹ *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 372 (Section 12:1)

Fear: A negative emotion experienced in response to perceived danger or threat, usually accompanied by a physiological stress response.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed by the Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA’s Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
3. Freedom from distress
4. Freedom from discomfort
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA’s Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society’s Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.

Humane killing: A method that ensures an animal is either killed instantly or that involves rendering an animal insensible to pain until death ensues.

Humane training: Training or caring for an animal without using pain, fear, physical or verbal intimidation techniques.

Insensible: Lacking sensory perception or ability to react to a stimulus.

Pain: An unpleasant sensation generally felt in response to injury, disease or other forms of physical harm.

Reward-based training: Any training technique, tool or device that an animal does not perceive as physically or emotionally uncomfortable.

Stress: The physiological response to a stimulus in order to help an animal cope with his/her environment. The stress response can be associated with either positive emotions (e.g., excitement, arousal) or negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), depending upon the nature of the stimulus or the animal's perception of that stimulus.

Suffering: An enduring negative affective state. Suffering is associated with feelings such as pain, hunger, fear and anxiety. All sentient beings are capable of suffering.

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state.

Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear and frustration).



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

HUMANE KILLING

The BC SPCA believes that the methods used to kill any animal must be humane. The BC SPCA can only consider a method of animal killing to be humane if it either kills an animal instantly or it first renders the animal insensible to pain until death ensues.

The handling methods, equipment and facilities used must also ensure that animal fear, pain and anxiety are kept to absolutely minimal levels prior to and during killing.

Approved by the Board of Directors – July 2012

BACKGROUND

In reference to slaughter of farm animals, it is imperative for animals to be rendered unconscious and insensible to pain prior to slaughter, notwithstanding religious or ethnic custom. The stunning method used to achieve insensibility must meet provincial and federal regulatory requirements, and must be capable of consistently rendering an animal insensible on the first attempt. Every animal must be checked for sensibility after stunning and prior to delivery of the final killing step (e.g., bleed out).

No more than 1% of animals should require a second attempt to render them unconscious. Should the first attempt fail, a second stun must be delivered immediately after the first attempt. A backup stunning device must be available within immediate reach, in case the primary stunning device fails. When checking for sensibility, a variety of signs should be observed¹.

While respecting individual religious or cultural practices, scientific evidence indicates there are greater risks of animal suffering during ritual slaughter conducted without prior stunning (e.g., kosher or halal) than for conventional slaughter^{2,3,4,5,6}. These methods are distressing to the animal due to:

- the increased restraint necessary;
- pain experienced during the throat cutting procedure; and
- pain and stress experienced by the conscious animal during subsequent bleeding out.

¹ A full description of signs of sensibility can be found in the OIE Guidelines for the Slaughter of Animals (available at www.oie.int) and the American Meat Institute's Animal Handling Guidelines (available at www.meatami.com).

Stunning the animal immediately after the initial cut is made may mitigate some, but not all, of these concerns.

In order to minimise animal stress and ensure accurate and effective stunning, any slaughter facility must be designed to allow calm handling and effective and appropriate restraint of the species being killed. Employees handling live animals must be trained in low-stress animal handling techniques and must never physically or psychologically abuse an animal. Employees conducting stunning and killing must be trained in approved techniques and provided with sufficient relief to avoid fatigue. All stunning equipment must be used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and regularly maintained to ensure effective stunning occurs.

Government inspectors, facility employees and independent auditors should conduct scoring of animal welfare indicators such as vocalisation, electric prod use, instances of slipping or falling, stun efficacy and post-stun sensibility to ensure regulatory and industry standards are met and to encourage continuous improvement.

Background updated – July 2012

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DEFINITIONS

Anxiety: A negative emotion experienced in response to uncertainty about one's environment. Animals experience anxiety most often in new and unfamiliar situations and respond by heightening their vigilance in order to assess the potential for danger. The posture of an anxious animal varies by species.

Distress: A severe negative affective state caused by physical and/or psychological factors. Physical distress may arise when an animal is hungry, thirsty, too hot, too cold, diseased, injured or in pain to an elevated degree. Psychological distress may arise when an animal experiences fear, anxiety, frustration or depression to an elevated degree.

When used in a legal context¹ by animal protection officers and veterinarians:

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(a.1) kept in conditions that are unsanitary

(a.2) not protected from excessive heat or cold,

(b) injured, sick, in pain or suffering, or

(c) abused or neglected."

¹ *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 372 (Section 12:1)

Fear: A negative emotion experienced in response to perceived danger or threat, usually accompanied by a physiological stress response.

Humane: Actions that promote good welfare and minimize suffering.

Humane killing: A method that ensures an animal is either killed instantly or that involves rendering an animal insensible to pain until death ensues.

Insensible: Lacking sensory perception or ability to react to a stimulus.

Pain: An unpleasant sensation generally felt in response to injury, disease or other forms of physical harm.

Stress: The physiological response to a stimulus in order to help an animal cope with his/her environment. The stress response can be associated with either positive emotions (e.g., excitement, arousal) or negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), depending upon the nature of the stimulus or the animal's perception of that stimulus.

Suffering: An enduring negative affective state. Suffering is associated with feelings such as pain, hunger, fear and anxiety. All sentient beings are capable of suffering.

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state.

Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear and frustration).

Wildlife and Exotic Animal Position Statements



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

WILD ANIMAL WELFARE

Human activities, directly and indirectly, have an impact on all other species of animals and plants on earth through our common ecosystem of air, earth and water. The BC SPCA recognizes and values our interconnectedness with all animals, and strives to enhance their quality of life. Wild animals are unique in that they may be free-living or under our guardianship in captivity. In both circumstances, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and reduce intentional and unintentional human impacts that may compromise the welfare of wild animals. Although the conservation and preservation of species biodiversity is imperative for the survival of wild animals, the value and welfare needs of an individual wild animal must be understood and balanced with those of the species.

Free-living wildlife are those non-domestic animals that are generally born, reproduce and die in the wild. Occasionally, captive-bred wild animals are released into nature to augment species populations. Humans intentionally and unintentionally impact free-living wildlife across the globe, and must strive to reduce any negative impacts on individual wild animals and protect species through conservation.

Captive wild animals may be wild-born or captive-bred and are physically confined from living in the wild. Guardians of captive wildlife must strive to meet the Five Freedoms by employing management practices and species-specific enclosures that meet the physiological, emotional, and behavioural needs of the animals.

Approved by the Board of Directors – August 2009



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

FALCONRY

The BC SPCA opposes the keeping, breeding and importing of captive raptors to hunt any animal species due to the pain, suffering, and harassment of the animals targeted and the often inhumane husbandry practices and training techniques. Additionally, the current practice in BC allows young birds to be taken from the wild and often improperly trained wild or captive-bred birds are set free or are never recovered, thus suffering poor welfare. The BC SPCA is opposed to both practices and to the inhumane methods of raising and using live food species for falconry birds.

The BC SPCA does not oppose the keeping and use of non-releasable raptors from rehabilitation programs in legitimate educational and wildlife management programs as long as their Five Freedoms are met. Educational activities must have specific learning goals as part of a humane education curriculum, and must not be for entertainment, sport promotion or commercial gain. Wildlife management programs may include flying raptors as a non-lethal management tool to address nuisance wildlife at airports, grain elevators, landfills, and buildings in order to drive other animals away from situations in which they could be injured or killed.

Approved by the Board of Directors – August 2009



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

FISH AND AQUATIC INVERTEBRATE WELFARE

The BC SPCA believes the balance of scientific evidence indicates that fish and cephalopods (e.g., octopuses, squids) are sentient, capable of experiencing pain, fear and distress. Research also suggests that decapod crustaceans (e.g., crabs, lobsters) have the capacity to feel pain. The Society therefore advocates the adoption of practices that minimize stress and suffering in these animals.

To safeguard the welfare of fish and aquatic invertebrates, the BC SPCA supports:

- The adoption of legislation, regulation and policies that protect their health and welfare;
- The development and use of the highest professional accreditation standards and programs that evaluate and improve their capture, care, breeding, handling, transport, release and killing; and
- Further research and development in all areas of their management that have an impact on welfare.

Approved by the Board of Directors – December 2018
(replaces Sport Fishing, January 1999)

BACKGROUND

Fish and aquatic invertebrates play diverse roles in our society. They are farmed and caught for consumption; they are subjects of research, teaching and testing; they are kept as companion animals; they are used in recreation, sport and entertainment; and they are the focus of many conservation efforts.^{1,2} Fish in particular are the most heavily used vertebrate animal on Earth: for instance, an estimated 47 billion fish are landed recreationally every year, with a further 157 billion caught commercially.³

Evidence that fish can feel pain, experience fear and are capable of suffering has been accumulating for decades. It has now reached a point where the sentience of fish is acknowledged by scientists around the world.¹ Similarly, there is widespread recognition of sentience in cephalopods (e.g., octopuses, squids) within the scientific community.⁴ It must be noted, however, that some still view sentience in these animals with skepticism.⁵

Research also suggests that decapod crustaceans (e.g., crabs, lobsters) have the capacity to feel pain, and some consider this evidence to be as strong as the evidence for pain in fish.⁶ However, others

regard the scientific literature on the subject as immature.⁷ As a result, the idea that fish experience pain has gained wider acceptance to date than the concept of decapod pain.⁶

Based on the available evidence on the functioning of fish, cephalopods and decapod crustaceans, many scientists have concluded that, firstly, there should be concern for their welfare and, secondly, there should be careful consideration of human actions that impact their welfare.⁸⁻¹⁵

Human activities affect the welfare of fish and aquatic invertebrates directly and indirectly, and with varying severity and duration. Poor welfare can occur whenever these animals are caught^{16, 17}, cared for in captivity¹⁸⁻²⁰, bred^{1, 21, 22}, handled^{23, 24}, transported^{23, 24}, released^{25, 26} or killed^{27, 28}. Furthermore, free-living fish and aquatic invertebrates may be impacted by human-caused environmental degradation and disturbance.^{17, 29, 30}

Worldwide, a number of prominent organizations have already responded by adopting welfare guidelines or statements for fish and aquatic invertebrates: the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC)³¹, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)³², the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)³³, the European Union (EU)³⁴, the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)³⁵, and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) in both the United Kingdom³⁶ and Australia³⁷, among others.

Given the significant number of animals involved, the myriad ways that humans use and interact with them, and their ability to suffer, the BC SPCA believes that fish and aquatic invertebrates are due far greater consideration than they currently receive. The Society therefore urges all individuals and institutions responsible for these animals to make evidence-based improvements to their welfare.

