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## Share the Knowledge

The range of animals kept as pets has increased dramatically over the past ten years, and in both the US and UK, the variety of exotic species now available outnumbers the range of traditional domesticated species. The UK-based Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) recently conducted three surveys related to exotic pet ownership and care. The results were not encouraging; they indicated that many exotic animal owners do not possess the experience or knowledge to provide the animals in their care with the required diet or environmental conditions, often resulting in welfare problems. Equally alarming, when asked for advice, many pet shop owners did not have adequate knowledge to prepare novice pet owners for the responsibility of caring for an exotic pet. Many veterinarians who responded to the RSPCA survey opined that there is a shortage of clinicians who can provide veterinary treatment to exotic animals; indeed, fewer than half of the respondents had ever treated exotic animals.

Veterinarians in the private sector might benefit from the wealth of information compiled during the long history of using unusual and exotic animals in laboratory animal medicine. It is worth remembering that *The Biology of Rabbits and Rodents*, the first book on exotic pet medicine, was published in 1977 by two laboratory animal veterinarians—John Harkness and Joe Wagner. The problems currently faced by exotic animal veterinarians should give us pause to consider how far laboratory animal has come. Certainly, laboratory animal facilities with unusual animals have made great strides toward providing appropriate care and husbandry. For instance, nutritional diseases have become a rarity among exotic species used in laboratory animal medicine, even though among privately owned animals, health problems are often the result of nutritional deficiencies. Laboratory animal vendors are extremely knowledgeable and provide high-quality services to customers, which cover diagnostic monitoring, normal physiological values, and information on care. In contrast, pet shop employees and exotic animal breeders are often not as knowledgeable and may provide incorrect information to prospective exotic pet owners.

Laboratory animal veterinarians can also learn from their fellow exotic pet veterinary colleagues. Exotic pet medicine as a veterinary specialty is a rapidly growing area; the Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians (<http://www.aemv.org>) was formed in 2000. While laboratory animal medicine is 'herd medicine', and euthanasia and necropsy are common diagnostic options, exotic pet medicine is 'individual medicine', requiring clinical work-ups to diagnose cases. At the recent International Conference on Exotics in Naples, FL, I was impressed by the sophisticated diagnostic techniques—such as endoscopy—and treatments routinely performed by exotic pet veterinarians. At the same time, however, I was disappointed by the lack of awareness of information that laboratory animal veterinarians have published and put into textbooks.

In the end, practicing laboratory animal veterinarians and exotic animal veterinarians could learn a great deal from each other. I believe that excellent opportunities exist for interchange of information between both specialty groups. I would encourage laboratory animal veterinarians to invite interested exotic pet veterinarians to attend seminars and to sit on IACUCs. Once involved, their fresh perspective could help us provide better quality care, better diagnostic and therapeutic options, and make the practice of medicine as exciting and challenging as it was for many of us in veterinary school. This issue presents articles that show the benefit both groups can achieve from interchange of ideas. Hopefully, we will see much more of this in the future.

Thomas M. Donnelly, DVM