Equine Welfare

Editors | C. Wayne McIlwraith and Bernard E. Rollin
Equine Welfare
The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare

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

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

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

Sir Peter Medawar CBE FRS, 8th May 1957
Nobel Laureate (1960), Chairman of the UFAW Scientific Advisory Committee (1951–1962)

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UFAW’s aim regarding the UFAW/Wiley-Blackwell Animal Welfare book series is to promote interest and debate in the subject and to disseminate information relevant to improving the welfare of kept animals and of those harmed in the wild through human agency. The books in this series are the works of their authors and the views they express do not necessarily reflect the views of UFAW.
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Having evolved to help us maximize our evolutionary fitness – most recently as we (our ancestors) lived in the trees, descended to the savannahs, and emigrated as hunter-gatherers to the far ends of the Earth – our brains are wired to raise all sorts of ‘gut feelings,’ ‘instincts,’ and preferences. Regardless of their relevance to the very different habitats we have since created for ourselves, these default biases – ‘Don’t touch snakes,’ ‘Be wary of spiders,’ ‘Try tasting the red berries,’ and many others far less apparent to us – remain subtly powerful and very influential. Unless we take time to stop and consider, using evidence and reason, our brains are inclined to make, and stick to, hasty judgments about what is good or bad, and about what they like and what they don’t (to the detriment of the welfare of some species). This can have adverse consequences for animal welfare.

There is something about horses that makes us tend to feel very fondly toward them. Nancy Loving (Chapter 13) captures this very evocatively: ‘The whicker of welcome, the soft blow of a horse’s sweet breath on one’s face, and the velvet touch of a warm muzzle add to the special emotional attachment an owner feels for a horse.’ So, too, in more muscular but equally eloquent style, does David Ramey (Chapter 2): ‘To ride a horse at speed gives its rider metaphorical wings, freeing man from the constraints of the ground, even if only for a short time. Throughout history, these needs have been celebrated in poetry, writing, sculpture, paintings, and drawings. The horse has been given high marks for honor, intelligence, and wisdom, and has been given a wide and diverse range of symbolic meanings. The horse has been treated with reverence, and man has used the horse as a symbol for his highest aspirations.’ As this book shows, such warmth and admiration often foster great concern and effort to provide for the welfare – the quality of life – of horses. Are all animals so fortunate?

Toads, rats, and the very many other species that, in contrast, tend to be judged the other way by our brains are more used to the harsher facets of human behavior. However, they might console themselves by observing that there can be some
significant risks in having such close relationships with humans. In the case of horses, as we see in this book, these can include: ‘firing’ (see Chapter 11), ‘soring’ to adjust gait and impress show judges (see Chapter 12), suboptimal housing leading to behavioral abnormalities, inappropriate feeding (often reflecting generosity unconstrained by knowledge, or overwhelming it), and being at risk (often for similar reasons) of ‘alternative’ therapies that have no scientific basis.

UFAW works to improve the welfare of animals by promoting and supporting research aimed at determining animals’ needs and how these can be met (both of which can be much more difficult than our hasty, biased, brains often assume) and through education, including publishing information relevant to animal welfare. One way that animal welfare improvements can be brought about is through becoming aware that standards for animal care in some situations fall short of those in others. It is therefore very helpful to look across the range of ways in which animals are kept and used, both between and, as most valuably done in this book, within species. As UFAW’s founder, Charles Hume, stated in his foreword to one of the charity’s first books, The UFAW Handbook on the Care and Management of Farm Animals (Churchill Livingstone, 1971): ‘UFAW does not necessarily support all the procedures that are described, and hopes that as knowledge accumulates some alternative and more humane methods will be developed.’ Although horses have been kept for thousands of years, it is only very recently that practices have begun to be scientifically scrutinized from the welfare point of view and there are, no doubt, many improvements to be made, as recognized by the editors in their preface.

We are very grateful to Wayne McIlwraith and Bernie Rollin for their excellent work in drawing together and editing this book (and patiently dealing with all of the editorial comments from UFAW), and to all the authors for their very interesting, informative, valuable, and New- and Old-World flavored chapters on aspects of our interactions with this very appealing animal.

James K. Kirkwood
UFAW
Western society is in the midst of a major cultural revolution in how animals are viewed and in how they ought to be treated in the course of human use. Despite the fact that rats and mice continue to be viewed by some as vermin, society has nonetheless demanded that the pain and distress they undergo in the process of research be regulated in law. Similar demands are being made regarding the animals used for food. Indeed, in 2004, no fewer than 2100 laws pertaining to animal welfare were proposed in state legislatures across the USA. Inevitably, the ethical searchlight illuminating animal use has focused on the horse, an animal second only to the dog in its iconic stature. Those who view horses as livestock have been outpaced by those who see them as companion animals. Equine uses long taken for granted or ignored by society in general have been thrown into stark relief as emerging animal welfare issues.

The equine industry has often tended to ignore the animal welfare issues following in its wake, and has historically not attracted a great deal of opprobrium. This is even true of the Tennessee Walking Horse show industry, which, despite federal legislation promulgated in the 1970s aimed at correcting welfare abuses, continued to behave as it always had. That this social inattention will not last is patent, given all else that has occurred regarding animal welfare. If society is shocked by a practice, it will act, even if it has not thought through the consequences of its actions – witness what has occurred in regard to horse slaughter. If the industry wishes to retain its autonomy, it must address animal welfare issues in an anticipatory way, even if the issues have not yet reached societal consciousness.

This book is intended to stimulate thought and discussion in the equine industry regarding horse welfare in general and various issues specific to different industries. Toward this end, we have gathered knowledgeable experts in diverse aspects of equine use. Their chapters are not meant to be the final word on the topic, but the first word. They review what has been done regarding equine welfare and where we are going.

The book has grown out of a thirty-year collegial and friendship relationship between the two editors, one of us an equine surgeon and researcher, and the other...
a philosopher focusing on animal ethics. Our extensive history of watching yesterday’s acceptable practices turn into today’s social issues, combined with our close tracking of animal welfare concerns, convinced us of the timeliness – indeed exigency – of such a book.

We are grateful to our authors for their willingness to address the issues in their areas of expertise. Virtually no one refused our invitation. We are also grateful to Paula Vanderlinden for her tireless organizational efforts.

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