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Progress made on Voluntary Trap Approval

In Pest 52: August & September 2017, we first reported on Dr Sandra Baker’s presentation at the International Conference on Urban Pests (ICUP) where she called for an end to double standards in spring trap welfare. What’s happened since? The good news is that the government’s Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) is getting on board.

At ICUP 2017 Dr Sandra Baker, from the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit at the University of Oxford’s Zoology Department, spoke about her research on the likely welfare impact of unregulated break-back traps and mole traps. She proposed a Voluntary Trap Approval (VTA) scheme to eliminate poor welfare traps from the market.

Such a scheme would allow unregulated traps to be tested in the same way that other (regulated) spring traps are currently tested for approval – using killing trials conducted by the government’s Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). Over the following few weeks we covered the story further including advice from Sandra on which break-back traps to avoid.

We are pleased to report that Dr Baker has since heard from APHA that they have been contacted by a trap manufacturer who was aware of the proposal (probably via Pest, suggests Sandra!) and was interested in having their unregulated traps tested.

APHA told Dr Baker that they were prepared, in principle, to begin testing unregulated break-back traps in the same way as they test regulated traps.

In order to pass these tests, traps need to cause irreversible unconsciousness in the target species within five minutes in 80% or more of 12 tests. This is based on the AIHTS (Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards) criteria. Regulated traps (not break-back traps) that have been tested and approved are then listed on the relevant Spring Traps Approval Order (STAO).

Unregulated traps that pass the same tests are not eligible to be added to the STAO, nor is APHA accredited to give certification. However, manufacturers of successfully tested traps would be able to market them as having ‘passed APHA tests to AIHTS standards’.

Dr Baker predicts that a Voluntary Trap Approval (VTA) scheme would drive improvements in trap welfare quality by incentivising manufacturers to reduce the time taken by their traps to cause irreversible unconsciousness.

Manufacturers would pay for tests – as do manufacturers of regulated traps – and the price would be approximately £6/7,000 per trap type for mice and a little more for rats. Manufacturers would own their test data on times to irreversible unconsciousness and could do with it as they liked. They could choose to keep their tests and test data private, post their data on their own website or advertise it on their packaging.

Independent website

In addition, Sandra told us that she is looking into the possibility of an independently hosted website on which manufacturers could voluntarily display their test data for public scrutiny.

Unfortunately, tests on mole traps will not be possible at this stage because of practical difficulties associated with testing traps underground.

Following their conversation with Dr Baker, APHA are consulting the Home Office to check whether they can go ahead with testing unregulated break-back traps. We will update you on that soon.

Watch this space!

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