See also:

[Animals in Recreation, Sport and Entertainment](#)

[Animals Used in Research](#)

[Animals Used in Science](#)

[Animals Used in Testing](#)

[Farm Animal Welfare](#)

[Humane Killing](#)

[Live Feeding to Animals in Captivity](#)

[Use of Animals in Teaching](#)

[Wild and Exotic Animals in Zoos, Aquariums and Other Permanent Captivity](#)

[Wild and Exotic Animals Kept as Pets](#)

[Wild Animal Welfare](#)

Background updated – January 2022

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DEFINITIONS

Cephalopods: Invertebrate animals included in the class *Cephalopoda*, characterized by a ring of at least eight arms around their head (e.g., octopuses, squids, cuttlefishes).

Decapod crustaceans: Invertebrate animals included in the order *Decapoda*, characterized by a hard exoskeleton and a set of ten legs (e.g., crayfishes, crabs, lobsters, shrimps).

Distress: A severe negative affective state caused by physical and/or psychological factors. Physical distress may arise when an animal is hungry, thirsty, too hot, too cold, diseased, injured or in pain to an elevated degree. Psychological distress may arise when an animal experiences fear, anxiety, frustration or depression to an elevated degree.

When used in a legal context¹ by animal protection officers and veterinarians:

“An animal is in distress if it is

- (a) deprived of adequate food, water, shelter, ventilation, light, space, exercise, care or veterinary treatment,
 - (a.1) kept in conditions that are unsanitary,
 - (a.2) not protected from excessive heat or cold,
- (b) injured, sick, in pain or suffering, or
- (c) abused or neglected.”

¹ *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 372 (Section 12:1)

Invertebrates: Animals lacking a vertebral column, or spine (e.g., insects, arachnids, cephalopods, crustaceans).

Pain: An unpleasant sensation generally felt in response to injury, disease or other forms of physical harm.

Sentience/Sentient: The ability to perceive, experience and feel. This implies the ability to suffer and to experience pleasure, but does not require the faculty of self-awareness.

Stress: The physiological response to a stimulus in order to help an animal cope with his/her environment. The stress response can be associated with either positive emotions (e.g., excitement, arousal) or negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), depending upon the nature of the stimulus or the animal's perception of that stimulus. Chronic stress is detrimental to an animal's health and welfare.

Suffering: An enduring negative affective state. Suffering is associated with feelings such as pain, hunger, fear and anxiety. All sentient beings are capable of suffering.

Vertebrates: Animals possessing a vertebral column, or spine (e.g., reptiles, amphibians, fish, birds, mammals).

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state. Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear, frustration).



THE BRITISH COLUMBIA

SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

POSITION STATEMENT

HUNTING, TRAPPING AND FISHING

The BC SPCA is opposed to hunting, trapping and fishing any animal for recreation, sport, pleasure and/or trophy. Where these activities are practiced for consumptive or subsistence purposes, they must be carried out in an ethical, humane, responsible and sustainable manner by qualified and experienced individuals (or under the supervision of experienced individuals), abiding by applicable laws and regulations.

Hunting, trapping and fishing are traditional practices of Indigenous people for cultural, ceremonial, livelihood and other subsistence purposes, and are an integral aspect of Indigenous Title, Rights, and laws.

In all instances, harvesting should come from abundant populations that do not impact ecological integrity.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2022

(replaces Hunting, 2017; Trapping, 2009)

BACKGROUND

The BC SPCA acknowledges that hunting, trapping and fishing have been part of Indigenous people's way of life for millennia, and that these activities are essential for fostering cultural identity, connection with their community and the land, and for food security and economic life.^{1,2,3} These traditional practices have endured despite the continual harms of colonization.¹

Harvesting refers to hunting, trapping and fishing methods for both the capture and killing of wildlife, whether by firearms or other tools, or by use of traps that either kill or restrain animals. Harvesting activities should minimize the infliction of pain and suffering to animals by using techniques that cause instant death. Harvesting should come from abundant populations, which can sustain harvest without compromising the integrity of the ecosystem. Overharvesting, particularly by commercial interests, has detrimental impacts on subsistence communities – for example, abalone are considered both an ecological and cultural keystone species to the Gitga'at people, but are no longer available due to commercial overfishing.² Harvesting activities should respect the laws and customs of the Indigenous Nation in which the activities are occurring.

Additionally, harvesting tools and techniques should consider any potential negative impacts to the environment. For example, lead shot and lead sinkers are highly toxic environmental pollutants that cause unnecessary animal suffering and death through ingestion or secondary lead poisoning.

The BC SPCA does not condone the introduction of species to increase opportunities for harvesting purposes (e.g., feral pigs, fallow deer, rainbow trout). Such activities provide incentive to maintain a population of introduced species, often with negative consequences for the ecosystems they are introduced to.

HUNTING

Subsistence hunting should be carried out in a manner that respects the dignity of the animals, only from abundant populations to avoid harm to ecological integrity.² Hunters should be experienced and have thorough knowledge of an animal's natural history and their environment, or be supervised by mentors who have this knowledge.⁴ Hunting methods should achieve rapid death, using the best available technologies and techniques to achieve this. For example, rates of injured deer evading capture are substantially higher for bow hunting than for rifles.^{5,6} Hunters should not attempt to kill unless they can reasonably expect a successful lethal shot, and should limit the shot distance to within their individual marksmanship.⁵

In addition, hunters should aim to minimize disturbances to hunted populations, and limit the number of animals killed to only those required to meet the needs of the hunter, their family and their community.⁴ Ethical hunting includes the principles of fair chase (e.g., no canned hunts, no baiting or pit lamping) and does not cause hunted animals unnecessary harm or stress (e.g., using hunting dogs).

TRAPPING

Many types of traps currently used in Canada – both lethal and non-lethal – cause severe injuries, distress, or death for target and non-target species.^{7,8,9} For example, non-lethal snares cause significant physical injuries to a large majority of animals trapped, and should not be condoned.¹⁰ Traps should be checked frequently or fitted with monitoring tools to ensure animals are not left to suffer in traps for long periods of time, dependent on the context of the species, environmental factors, trap mechanism and regulations. Any animals found injured and alive in traps should be quickly and humanely killed to prevent further suffering.

Trapping carried out for subsistence purposes should target abundant species to ensure ecological integrity and only use species-selective traps that cause instant death.² Trappers should be knowledgeable about the local ecosystem and biology of the animals targeted to minimize harms to them and limit potential captures of non-target animals.⁴ Where trapping is used for urban wildlife control, only live traps that do not cause pain or injury should be used for relocation or exclusion purposes. When relocation is not an option for legal or biological reasons, either lethal traps that cause instant death or live traps directly followed by humane killing should be used.

Trapping standards should focus on continual improvement, and be improved as developments in trapping technology allow.⁹ The BC SPCA encourages the development of new trapping standards, or the amendment of existing standards to address shortcomings in current documentation, in addition to the regulation of traps to ensure continued improvement in humaneness.^{9,11}

FISHING

The BC SPCA acknowledges that like other animals, fish can perceive pain and have cognitive abilities that match or exceed other vertebrates, and should be granted similar considerations for their welfare.^{12,13} The available scientific research suggests that all recreational fishing results in some level of injury and stress, and these effects should be minimized through changes in equipment and angling practices.¹⁴ See also: BC SPCA position statement on Fish and Aquatic Invertebrate Welfare.

Fishing techniques should aim to minimize animal harms by minimizing angling duration and air exposure, improving handling, choosing tackle less likely to cause injury, avoiding fishing in extreme weather conditions or sensitive habitats, and avoiding fishing during the reproductive period.¹⁴ Caught fish should be rendered immediately and permanently unconscious using a specially designed club or stunning device – fish should not be left to die from asphyxiation in air.^{12,14}

The BC SPCA does not condone catch-and-release fishing, even from abundant populations, as hooking and handling causes unnecessary animal suffering, without the benefit of subsistence use.^{12,15,16} Although catch-and-release techniques may be justified for conservation purposes (e.g., tagging of a threatened species), researchers should still carefully consider the welfare of the fish and make responsible decisions whether or not to return fish to the water based on stress, injuries and mortality potential.¹⁴

Background updated – September 2022

See also:

[Fish and Aquatic Invertebrate Welfare](#)

[Humane Killing](#)

[Marine Mammal Welfare](#)

[Nuisance Wildlife Management](#)

[Wild Animal Welfare](#)

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DEFINITIONS

Baiting: Using meat, cereals, cultivated crops, restrained animal, or any manufactured product or material that may attract wildlife, and includes plastic or other imitation foods, to lure wildlife closer to the person intending to kill it.

Canned hunt: A practice that involves the hunting of a contained animal, thereby preventing fair chase (e.g., fencing), or animals who have been bred, raised in captivity and released specifically to be hunted.

Cultural keystone species: Species that form the contextual underpinnings of a culture, as reflected in their fundamental roles in diet, as materials, in medicine, or in spiritual practices, and key to both the identity and survival of a people (Garibaldi & Turner 2004).

Ecological keystone species: Species essential to the integrity of an ecosystem by virtue of the key roles they play in its overall structure and function (Garibaldi & Turner 2004).

Ecosystem: A dynamic set of living organisms (plants, animals and microorganisms) all interacting amongst themselves and with the environment in which they live (soil, climate, water and light).

Hunting: The capture and killing of wildlife, whether by firearms or other weapon, or by use of traps that either kill or restrain.

Pit lamping: A practice that involves the use of lights to hunt at night, making use of animals' reflective eyes.

Sport hunting: The hunting of wildlife for recreational purposes that includes stalking, pursuing or otherwise seeking the wild animal, followed by killing or attempting to kill it, and may include removal of select meat cuts from the animal.

Subsistence use: The intent of animal use for only personal consumption to meet the basic food and clothing needs of an individual and/or their family. For Indigenous peoples, this includes cultural, ceremonial, consumptive, livelihood and other traditional purposes.

Trapping: The capture of wild or domestic animals in traps that either kill or restrain them.

Trophy hunting: The selective hunting of wild animals for human recreation, regardless if meat is removed from the animal. The trophy is the animal or part of the animal that is kept, and usually displayed, to represent the success of the hunt.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

LIVE FEEDING TO ANIMALS IN CAPTIVITY

The BC SPCA is opposed to the feeding of live vertebrates to companion, farm, exotic or zoo animals. This practice is unnecessary as these animals will never be released to the wild or need to develop the skills to catch and eat live prey.

The BC SPCA recognizes there are limited situations when the feeding of live prey to injured or orphaned wild animals in rehabilitation (e.g. raptors) may be necessary to ensure the patients can hunt successfully when released; only under certain circumstances is this permissible. Wild animals with previous hunting experience and no impairments that would prevent hunting in the wild do not require to be fed live prey in rehabilitation care. Wild animals that are in permanent captivity in rehabilitation as display, foster or breeding animals also do not require live feeding as they will not be released to the wild.

All prey animals raised for food should be provided with the Five Freedoms. Prey species should be sourced from reputable businesses that humanely raise and euthanize these animals for food purposes only.

The use of live prey in rehabilitation should always be conducted under the supervision of professional wildlife rehabilitators who have the ability to euthanize the prey immediately if the predator is unsuccessful in doing so. Further, the fewest number of live prey animals that confirms the patient's ability to hunt should be used.

Approved by the Board of Directors – July 2012

BACKGROUND

In order to provide injured and orphaned wild animals the necessary tools to be successful when returned to the wild, feeding live prey may be required in certain rehabilitation cases. The development of hunting skills is necessary before release, and the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council and National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association recommend predators in rehabilitation must be given the opportunity to recognize and kill live prey.^{1,2}

Many nutritional needs of wildlife in temporary captivity are met through fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds and eggs, as well as packaged pet and specialty foods. Further, to meet the natural dietary requirements of particular wild animals, both live and dead fish, shellfish and insect products are regularly provided. However, for certain species – such as owls, hawks and falcons – their diets in the wild are composed mostly of rodents and small birds. Although both these prey items are commercially

available frozen and widely used in rehabilitation, there are rare times when the feeding of live prey is necessary.

For example, an orphaned owl chick raised in captivity does not have previous experience in the wild to catch a live rodent. Releasing a healthy juvenile owl without knowing if it had the ability to hunt live prey would be inhumane as it may die of starvation. An adult hawk with head trauma from being hit by a car can suffer neurological damage that may impair its ability to ever hunt again. Rehabilitators must know that the hawk has full capacity to hunt live prey again before release.

To date, few research studies have compared the post-release survival of wild animals fed live prey during rehabilitation to the survival of wild animals released without this training. The BC SPCA strongly recommends that more scientific study be undertaken to determine the post-release effects of live feeding in rehabilitation, and encourages the development of best practices for live feeding in rehabilitation to reduce the number of prey individuals required for testing.

Background updated – July 2012

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DEFINITIONS

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.

Humane: Actions that promote good welfare and minimize suffering.

Wildlife rehabilitator: An individual with formal training in wild animal care and natural history, permitted by applicable government agencies to provide treatment and husbandry to injured, orphaned and sick wildlife. Such persons should adhere to minimum international wildlife care

standards, participate in regular professional development and maintain membership to regional and national wildlife rehabilitation associations.

Vertebrate: An animal member of the subphylum Vertebrata. Also known as chordates that have backbones and spinal columns, vertebrates include but are not limited to fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals and birds.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENTS

MARINE MAMMAL WELFARE

WELFARE OF MARINE MAMMALS

The BC SPCA recognizes the complex needs of these highly sentient and social animals. Marine mammals face numerous threats to their welfare from direct human activities such as captivity, ecotourism, research and hunting, and indirectly from pollution and overfishing. The BC SPCA strives to improve the lives of marine mammals through education and advocacy.

CAPTIVITY

The BC SPCA is opposed to the capture, confinement and breeding of marine mammals for entertainment or educational display. Institutions, facilities and businesses that currently house marine mammals must aim to provide the animals with the Five Freedoms and meet the highest professional accreditation standards. The BC SPCA supports the phasing out of such programs as the full provision of the Five Freedoms is not possible for wild animals who require large and diverse aquatic habitats to live.

ECOTOURISM

The BC SPCA supports whale-watching and other marine mammal viewing in their natural habitat from land or water, as one way to educate the public in developing a better understanding and appreciation of these highly intelligent and social creatures. Land-based watching, where appropriate, is preferable as there is less risk to the animals. Marine-based viewing should be conducted to the highest industry standards by regulated operators, with special attention paid to the issue of proximity as the animals are very vulnerable to disturbance, especially during feeding, breeding, birthing and nursing.

The BC SPCA opposes activities involving the direct interaction of humans with marine mammals, such as swimming with dolphins and feeding of all marine mammals, as such activities are in direct interference with the species' natural behaviour.

RESEARCH

The BC SPCA is opposed to the capture, permanent confinement and captive breeding of marine mammals. Only non-invasive and non-lethal research that temporarily confines the animals and directly benefits the species is acceptable. The Society believes that appropriate pain control should be administered for procedures such as branding and other painful monitoring techniques; and that anaesthesia, analgesia, tranquilization and euthanasia only be conducted by trained technicians or researchers as per the BC SPCA position statement on Animals in Research.

HUNTING – WHALING

The BC SPCA is opposed to the hunting or any non-subsistence killing of all cetaceans, including the killing for supposed “scientific research” that is carried out by some nations through an exemption in the international treaty but against a global moratorium on whaling. Standard practices of killing these animals using harpoons or standard firearms result in a lingering, painful and inhumane death. Although the meat and parts may be sold for use following such supposed “research projects,” the principle of killing healthy animals and exploiting their products or parts for profit is inconsistent with the BC SPCA position statement on Hunting.

HUNTING – SEALING

The BC SPCA is opposed to the commercial hunting of seals because the principal purpose of the activity is to supply pelts for the fashion clothing industry, which is inconsistent with the BC SPCA position statement on Animals Used for Clothing, Fashion and Art.

Further, the BC SPCA is opposed to the killing of seals because current standard methods have not proven to consistently result in a quick death with minimal suffering. In the immediate term, the BC SPCA supports mandatory on-site third-party supervision of seal hunts in Canada to ensure humane practices are followed. At a minimum, sealers should be expected to meet the same standards of humane killing required by law of other animal slaughter industries or should cease the practice.

In addition, the BC SPCA is opposed to culling marine mammals for population control (unless these animals are suffering due to health concerns), to protect fish farms, or to improve the viability of fish stocks without scientific evidence that demonstrates fish stock recovery is entirely dependent on marine mammal predation. If culling does occur, humane practices must be followed.

Approved by the Board of Directors – October 2011

BACKGROUND

The BC SPCA has historically opposed the commercial seal hunt in Canada, but we also recognize other direct activities that negatively impact marine mammals nationally and internationally, in the wild and in captivity.

Further, we recognize some aboriginal communities who hunt for subsistence purposes have few alternatives to the products harvested from marine mammals. However, large scale commercial harvesting of marine mammals by aboriginal communities under the guise of subsistence hunting is not supported. Subsistence hunting in these communities should only be carried out by qualified and experienced hunters, and only in a way that is humane, responsible and sustainable. Techniques which minimize the infliction of pain or suffering and cause instant death must be employed as in accordance with the BC SPCA position statement on Hunting.

Background updated – October 2011

DEFINITIONS

Marine mammals: Mammals who are ocean-dwelling or depend on the ocean for food and include, but are not limited to, whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, sea lions, walrus, otters and manatees.

Cetaceans: Marine mammals included in the order Cetacea (whales, dolphins and porpoises).

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

NUISANCE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

The BC SPCA encourages coexistence with wildlife, through education, bylaws and enforcement, and actions that prevent conflict, and opposes the use of inhumane nuisance rodent and wildlife¹ management methods.

Where trapping is used for urban wildlife management after prevention and exclusion measures have failed to resolve the conflict, only live traps that do not cause pain or injury should be used. Healthy, trapped animals should be released on the same property of capture and the site should be animal-proofed (i.e. structure access points closed off) and attractants removed. Exceptions include if the site is dangerous for the animal or humans or animal-proofing is not possible. Routine use of trap-and-relocation methods is not condoned.

Only when human health and safety or herd/flock health for animals under human care are at serious risk, and where prevention and exclusion methods have been exhausted, should methods of lethal control that minimize suffering and cause a quick death be considered.

Methods of nuisance rodent and other wildlife management that prolong suffering or cause excessive discomfort (e.g., dehydration, starvation, hypothermia) are unacceptable, as are those that endanger non-target wildlife. Accordingly, control methods that cause unnecessary pain and suffering, such as glue boards, electrocution, drowning, live freezing and ineffective traps are not condoned.

Rodenticide poisons, and use of specially trained dogs to control mice and rats should only be considered to protect human health and safety. Although these products are not humane, the method of use should aim to reduce the potential harm to non-target animals. Until a humane alternative is available, the BC SPCA will encourage further developments towards improving the humaneness of rodent control methods.

Approved by the Board of Directors – January 2020
(replaces previous version, August 2009)

¹ The BC SPCA does not believe the terms “pest” or “nuisance wildlife” are appropriate or meaningful for any wildlife, as they impart a negative connotation on these animals. However, given their common usage by the public, these terms are used in this position statement to facilitate public understanding of the statement.

BACKGROUND

Human-wildlife conflict can often be avoided by modifying human behaviour to prevent the problem before it starts. Prevention actions include (but are not limited to):

- Avoiding intentional feeding and accidental feeding via sources such as pet food, bird seed, fruit trees and fish ponds (see BC SPCA position statement on Wildlife Feeding);
- Ensuring garbage and compost are in wildlife-proof containers; and
- Blocking wildlife from seeking shelter in buildings by sealing gaps or holes in sheds, crawl spaces, attics and porches, for example, before they become used as a nest or den.

Trapping and relocating wildlife is not a permanent or humane solution. Animals often injure themselves and may die trying to escape a trap. Relocated animals must set up a new home, and may starve trying to find food in unfamiliar territory, or get into fights with other animals over territory. When animals are live trapped, there is also a risk of separating a mother from her babies who, once orphaned, will die from dehydration, starvation or predation. Even when an entire family is moved together, a mother may abandon her babies due to the pressure to find food and care for her young. When live trapping is necessary (i.e. to remove an animal from a structure), then the site should be animal-proofed to prevent that animal or others from re-entering the structure.

When dogs are used for rodent control, the dogs must be able to kill mice or rats immediately following capture and should always remain under the control of the handler. Captured mice or rats must be immediately retrieved by the handler and subjected to a humane secondary killing method to ensure death, if necessary.

Best practice sheets for urban wildlife control are available for a number of species on the BC SPCA website at spca.bc.ca/ways-to-help/take-action/urban-wildlife/.

The BC SPCA also has developed AnimalKind, an animal welfare accreditation and referral program that includes science-based standards for rodent and wildlife control for wildlife and pest management companies to follow. Companies that have been accredited by the BC SPCA through AnimalKind have been audited to verify they are meeting the standards.

Education and enforcement

The BC SPCA supports public education (e.g., signage in public areas) and the adoption of bylaws in parks and municipalities that aim to prevent human-wildlife conflicts and encourage coexistence (such as bylaws to discourage the feeding of wildlife). The Society also encourages municipalities to adopt bylaws such as those outlined in the BC SPCA Model Animal Responsibility Bylaws, which provide recommendations with respect to wildlife feeding and attractant management.

See also:

[Hunting](#)
[Predator Control](#)
[Wildlife Feeding](#)

Background updated – January 2020

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DEFINITIONS

Nuisance wildlife (Pest): Any wild animal who is perceived to be in conflict with humans, their animals or property. Neither term is preferred by the BC SPCA, as both have negative connotations.

Trapping: The capture of wild or domestic animals in traps that either kill or restrain them.

Wild animals: Species that have not been domesticated. Wild animals have evolved in complex ecosystems resulting in mutual interdependencies with other animals and the surrounding environment. Wild animals may be exotic or indigenous, and wild-born or captive-bred.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

OIL AND TOXIC SPILLS

The BC SPCA is opposed to the transport or storage of oil or toxic substances in environmentally sensitive areas.

Transport of all potentially harmful substances by boat, plane, train or vehicle, or by pipeline should adhere to international transport and safety standards. Prime responsibility for the safe handling of oil and chemicals lies with the appropriate departments of government and with commercial companies involved. Agencies undertaking transportation and supply of such substances must take every precaution to avoid environmental pollution and have available the resources necessary to deal with a spill, should one occur.

Approved by the Board of Directors – December 2007



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

PREDATOR CONTROL

The BC SPCA opposes the killing of any vertebrate species specifically for the purpose of predator control. Every effort should be made to use non-lethal means to protect prey species. Only when human health or safety or herd/flock health and safety are at serious risk, and where non-lethal methods have been exhausted, should a humane lethal method of control be considered such as gunshot by a trained and permitted individual. With the exception of mice and rats (see position statement on Nuisance Wildlife Management), poison should never be used to control predators as it may cause undue suffering on both target and non-target species.

Where companion animals are threatened by wildlife species outside of the home, it is the responsibility of the guardian to ensure the protection of the companion animal. Only when an individual wild animal (bear, cougar, coyote, etc.) becomes too habituated to human settlement showing no fear of humans, is increasingly aggressive, and relocation efforts would not be reasonable or biologically sound, should humane methods of lethal control be considered for that individual animal.

Approved by the Board of Directors – August 2009

DEFINITIONS

Predator control: The killing of a predator who is perceived to be a threat to a prey animal based solely on their proximity, not on the actual attack of the prey animal.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

URBAN DEER

The BC SPCA is opposed to the culling of urban deer when there is a lack of credible scientific evidence to support it, and/or it cannot be achieved humanely¹. The BC SPCA recommends the use of non-lethal strategies as a solution to increased human-deer conflict. Culling is only a temporary solution and should not be used as a default management practice, regardless of whether deer populations are actually measured or simply perceived as being high.

The real or perceived problem of overabundant deer populations must be addressed in a sustainable and tolerant manner, and therefore the BC SPCA supports activities that aim to prevent conflict and educate residents about how to co-exist with urban deer. The BC SPCA is also opposed to the feeding and habituation of deer, which causes them to gradually lose their fear of people, pets and vehicles.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2014
(replaces previous version, February 2011)

BACKGROUND

The BC SPCA understands that the tolerance and management of deer overabundance, whether in urban centres or on rural properties, is a complicated issue that requires a multiple strategy approach. Overabundant deer populations can result from plentiful resources and low numbers of natural predators. Also high deer densities may be found in sprawling human-populated areas where traditional deer habitat once existed.

The relocation of mature deer in government programs should be approached with caution as studies have shown that high mortality and fatal injuries result from the stress of capture and transportation. Further studies have revealed that mortality is also high post-release due to enduring stress from capture and transport, the inability to adapt to unfamiliar territory, and naivety to new predators. More research is needed to identify conditions for possible successful relocation efforts specific to British Columbia species and terrain.

The BC SPCA also recognizes that contraception for wild ungulate populations in Canada is authorized only for experimental use at this time, and supports pilot programs to test its efficacy for broader applications in future.

Further community-wide measures should include:

¹ Despite being a legal cull authorized under government permit, it may not meet humane criteria as operator experience and equipment efficacy can vary.

- Municipal enactment and enforcement of bylaws that prevent the intentional feeding of deer and other wild mammals;
- Public education on landscaping measures such as plant species selection, fencing/netting motion-activated sprinklers, flagging tape and other humane deterrents;
- Training residents in non-contact hazing techniques to discourage wildlife from taking refuge on their properties;
- Prevention of deer-vehicle collisions through appropriate fencing, wildlife corridors for safe passage, warning signage for high crossing areas and speed limit enforcement; and,
- Ensuring responsible pet guardianship through direct control over pets to avoid physical contact between pets and wildlife.

If a cull is undertaken by a community, it must be carried out in an appropriate season to prevent the abandonment of young. It must also be conducted in a humane, responsible and sustainable manner by qualified and experienced wildlife professionals in accordance with the [BC SPCA Hunting position statement](#). Wildlife professionals should use techniques that cause instant death and make every effort to minimize stress to the animal and the infliction of pain or suffering before death occurs.

In any urban deer management efforts, only those individual animals that are the source of significant conflict should be managed. A public hunt within urban limits should not be permitted, as the hunting public may target different animals than those selected by qualified wildlife professionals.

Background updated – September 2014

See also:

[Hunting](#)



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

**WILD AND EXOTIC ANIMALS IN ZOOS, AQUARIUMS
AND OTHER PERMANENT CAPTIVITY**

The BC SPCA is opposed to the permanent confinement of wild and exotic animals unless it can be demonstrated that the Five Freedoms can be met in the captive environment. While individuals and organizations should ultimately phase out collections of these animals, in the interim, they must strive to meet the Five Freedoms at all life stages, both on and off exhibit, by employing management practices and species-specific enclosures that meet the physiological, emotional and behavioural needs of the animals.

Approved by the Board of Directors – October 2014

(replaces previous version, October 2004)

BACKGROUND

A variety of individuals and organizations keep wild and exotic animals in permanent captivity, such as zoos, aquariums, wildlife rehabilitation facilities, research institutions, sanctuaries, businesses, private collectors and falconers. However, full provision of the Five Freedoms is not possible for most wild and exotic animals, whether wild-caught, captive-bred or rescued and deemed non-releasable, due to their complex social, physiological and behavioural needs.

Existing evidence suggests, for instance, that the welfare of captive animals with large home ranges (e.g., bears, felids, elephants) and high cognitive abilities (e.g., great apes, cetaceans) is severely compromised. Thus, where the Five Freedoms are unattainable, these animals should not be kept in permanent captivity. (See the Marine Mammal Welfare position statement for a more specific discussion of marine mammals in captivity.)

Accreditation by industry or membership associations and/or possession of government permits for restricted animals are often a means of distinguishing between roadside attractions and more legitimate facilities; however, this is no guarantee that the welfare of the animals in captivity is adequate.

Frequently, conservation, education and research are cited as justification for keeping wild and exotic animals in permanent captivity. Human activities intentionally and unintentionally impact free-living wildlife across the globe. The BC SPCA therefore believes that we must strive to protect species through conservation and preservation practices. While conservation is a commonly espoused mandate among zoos and aquariums, breeding wild animals in captivity for eventual release to augment species populations (*ex situ* conservation) is dependent upon highly sophisticated recovery strategies that can, at times, jeopardize the welfare of the individual involved. Thus, in addition to

preserving and restoring habitats to support reintroduced populations, such programs should ensure a balance of good welfare of the reintroduced animals with the intended conservation purpose. Where an organization has a mandate of conservation, the BC SPCA believes that it should provide significant support, either financial or personnel, to legitimate *in situ* (in the field) conservation programs with a history of demonstrated success.

Given the considerable impact humans have on free-living wildlife, the BC SPCA recognizes the importance of communicating to the public the issue of biodiversity decline. Although many zoos and aquariums claim to educate visitors about environmental and animal issues, the Society believes that observing wild animals outside of their natural habitat provides little educational benefit. At present, there is scant evidence to suggest that visitors retain the information long-term and, more importantly, that visitors are compelled to change their behaviour in light of what they have learned (e.g., to donate to conservation causes). Instead, the BC SPCA supports the viewing of wild animals in their natural habitat under safe, controlled conditions. Such experiences, particularly when guided by a skilled environmental educator, can aid the public in developing a better understanding and appreciation of the wildlife where they live. When viewing animals in the wild, care should be taken to minimize habitat disturbance, as well as direct interference with the animals' natural behaviour.

As biodiversity is lost at an accelerating pace, the BC SPCA acknowledges the potential significance of research on captive wild animals to inform field conservation projects. However, much of the research currently conducted by zoos and aquariums is focused on animal husbandry rather than conservation of animals in the wild. While the BC SPCA recognizes that such research can improve the welfare of captive wild animals, non-invasive and non-lethal research that directly benefits the species as a whole is preferable. Therefore, the conservation value and scientific necessity of proposed research projects should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Background updated – October 2014

DEFINITIONS

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.

Exotic animals: Species that are non-domesticated, non-native wild animals, whether captured from the wild or captive-bred.

Wild animals: Species that have not been domesticated. Wild animals have evolved in complex ecosystems resulting in mutual interdependencies with other animals and the surrounding environment. Wild animals may be exotic or indigenous, and wild-born or captive-bred.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

WILD AND EXOTIC ANIMALS KEPT AS PETS

The BC SPCA does not support the keeping of wild or exotic animals, including their hybrids, as pets* due to the difficulty of providing them with the Five Freedoms and the risks posed to the health and safety of people, other animals and the environment.

The BC SPCA acknowledges that there are many exotic animals, such as parrots, snakes, lizards and turtles, currently living in homes. However, even when born in captivity, exotic animals are not considered domesticated and therefore have the same needs as they would in the wild. Guardians of exotic animals must strive to meet the Five Freedoms by employing husbandry practices and providing species-specific enclosures that meet their environmental, dietary, social and behavioural requirements, as well as by seeking appropriate veterinary care.

To safeguard the welfare of wild and exotic animals, the BC SPCA supports:

- The adoption of legislation, regulation and policies that prohibit their importation, breeding, display and sale, protect their health and welfare, and minimize their risk to human health and safety;
- The development and use of the highest professional accreditation standards and programs that evaluate and improve their care and handling; and
- Further research and development in all areas of their management that have an impact on welfare.

The keeping of wild animals as pets in B.C. is illegal under the provincial Wildlife Act. The release of exotic animals into the wild is considered abandonment and is therefore a criminal offense pursuant to the Criminal Code of Canada and the B.C. Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The BC SPCA supports preventing abandonment of exotic animals, which can have devastating impacts on native species and habitats, through public education.

* Normally, the BC SPCA prefers the term “companion animal” to the term “pet” as it signifies the mutually beneficial relationship that can exist between domesticated animals and humans. However, given that exotic animals are not domesticated, the term “pet” is used in this position statement instead.

BACKGROUND

There are an estimated 1.4 million exotic pets in Canada¹, ranging from small invertebrates such as stick insects and scorpions to large vertebrates such as lions and alligators. Notably, however, this figure does not include fish. Given that fish are the third most commonly kept animals after cats and dogs², the actual number of exotic pets in the country is likely far greater.

Despite their popularity as pets, exotic animals can pose serious public health and safety risks. One considerable health risk is zoonotic disease involving bacteria, viruses, fungi or parasites passed from these animals to people.^{3,4} Safety risks include injuries from teeth, beaks, claws, talons, tails, constriction, poison or venom. Furthermore, any injury can potentially become secondarily infected by the pathogens associated with exotic animal bites and scratches.⁵

Animal welfare is also a serious concern. Guardians of exotic pets are faced with a lack of research into proper housing and care for these animals, the proliferation of poor or unsubstantiated care information online, and a lack or inaccessibility of resources such as proper diets and specialized veterinary care.⁶ Therefore, these animals often suffer physically and psychologically under even well-intentioned human care. Examples include:

- Nutritional problems from inadequate or inappropriate diets (e.g., metabolic bone disease due to calcium or vitamin D3 deficiency, leading to swollen joints and limbs, shell softening and deformation, and fractures⁷; high-fat seed mixes resulting in obesity and fatty liver and heart disease⁸)
- Housing and husbandry practices that restrict or prevent natural behaviours and lead to abnormal behaviours (e.g., single housing that eliminates opportunities for socializing with members of the same species⁹; enclosures that are too small to accommodate normal patterns of movement¹⁰; clipping wings to prevent flying while also reducing the ability to exercise and escape from danger¹¹; barren containers that do not permit hiding from perceived threats¹²)
- Illnesses or injuries from inappropriate environmental conditions (e.g., thermal burns from improper heat sources¹³)

Due to the cost and difficulties of caring for exotic pets properly and, in some cases, their potentially long lifespan and large body size, these animals often lose their appeal over time.¹⁴ However, guardians who no longer want their pets are faced with few options for placement. There are very few suitable sanctuaries and most animal shelters do not have specialized training to handle or appropriate enclosures to house them. As a result, many exotic animals are rehomed online or released outdoors.

In addition to being illegal, abandoning exotic animals can have devastating environmental effects in both terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Although some exotic animals eventually die from starvation, exposure or predation when released into a novel environment, others can breed and thrive (e.g., bullfrogs, red-eared slider turtles, goldfish, koi). They can also put native species at risk through disease and parasite exposure, competition for resources and predation.

Each year, millions of exotic animals are captured, bred and transported around the world for the commercial pet trade. Apart from the obvious animal welfare concerns, this level of exploitation impacts the health of populations to the point where some species have become endangered and threatens ecosystems due to the unique ecological roles these animals often play. Although in many cases it is illegal to take exotic animals from the wild, the people involved accept the risk because it is less expensive to capture wild animals than breed them in captivity.

Captive breeding may avoid some of the ecological issues associated with wild capture but is not without significant animal welfare concerns. To increase efficiency and profit, many breeders house large numbers of exotic animals in small, barren enclosures. Captive breeding can also serve as an effective cover for the illegal trade as wild-caught individuals can easily be assimilated into existing breeding populations and labelled ‘captive-bred.’

Captive-bred animals may then be sold to wholesalers which house many different species of exotic animals in large warehouses. Although mortality rates of 70 per cent are not uncommon¹⁵, wholesalers remain profitable because of the sheer volume of animals they sell.

Changes to the B.C. Wildlife Act in 2008 prohibited the sale, breeding, importation and display of certain exotic animals designated as Controlled Alien Species (CAS).¹⁶ As the provincial government has the responsibility of ensuring public safety, the CAS list reflects only those exotic animals who pose a serious risk to human health and safety, including large cats, primates and venomous snakes. In a number of cases, exotic animals on the CAS list living in B.C. before 2009 were grandfathered under specific permit conditions. Research institutions, film companies, rescue centres and accredited zoos must have government permits in order to keep any CAS-listed animals.

Even with such restrictive legislation in place, B.C. still ranks fourth in the country for exotic pet ownership after Ontario, Quebec and Alberta.¹ Unfortunately, the legislation does not apply to numerous other exotic animal species being kept. Many less common exotic animals such as kangaroos and zebras are still allowed, as are the more common exotic species such as ball pythons, bearded dragons and leopard geckos often sold in pet stores.

As a result, the BC SPCA recommends that municipal governments fill in the gap by adopting a “positive list” of allowable animals instead of a list of prohibited species. Benefits include:

- Positive lists are able to keep up with a constantly changing industry. Unlike negative lists, they do not have to be amended every time a new exotic animal enters the pet trade.

- Positive lists are easier to understand and enforce. By necessity, negative lists are longer and more complicated than positive lists and, as such, can be difficult for enforcement personnel to interpret.
- Positive lists protect animal welfare and human health and safety by shifting the burden of proof. Whenever someone wants to add a new exotic animal to a positive list, they have to prove that the species satisfies whatever criteria are in place for inclusion.

See also:

[Animals in Schools](#)

[Wild and Exotic Animals in Zoos, Aquariums and Other Permanent Captivity](#)

Background updated – September 2021

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DEFINITIONS

Captive-bred wild animals: Individual wild animals (whether native or exotic) who have been habituated to living amongst humans but have not been domesticated and, therefore, still retain the genetic, biological and behavioural characteristics of their non-captive counterparts.

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Domesticated animals: Species that have been selectively bred by humans over hundreds and or thousands of generations in order to alter their genetics to create animals who are dependent, docile, predictable and controllable, and who no longer occupy an ecological niche in the wild.

Exotic animals: Species that are non-domesticated, non-native wild animals, whether captured from the wild or captive-bred.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed by the Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
3. Freedom from distress
4. Freedom from discomfort
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.

Hybrid wild animals: Individual animals who are the offspring of wild animals (whether native or exotic) who have bred with either domesticated animals or other species of wild animals (e.g., wolf-dog hybrids, savannah cats).

Stress: The physiological response to a stimulus in order to help an animal cope with his/her environment. The stress response can be associated with either positive emotions (e.g., excitement, arousal) or negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), depending upon the nature of the stimulus or the animal's perception of that stimulus.

Suffering: An enduring negative affective state. Suffering is associated with feelings such as pain, hunger, fear and anxiety. All sentient beings are capable of suffering.

Welfare: An animal's quality of life. An animal's welfare depends upon both his/her physical health and affective state.

Animals experience good welfare when they are able to experience positive feelings arising from pleasurable activities and the fulfillment of behavioural needs, and when they are free from poor physical health and negative feelings (e.g., pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, fear and frustration).

Wild animals: Species that have not been domesticated. Wild animals have evolved in complex ecosystems resulting in mutual interdependences with other animals and the surrounding environment. Wild animals may be exotic or indigenous, and wild-born or captive-bred.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

WILDLIFE FEEDING

The BC SPCA is generally opposed to the feeding of wild animals. Whether intentional or unintentional, feeding can lead to poor welfare and even death of wildlife, and is a significant source of human-wildlife conflict. Therefore, the BC SPCA encourages municipalities to adopt bylaws that prohibit intentional wildlife feeding and encourage the management of wildlife attractants as unintentional feeding sources.

BIRD FEEDING

The BC SPCA recognizes that bird feeding, though a popular activity, carries risks. Backyard bird feeders can facilitate the spread of disease, provide inadequate nutrition and increase the risk of window strikes, predation and conflicts with other wild animals. Except for liquid hummingbird nectar feeders (due to their specificity and low attraction to other species), the BC SPCA does not support providing bird feeders in months when there are abundant natural food sources available. During these months (which vary from region to region), native plants, well-managed bird baths and bird houses can be appropriate attractants for birds.

The BC SPCA is opposed to intentional hand-feeding of birds like jays, gulls, pigeons and ducks, geese and other waterfowl, and recommends municipalities and parks strongly discourage feeding through education, bylaws and enforcement.

Approved by the Board of Directors – June 2019

BACKGROUND

Unintentional food sources such as compost, garbage, pet food and even bird feeders will attract unwanted wildlife, which can become a nuisance or safety risk to residents through their increased presence, noise, droppings and property damage.¹ Further, improper waste management and wildlife feeding can lead to increased rodent activity, disease spread and public health concerns.

Intentional or opportunistic feeding by both residents and tourists leads to the habituation of wildlife. Wild animals who become habituated to people are more susceptible to predation and vehicle collisions, and more likely to be involved in nuisance issues in urban and rural settings. Animals adapt to an artificial abundance of food, but when that food is withdrawn, they can starve or become stressed and aggressive as the resource becomes increasingly scarce. Intentional or opportunistic

feeding may also have effects on populations over time. When habituated or food-conditioned wild animals are perceived as a nuisance or public safety risk, the response often involves nonlethal methods (e.g., exclusion, trapping) or lethal methods (e.g., hunting, poisoning, culling) of control. This type of conflict can be avoided by modifying human behaviour to prevent both intentional and unintentional feeding.²

Bird feeding

Backyard bird feeders cause unusually large numbers of birds to gather in one place. These gatherings can facilitate the spread of disease, provide inadequate nutrition, attract rodents and other wildlife, increase the risk of window strikes and predation, and have negative impacts on populations.^{1, 3} Feeding birds can also lead to increased predation from outdoor cats and raptors.

Bird feeders must be kept clean and dry to prevent illness or disease from rancid food. Liquid hummingbird feeders do not attract rodents and other wildlife, but they can attract ants, wasps and other insects, and can cause deadly fungal or bacteria infections if not cleaned thoroughly and regularly, or if the nectar is prepared improperly.

The BC SPCA does not recommend providing bird feeders between April and September (or depending on the region of the province, in months when natural foods are abundant) and should only be considered during harsh winter conditions. During non-winter months, birds can be attracted to native plants, particularly those with seeds, berries or nectar as a food source. Features like bird baths and bird houses can also be an appropriate attractant. Bird baths should be regularly cleaned to prevent the spread of disease and mosquitoes, and managed appropriately to prevent cat predation.

Bird feeding by hand (e.g., bread, rice) commonly occurs at roadsides, parks and public spaces with birds such as jays, gulls, pigeons and ducks, geese and other waterfowl. This type of feeding causes birds to suffer extensively from malnutrition, bone deformation and death, creates conflict with humans, and contributes to environmental degradation and water pollution.¹ Even with nutritionally appropriate feed, hand-feeding or broadcast food spreading has negative consequences and leads to increased conflicts between birds and people. Food-conditioned birds may become aggressive towards people, become a nuisance or damage property when they gather in large numbers, and stray feed can attract rodents and other wildlife.

Ungulates

Ungulates can be attracted to certain garden plants and safe green spaces like backyards, and can become habituated with repeated interaction with people or pets, especially when they are intentionally fed. These problems create the perception that ungulates are overabundant and lead to culling proposals. However, ungulates can be effectively managed with non-contact hazing, anti-feeding bylaws and enforcement, road signage and speed enforcement, landscaping changes and humane deterrents such as motion-activated sprinklers.¹ For more information, see the BC SPCA position statement on Urban Deer.

Wildlife tourism

When visiting other countries, tourists create conflicts directly by feeding wildlife, or through tour companies using food to bait wildlife for viewing and photo opportunities. In addition to the animal welfare concerns, habituation and conflict problems caused by tourists are likely to persist for the local communities long after tourists have left.¹ For example, opportunistic feeding of wildlife by park visitors can lead to traffic congestion, personal property damage, begging, aggression and injury, illness or even death, for both people and wild animals.⁴

Education and enforcement

The BC SPCA supports public education (e.g., signage in public areas) and the adoption of bylaws in parks and municipalities that discourage the feeding of wildlife. The Society also encourages municipalities to adopt bylaws such as those outlined in the BC SPCA's Model Animal Responsibility Bylaws, which provide recommendations with respect to wildlife feeding and attractant management.⁵

See also:

[Nuisance Wildlife Management](#)

[Urban Deer](#)

[Wild Animal Welfare](#)

Background updated – June 2019

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DEFINITIONS

Attractant: Any substance or material, with or without an odour, which attracts or is likely to attract animals and without limitation includes antifreeze, paint, food products, unclean barbecues, pet food, animals, bedding materials, beehives, bird feeders or fallen bird seed, offal, improperly maintained composts, restaurant grease barrels, and accumulation of fruit in containers or on the ground.

Food-conditioning: Occurs when an animal learns to associate people (or the smell of people), human activities, human-use areas, or food storage receptacles with anthropogenic food. Anthropogenic food sources may include garbage, compost, pet food, barbeques, bird feeders and more.

Habituation: A form of learning where an animal gradually reduces or loses their fear response to a stimulus due to repeated exposure (e.g., wildlife losing fear of humans).

Nuisance wildlife/Pest: Any wild animal who is perceived to be in conflict with humans, their animals or property. Neither term is preferred by the BC SPCA, as both have negative connotations.

Wild animals: Species that have not been domesticated. Wild animals have evolved in complex ecosystems resulting in mutual interdependencies with other animals and the surrounding environment. Wild animals may be exotic or indigenous, and wild-born or captive-bred.

Recreation and Entertainment Position Statements



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMALS IN RECREATION, SPORT AND ENTERTAINMENT

Animals are used for recreation, sport and entertainment at a range of venues (e.g., zoos, aquariums, rodeos, circuses, and film and television sets) for a variety of activities (e.g., shows, demonstrations, rides, races, competitions and site-seeing tours). Whenever animals are on display or made to perform, they face risks to their physical and psychological well-being. Such risks concern how they are bred, raised, housed, trained and transported, as well as the activities themselves.

The BC SPCA is opposed to the killing of, or infliction of pain or suffering upon, any companion, farm or wild animal for recreation, sport or entertainment.

The use of animals for recreation, sport or entertainment is only acceptable if:

- The Five Freedoms are ensured throughout the lives of these animals, including breeding animals, offspring and animals who have been retired from the activity;
- Humane training methods are used;
- The animals are healthy and receive sufficient rest from the activity;
- The activity does not result in ongoing discomfort, pain or injury;
- The animals have an appropriate temperament, level of experience, training and fitness for the activity; and
- Their portrayal is not demeaning toward the individual animal or the species, which may undermine respect for and humane care of animals.

The health and welfare of the animals must be closely monitored at all times and action immediately taken if concerns arise. Monitoring of animal health and welfare should be done by an independent professional, such as a veterinarian or trained animal welfare auditor.

The BC SPCA does not endorse the use of animal handling and training techniques that use pain or fear to motivate behaviour change. The Society advocates for the use of humane, reward-based methods to foster trust and build positive human-animal relationships (see the BC SPCA position statement on [Animal Training](#)).

The BC SPCA supports the adoption and enforcement of strong welfare standards and laws for any animals used in recreation, sport or entertainment.

Approved by the Board of Directors – November 2021

(replaces *Animals in Recreation, Sport and Entertainment*, April 2008; *Farm Animals in Rodeo and Other Entertainment*, October 2010)

BACKGROUND

The BC SPCA encourages patrons of activities where animals are used for recreation, sport or entertainment to carefully consider whether the animals are being cared for ethically before attending and research or ask the organizer for their animal welfare policies. Consideration should also be given to the care of breeding animals and those retired from the activity. The BC SPCA encourages patrons to support forms of entertainment that do not compromise the welfare of animals. This position statement applies to all uses of animals in sport, recreation or entertainment, including but not limited to:

Rodeos

The BC SPCA recognizes the province's ranching traditions and that rodeo began as a way to showcase the essential skills needed to manage cattle on a range¹. However, farming practices have changed and the techniques common at rodeos (e.g., bucking, chasing, roping) are no longer acceptable on a farm. Animal deaths and injuries at rodeos are reported annually across the country and animals who are not physically injured can still experience fear and stress as they attempt to escape. Regardless of whether an event is sanctioned by a professional rodeo association or not, every year, many animals suffer sprains, bruises, and broken limbs and necks during rodeos.

Where rodeos take place, the BC SPCA encourages the showcasing of low-stress handling skills and horse riding events that do not cause fear, frustration, anxiety, pain or injury to animals. The National Farm Animal Care Council's *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle*² requires cattle handlers to use quiet handling techniques. The BC SPCA asserts that this standard should also apply to handling of cattle during rodeo events.

The BC SPCA encourages the public to not attend rodeos that include events that cause animals distress. See the BC SPCA position statements on [Equine Welfare](#) and [Farm Animal Welfare](#).

Horse-drawn carriages

Horse-drawn carriages are only acceptable if they can operate safely and ensure a high level of welfare for the horses, including regular veterinary and hoof care. Higher welfare practices for horse-drawn carriages include:

- Avoiding travel on traffic-congested streets;
- Ceasing operations during extreme weather;
- Providing appropriate feed, water and rest; and
- Establishing standard operating procedures and planning for emergencies, including driver/handler training, emergency kits and post-emergency reporting.

Providing high quality care for horses during the off-season, as well as before and after their time as a carriage horse, must also be a priority.

The BC SPCA encourages clients of horse-drawn carriage rides to research the operator to verify they are ensuring a high level of welfare for their horses before engaging these services. See the BC SPCA position statement on [Equine Welfare](#).

Horse racing

Factors that can decrease the welfare of racehorses include injuries, the use of whips, inadequate housing and socialization, and aversive training. Breeding for horse racing can also contribute to horse overpopulation and lead to unwanted horses. Additionally, training and racing young horses predisposes them to a higher risk of injuries, some of which are life-threatening. The BC SPCA encourages the racing industry toward improved care standards, humane horse training and support of retired racehorse rehoming initiatives.

Those interested in attending races should ask how horses are cared for before and after races and avoid races that allow continuous whip use and other aversive training. See the BC SPCA position statement on [Equine Welfare](#).

Sled dogs

The BC SPCA believes that dogs kept for any purpose related to recreational or competitive mushing or commercial sled dog tourism must be provided with the Five Freedoms for the duration of their lives, including breeding dogs and dogs who have been retired from activity. Operators must follow the applicable regulations and standards, such as the *Sled Dog Code of Practice*³ and the *Code of Practice for Canadian Kennel Operations*⁴. The BC SPCA encourages those who wish to participate in a sled dog tour to select an operator that provides high welfare for their dogs. See the BC SPCA position statement on [Dog Welfare](#).

Dog sports and competitions

Dogs participate or compete in many activities with their guardians such as agility, herding, dock diving, obedience trials, skijoring, tracking and more. It is important to ensure that dogs are physically fit, humanely trained and enjoy the activity they are participating in. Dog sports or competitions that use live animals to motivate performance should aim to replace these live animals due to the stress their involvement imposes on them. Dogs not suited to an activity or those who are retired from the activity should be cared for as per the BC SPCA position statement on [Dog Welfare](#).

The BC SPCA encourages spectators of dog sports and competitions to only support those events that prioritize dog welfare, such as having an independent observer monitoring the competition and ensuring dogs are well cared for when not competing.

Conformation shows

Conformation shows are popular among those who breed animals, including companion animals such as dogs and cats and farm animals such as cattle and sheep. Competing in these events may include long travel times and overnight stays. Animals who attend these shows must be well socialized so that they do not experience fear or stress. Animals must also be well cared for before, during and after shows.

The BC SPCA encourages spectators of conformation shows to only support those events that prioritize animal welfare, such as ensuring good welfare for animals when not competing and ensuring animals are comfortable with handling that may occur during the competition.

Sport fishing

Fish, like other animals, can feel pain, fear and distress (see the BC SPCA position statement on [Fish and Aquatic Invertebrate Welfare](#)). The BC SPCA does not support sport fishing or catch-and-release fishing as they are done for recreational purposes, the latter injuring fish unnecessarily before release, and may cause prolonged death.

Wild and exotic animals in zoos, aquariums, circuses, film and television

There are wide variations in the level of welfare that different zoos and aquariums provide their animals. Many animals suffer in captivity even when the environment meets or exceeds industry standards. Institutions, facilities and businesses should ultimately phase out collections of these animals and, in the interim, must strive to meet the Five Freedoms at all life stages, both on and off exhibit. See the BC SPCA position statements on [Wild and Exotic Animals in Zoos, Aquariums and Other Permanent Captivity](#) and [Marine Mammal Welfare](#).

The BC SPCA is opposed to the use of wild and exotic animals as circus performers, in traveling exhibitions or in the film and television industry. See the BC SPCA position statements on [Circuses and Traveling Exhibitions](#) and [Animals in the Film and Television Industry](#).

Novelty events

Events such as dove releases, turtle racing, greased pig contests and guinea pig races place animals in high-stress environments where they experience fear. Without oversight or animal welfare standards, animals may be cared for inappropriately before or after the event. Animals may be sourced specifically for the event without planning for their care after the event. For this reason, the BC SPCA is opposed to the use of animals in novelty events and discourages the public from attending events using animals in this way.

See also:

[Animal Fighting](#)

[Animal Training](#)
[Animals in the Film and Television Industry](#)
[Animals Used for Clothing, Fashion and Art](#)
[Circuses and Traveling Exhibitions](#)
[Dog Welfare](#)
[Equine Welfare](#)
[Falconry](#)
[Fish and Aquatic Invertebrate Welfare](#)
[Hunting](#)
[Marine Mammal Welfare](#)
[Trapping](#)
[Wild and Exotic Animals in Zoos, Aquariums and Other Permanent Captivity](#)

Background updated – November 2021

REFERENCES

- ¹ Rizzuto, S., Evans, D., Wilson, B., & McGreevy, P. (2020). Exploring the Use of a Qualitative Behavioural Assessment Approach to Assess Emotional State of Calves in Rodeos. *Animals*, 10(1), 113. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10010113>
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- ⁴ Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. (2018). *Code of practice for Canadian kennel operations*. Available from <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/code-of-practice-for-canadian-kennel-operations>

DEFINITIONS

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;

2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMAL FIGHTING

The BC SPCA is opposed to the use of animals for fighting and to the breeding of animals to be used for fighting.

This position applies, but is not limited to, the use of animals in dog fighting, cock fighting, and bull fighting.

Approved by the Board of Directors – April 2008



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMALS IN THE FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

The BC SPCA is opposed to the keeping of wild animals for use in the film and television industry. The use of domesticated animals is acceptable only if:

- the Five Freedoms are ensured, both on and off the set, for performing animals, breeding animals, and animals that have been retired from performance;
- humane training methods are used;
- risk of injury is low;
- their portrayal is not demeaning toward the individual animal or the species.

Approved by the Board of Directors – April 2008

DEFINITIONS

Wild animals: Species that have not been domesticated. Wild animals have evolved in complex ecosystems resulting in mutual interdependencies with other animals and the surrounding environment. Wild animals may be exotic or indigenous, and wild-born or captive-bred.

Exotic animals: Species that are non-domesticated, non-native wild animals, whether captured from the wild or captive-bred.

Domesticated animals: Species that have been selectively bred by humans over hundreds and often thousands of generations, in order to alter their genetics to create animals that are dependent, docile, predictable, and controllable, and that no longer occupy an ecological niche in the wild.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges

that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMALS USED FOR CLOTHING, FASHION AND ART

The BC SPCA is opposed to the infliction of pain or suffering upon, or the killing of any animal, explicitly for clothing or any aesthetic purpose. This position applies, but is not limited to, the killing or use of animals for their fur and the use of animals for artistic display.

The BC SPCA accepts the use of animals for clothing or aesthetic purpose only when the methods used to raise the animals meet the Five Freedoms and only if the harvest of the fibre or product:

- is a by-product of food production (e.g., leather); or
- does not necessitate the killing of the animal (e.g., wool).

Approved by the Board of Directors – April 2008

DEFINITIONS

Aesthetic: Any purpose that is purely for visual or artistic effect, including fashion or art of any kind.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

CIRCUSES AND TRAVELING EXHIBITIONS

The BC SPCA is opposed to the use of wild and exotic animals as circus performers or in traveling exhibitions. Although most of the animals used in such shows are captive-bred, they retain the natural instincts of their species and have unique care and welfare needs. Many wild and exotic animals in such acts may also pose a threat to public safety and to themselves and other performing animals.

The use of domestic animals in traveling performances, exhibits and petting zoos is only acceptable if:

- the Five Freedoms are ensured for all animals involved, including breeding animals and animals that have been retired from the activity;
- humane training and transport methods are used;
- risk of injury is low;
- their portrayal is not demeaning toward the individual animal or the species.

Providing the Five Freedoms to any captive wild or exotic animal is very challenging, and the transitory nature of circuses and exhibitions makes it impossible to ensure that the physiological, emotional, and behavioural needs of the animals are consistently met. The training methods used to make wild or exotic animals perform tricks contrary to their nature are often inhumane, inflicting both physical and emotional pain and suffering. Temporary and unsuitable housing, long transportation times and poor transportation conditions are all serious concerns faced by traveling animal acts.

Approved by the Board of Directors – October 2010

BACKGROUND

In British Columbia, the Controlled Alien Species (CAS) Regulation under the provincial *Wildlife Act* requires that any circus or traveling exhibition with a designated exotic animal apply for a CAS permit to enter the province and publicly display the animal at least 60 days before the event. A permit from the Provincial Government may be issued if conditions for a Public Safety Plan, Enclosure Plan and Animal Welfare Plan can be met.

In addition, certain BC municipalities have enacted bylaws which prohibit or regulate the sale, ownership or exhibition of a variety of species of wild and exotic animals, and which may supersede provincial regulations.

Background updated – October 2010

DEFINITIONS

Exotic animals: Species that are non-domesticated, non-native wild animals, whether captured from the wild or captive-bred.

Wild animals: Species that have not been domesticated. Wild animals have evolved in complex ecosystems resulting in mutual interdependencies with other animals and the surrounding environment. Wild animals may be *exotic* or indigenous, and wild-born or captive-bred.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.

Research and Education Position Statements



THE BRITISH COLUMBIA

SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

The BC SPCA recognizes that animals in schools can enrich the lives of students. However, the relationship must equally respect the welfare of the animals, whether present on a temporary or permanent basis, according to the Five Freedoms.

CLASSROOM PETS

Direct involvement of companion animals in classroom education must be approached with the goal of providing exemplary animal care. When companion animals are considered for classroom placement, the teacher must:

- Select a species whose natural behaviour patterns are compatible with a classroom setting;
- Ensure the animal has been socialized to thrive in a classroom setting;
- Integrate the animal as part of a structured humane education curriculum, where possible; and
- Provide the animal with the Five Freedoms, including during non-instructional times.

The BC SPCA is opposed to the keeping of wild or exotic animals as classroom pets. Full provision of the Five Freedoms is not possible for most of these animals, whether wild-caught or captive-bred, due to their complex social, physiological, behavioural and environmental needs.

Animals should not be placed in educational settings where youth under the age of five are present, owing to the difficulty of ensuring the health and safety of both the animal and the children. Instead, consideration should be given to structured visits by animal caregivers who can safely oversee child-animal interactions.

SCHOOL VISITS WITH ANIMALS

Anyone bringing a domesticated animal into a school on a temporary basis must provide for the health, safety and well-being of the animal for the duration of the visit.

The BC SPCA does not condone school visits with wild or exotic animals. Such visits may have the unintended effect of persuading students of the suitability of these animals to life in captivity.

CLASSROOM HATCHING AND BREEDING PROJECTS

The BC SPCA is opposed to the hatching of birds (e.g., chicks, ducklings) in schools due to the welfare issues associated with inappropriate handling and environmental conditions, particularly when non-animal alternatives (e.g., videos, photos, apps) are readily available. Other hatching programs (e.g., salmonids, insects) should be critically evaluated on a case-by-case basis with regard to issues such as high mortality rates due to inadequate care or introduction of non-indigenous species into ecosystems.

CLASSROOM SCIENCE PROJECTS

The BC SPCA recognizes the innate curiosity that children have towards animals, and the value of inquiry-based learning in furthering student knowledge and appreciation of animal needs, behaviour and emotions. However, teachers should critically assess whether live animals are necessary to the achievement of learning outcomes. The BC SPCA only supports the use of live animals for student-driven or teacher-led classroom science projects under the following conditions:

- The Five Freedoms are ensured for all animals involved, including the use of humane training and handling methods;
- Projects are non-invasive (e.g., observation of animal behaviour) and in no way cause pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm;
- Animals are not killed as part of a lesson or in front of students; and
- Any portrayal of animals is not demeaning toward the individual animal or the species.

Alternatives to the use of live animals, including nature walks, field trips and documentaries, are encouraged as the BC SPCA believes that observation of wild or exotic animals outside of their natural habitats has less educational benefit for students.

ANIMAL DISSECTION

As per the BC SPCA position statement on the Use of Animals in Teaching, the Society is opposed to the use of any animal, including cadavers or tissues, for dissection in education except when training animal professionals in post-secondary institutions. The BC SPCA supports alternatives to dissection and encourages science teachers to use non-animal alternatives (e.g., 3-D models, virtual dissection apps, videos or photos) that have been proven to provide equal or better learning outcomes, while respecting the moral, cultural and religious freedoms of students.

Approved by the Board of Directors – January 2020

(replaces Classroom Pets, February 2009; Educational Visits Using Animals, February 2009; Hatching and Breeding Programs in the Classroom, February 2009; Student Science Projects, February 2009)

BACKGROUND

Research shows that children who interact with animals have higher levels of self-esteem, greater empathy and better social skills.¹ Having animals in the classroom can therefore contribute to their social-emotional development.² However, there are a number of conditions educators should consider to ensure the health, safety and well-being of classroom pets and students alike. These include (but are not limited to):

- The educator selects a species whose natural behaviour patterns are compatible with a classroom setting (e.g., the animal is not nocturnal);
- The educator thoroughly researches the animal's nutritional, social and environmental needs prior to acquiring the animal;
- The animal is under the direct guardianship of the educator (or other knowledgeable adult at the school) who assumes full responsibility for the care and welfare of the animal, including overnight as well as over weekends, holidays and school breaks (i.e., the animal is not sent home with students);
- The animal is socialized to thrive in a classroom setting;
- The animal is provided appropriate levels of care and a high standard of welfare in accordance with the Five Freedoms;
- The animal has access to regular and emergency veterinary care;
- Animal handling is supervised by an experienced adult and conducted in a safe and species-appropriate manner;
- The animal is not permitted to breed;
- The animal is included in emergency evacuation planning;
- The educator understands the risk of zoonotic disease transfer to students and implements appropriate hygiene and cleaning regimens; and
- The animal contributes to a structured humane education curriculum, where possible.

It is important to note that the mere presence of an animal is not a guarantee that children will learn prosocial behaviour. Empathy and compassion are learned primarily from role models.¹ Educators should therefore lead by example, and encourage sensitivity and respect for the physical and emotional needs of classroom pets.

Not all children have the opportunity to experience animals at home or in the classroom; hence the significance of structured school visits with animals. These humane education programs build on a child's natural curiosity about animals to help foster greater awareness and caring for the needs of others, starting with family, pets and classmates, and gradually growing to incorporate the larger community and even the planet (often referred to as a "circle of empathy").¹ As empathy deficits can be regarded as both the cause and consequence of cruelty to animals³, it is especially important to reach youth between the ages of eight and 13, when they are developmentally the most receptive to developing empathy skills. By fostering empathy, humane education programs may also prevent or interrupt a pattern of development that results in aggression against people.³

Given that children are innately drawn to animals, having animals in the classroom can provide opportunities to support the learning of the science curriculum, as well as motivate students to engage

with science learning.² However, it is the belief of the BC SPCA that student learning should not come at the expense of animal welfare. Moreover, ignoring the emotional responses or even glossing over the death of an animal can affect the value that children place on animals, and can inadvertently reinforce the notion that animals are disposable. Again, as role models, educators have a significant influence on the attitudes and behaviours of their students towards animals.⁴ Ultimately, due to the animal welfare issues that can arise, the BC SPCA is strongly supportive of non-animal teaching methods, many of which have been shown to be as or more effective than using animals.⁵

See also:

[Animal Training](#)

[Companion Animal Confinement](#)

[Companion Animal Handling and Restraint](#)

[Use of Animals in Teaching](#)

[Wild and Exotic Animals Kept as Pets](#)

Background updated – January 2020

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² Herbert, S., & Lynch, J. (2017). Classroom Animals Provide More Than Just Science Education. *Science & Education*, 26(1-2), 107–123. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-017-9874-6>

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⁵ Animals in Science Policy Institute. (2019). *Comparative studies of animal and non-animal methods in teaching*. Available from https://www.animalsinscience.org/what_we_do/research/literature-review/. Accessed 6 August 2019

DEFINITIONS

Animal: A living being belonging to the kingdom Animalia.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

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3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.

Companion animals: Domesticated animals who have been selectively bred to live and thrive in mutually beneficial relationships with humans and who are kept primarily for the purpose of companionship.

Domesticated animals: Species that have been selectively bred by humans over hundreds or thousands of generations in order to alter their genetics to create animals that are dependant, docile, predictable, and controllable, and that no longer occupy an ecological niche in the wild.

Exotic animals: Species that are non-domesticated, non-native wild animals, whether captured from the wild or captive-bred.

Wild animals: Species that have not been domesticated. Wild animals have evolved in complex ecosystems resulting in mutual interdependencies with other animals and the surrounding environment. Wild animals may be exotic or indigenous, and wild-born or captive-bred.

Zoonotic disease: Diseases that are transferrable between humans and animals.



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMALS USED IN RESEARCH

The BC SPCA is opposed to any live animals being used for either basic or applied scientific research, including field studies on wildlife, where experiments or procedures cause pain, suffering, distress, or lasting harm. The BC SPCA recognizes the value of animal-based research (e.g., development of human and animal medicines), but the benefits must outweigh the harms. In particular, attention to animal welfare and minimizing harm should be a priority.

When live animals are used in research, the Society considers it essential that control of pain with anaesthesia, analgesia, tranquilization and euthanasia must be available and should only be administered by trained technicians, researchers or veterinarians. Any proposed research must always be assessed in keeping with the Three Rs principles: Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement. The BC SPCA advocates for transparency of animal research practices, in particular the publication of animal numbers by both public and private institutions using animals in research.

The BC SPCA is also opposed to the use of wild-caught animals of any species in animal research laboratories since the full provision of the Five Freedoms is not possible due to their complex social, physiological and behavioural needs.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2015

(replaces Genetic Engineering, January 1998 and Xenotransplantation, September 1998)

BACKGROUND

Both public and private institutions conduct animal-based research in Canada, however, only government-funded institutions require oversight from the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC). The BC SPCA encourages all private institutions to become participants in the CCAC oversight program.

The BC SPCA believes that all use of animals (live and tissues) in research should be subject to ethical review and post-approval monitoring, and that the animals:

- when kept in confinement, be treated such that their physical and behavioural needs are met in accordance with the Five Freedoms;
- be specifically bred for experimental purposes to make animals more genetically similar and to reduce the number needed to achieve statistically significant results;
- be provided with adequate anaesthesia and analgesia agents, and prompt medical treatment by a trained professional to minimize suffering or discomfort whenever they demonstrate symptoms of disease or injury; and,

- be euthanized by a trained professional without delay when symptoms do not respond to medical treatment or when suffering from untreatable conditions.

In addition, appropriate training should be provided to all persons involved in handling animals.

Further, the BC SPCA believes an animal's welfare must be the first priority during the development and application of genetic engineering to animals. In the development of new genetically-engineered animal lines, there should be acknowledgement that unanticipated welfare concerns might occur and the animals should be monitored closely to ensure that any negative welfare impacts are mitigated as much as possible. The BC SPCA also has concerns about the implications of cross-species transplants (xenotransplantation) and advocates the promotion of alternatives over and above the pursuit of animal donor programs.

Background updated – September 2015

DEFINITIONS

Animal: A living being belonging to the kingdom Animalia

Anaesthesia: Temporary insensitivity to pain or loss of consciousness, especially as artificially induced by administration of gases or injectable drugs

Analgesia: The inability to feel pain, without the loss of consciousness, especially as artificially induced by administration of gases or injectable drugs

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

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The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.

Genetically-engineered animal: An animal who has had a random or targeted change in his/her DNA achieved through a deliberate human intervention

Replacement: Preferred use of non-animal methods over animal methods whenever it is possible to achieve the same scientific aims

Reduction: Use of methods that enable researchers to obtain comparable levels of information using fewer animals, or to obtain more information from the same number of animals

Refinement: Use of methods to alleviate or minimize potential pain, suffering or distress, and enhance welfare for animals used

Xenotransplantation: The transfer of living animal organs, tissues and cells into humans



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMALS USED IN SCIENCE

The BC SPCA recognizes that live animals and their tissues are used for scientific purposes (i.e., in research, teaching and testing – *see individual position statements*) that aim to improve the lives of both people and other animals. Nonetheless, the BC SPCA envisions a society in which the direct use of animals is not necessary for advancements in medical and other scientific research.

When animals are used in science, proposed use must always be assessed in keeping with the Three Rs principles: Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement. The animals' welfare must be a priority throughout all life stages and the BC SPCA is opposed to any procedure that causes pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm.

Further, the BC SPCA is opposed to:

- any animal experiments that involve unnecessary repetitions, scientifically trivial ends¹, or techniques for which satisfactory non-animal alternatives have already been developed;
- animal testing for inessential substances, such as cosmetics, household cleaning products, cigarettes and alcoholic beverages;
- the use of any animal or its tissues for dissection in education²;
- the surrender of animals by animal control agencies for research; and,
- the use of captive wild or exotic animals in research, since the full provision of the Five Freedoms is not possible due to their complex social, physiological and behavioural needs.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2015

BACKGROUND

Until the use of animals in science is eliminated, the BC SPCA will work for improved protection and welfare of these animals. The current Canadian organization providing oversight for the use of animals in government-funded research, teaching and testing is the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC). Participation in CCAC programs is required for institutions receiving public funding in Canada. Private research institutions may opt into CCAC participation, however, other private animal-based research, teaching or testing is conducted without CCAC involvement. The BC SPCA

¹ *E.g.*, research on the negative effects of smoking, which has already been established as harmful to human health

² With the exception of training animal professionals (*i.e.*, veterinarians, technicians, animal protection staff)

encourages all private institutions to become participants in the CCAC oversight program.

The BC SPCA believes that all use of animals (live and tissues) in science should be subject to ethical review and post-approval monitoring, and that the animals:

- when kept in confinement, be treated such that their physical and behavioural needs are met in accordance with the Five Freedoms;
- be specifically bred for experimental purposes to make animals more genetically similar and to reduce the number needed to achieve statistically significant results;
- be provided with adequate anaesthesia and analgesia agents, and prompt medical treatment by a trained professional to minimize suffering or discomfort whenever they demonstrate symptoms of disease or injury; and,
- be euthanized by a trained professional without delay when symptoms do not respond to medical treatment or when suffering from untreatable conditions.

In addition, appropriate training should be provided to all persons involved in handling animals.

The BC SPCA encourages the development of techniques that will result in the replacement, reduction and/or refinement of animal experiments or procedures. The Society urges government, universities, industry and other research institutions to make greater efforts to use alternatives that do not involve animals.

Background updated – September 2015

DEFINITIONS

Animal: A living being belonging to the kingdom Animalia

Anaesthesia: Temporary insensitivity to pain or loss of consciousness, especially as artificially induced by administration of gases or injectable drugs

Analgesia: The inability to feel pain, without the loss of consciousness, especially as artificially induced by administration of gases or injectable drugs

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed in 1965 by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the *suffering* of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal *guardians* to strive to provide them.

Replacement: Preferred use of non-animal methods over animal methods whenever it is possible to achieve the same scientific aims

Reduction: Use of methods that enable researchers to obtain comparable levels of information using fewer animals, or to obtain more information from the same number of animals

Refinement: Use of methods to alleviate or minimize potential pain, suffering or distress, and enhance welfare for animals used



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMALS USED IN TESTING

The BC SPCA opposes the use of live animals and their tissues for the testing of inessential substances, such as cosmetics, household cleaning products, cigarettes, and alcoholic beverages, and seeks to reduce animal testing in biomedical and other scientific research (e.g., therapeutic medications, vaccines, food) which is currently a legal requirement in Canada.

The BC SPCA recognizes that the use of live animals to test cosmetics has been banned in the European Union and India, and encourages the ban of such testing in Canada. The BC SPCA supports the development and use of non-animal alternatives for all types of testing, and believes that testing companies have a responsibility to aid in the development of non-animal alternatives.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2015
(replaces Animals in Research, January 2000)

BACKGROUND

Food items, medical equipment, pharmaceutical products (medicines, vaccines, etc.), chemicals, radiation emitting devices, cosmetics and pesticides are legally required to meet the safety obligations set out by Health Canada. Such efficacy and safety testing often involves the use of animals. Public and private institutions conduct such testing, however, only government-funded institutions require oversight from the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC). The BC SPCA encourages all private institutions to become participants in the CCAC oversight program.

The BC SPCA believes that all use of animals (live and tissues) in testing should be subject to ethical review and post-approval monitoring, and that the animals:

- when kept in confinement, be treated such that their physical and behavioural needs are met in accordance with the Five Freedoms;
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Efficacy testing: Testing a product or drug to see how well it works

Safety testing: Testing a product or drug to ensure that it causes no toxic or harmful effects



**THE BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

POSITION STATEMENT

USE OF ANIMALS IN TEACHING

The BC SPCA is opposed to the use of any animal, including cadavers or tissues, for dissection in education except when training animal professionals in post-secondary institutions. The BC SPCA is opposed to students at any educational level, being compelled either to perform or watch animal dissection, and supports students who opt out of animal dissection assignments on conscientious grounds. Alternatives to dissection, such as computer simulations and models, should be made available to all students.

When studying behaviours of animals in their natural state or environment, animals should not be distressed or disrupted from performing natural behaviours, nor be forced to perform unnatural behaviours.

When training animal professionals (e.g., veterinarians, technicians, animal protection staff) some use of animals or tissues may be appropriate so long as:

- there is proven educational merit to the activity and it has gone through an appropriate review process;
- non-animal alternatives are unavailable;
- wild animal cadavers from rehabilitation facilities are provided to institutions under government permit conditions;
- live animals are not likely to experience pain, distress or suffering, which may necessitate use of adequate anaesthesia¹ and analgesia; and
- live animals are being kept according to the Five Freedoms.

Approved by the Board of Directors – September 2015

(replaces Educational Dissection, July 2009)

BACKGROUND

The national oversight organization for animals in science, the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC), states there is no justification for teaching practices that are painful to animals. The CCAC indicates that teaching protocols rated at the highest level of invasiveness (Category E) should not be approved by institutions.

Unlike other forms of animal use in teaching, the use of animals in high school education does not fall under the mandate of the CCAC, nor does the dissection of externally sourced animal cadavers

¹ Pitthng is not considered adequate anaesthesia

at universities. Given the myriad of non-animal alternatives that exist, the Society advocates for the implementation of educational resources which provide alternatives to dissection at any education level.

The BC SPCA also recommends that there should be a clearly defined ethics and animal welfare component in all higher education courses in the biological sciences with emphasis on understanding the needs of animals and human responsibility toward them, which should encourage students to explore the ethics of animal use.

For other animals kept in confinement for teaching purposes, see the BC SPCA position statement on Classroom Pets.

Background updated – September 2015

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Pithing: To pierce or sever the spinal cord of an animal so as to kill or immobilize it