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## In brief

**DOG TO WORK:** Purina is hoping more companies will follow its lead by encouraging dogs to follow their owners back into the workplace. One in five Britons could take their dog to work before lockdown, but the food firm said allowing them back into a COVID-secure workplace could benefit both dog and worker. It has developed a list of tips (bit.ly/3iChOOV) it is following for its offices in Gatwick, where dogs have been welcomed back on a trial basis since July. Tips include a one dog per employee limit, limited petting by co-workers, keeping it on a short lead and bringing in a clean water bowl every day.

**CREATURE SUCCESS:** The first episode in Channel 5's reboot of *All Creatures Great and Small* was a ratings hit, attracting more than five million viewers. Overnight figures showed 3.3 million viewers, a 20.4 per cent audience share, tuned in for the first instalment on 1 September – Channel 5's highest overnight rating since the debut of *The X-Files* in February 2016. Consolidated Broadcasters' Audience Research Board seven-day ratings, which includes catch-up viewing, raised total viewers for the James Herriot opener above five million – the 11th highest audience that week.

**RED MITES:** A grant worth almost half a million pounds has been awarded to the Moredun Research Institute to develop a novel way of studying poultry red mites that greatly reduces the number of hens required. The aim of the research – funded by the £483,000 grant from the National Centre Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research – is to establish a laboratory colony of red mites and develop a novel feeding method that removes the need to use infested hens.

**CAT SURVEY:** A survey of almost 2,000 cat owners has highlighted the fact 43 per cent of cats in the UK and Ireland have not seen a vet within the past year. The survey, conducted by Royal Canin, also revealed the main reason owners didn't take their cat to the vet more often was because their pet appeared to be healthy, and, therefore, didn't need medical attention.

**PRIZE WINNER:** RCVS Knowledge has awarded its inaugural Plowright Prize to William Ivan Morrison of The University of Edinburgh for his research combating East Coast fever. Prof Morrison, professor of immunology at The Roslin Institute at the university, plans to use the funding to advance his research into creating a cost-effective vaccine.

**BIG INVESTMENT:** One of Doncaster's best-known veterinary practices is preparing to welcome patients to its new £750,000 surgery. Arundell Vets opens its new 24-hour veterinary practice on 28 September, on the site of a former shopping unit at Kirk Sandall mall.

# Slow-growing chicken breeds healthier and happier – study

**CHOOSING slower-growing chicken breeds is likely to have more impact on animal health than lower-density production or increased space.**

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Slower-growing broiler chickens also have more fun than conventional breeds of birds, according to evidence from an independent commercial-scale farm trial involving the University of Bristol Veterinary School.

Carried out by researchers from FAI Farms, the University of Bristol and Norwegian University of Life Sciences, the study has been published in *Scientific Reports*, and is the first to highlight the welfare differences between fast and slower-growing broilers in a commercial setting, using a comprehensive suite of positive and negative welfare indicators.

It showed that, while providing chickens with space had benefits, by slightly lowering the animal density, changing to a slower-growing breed resulted in much better health and more positive experiences for these birds.

Annie Rayner, FAI Farms' lead researcher, said: "Broilers are motivated to perform a range of positive behaviours. These positive behaviours create positive experiences, resulting in enjoyment or pleasure. Displaying positive behaviours improves an animal's quality of life.

"Our seminal study found slow-growing birds to have better health and perform more positive behaviours than conventional fast-growing broilers.

"A shift from fast-growing breeds would provide the most significant improvement for the lives of the 142 million chickens produced in Europe every week."

Siobhan Mullan, senior research fellow in animal welfare at the University of Bristol Veterinary School, added: "This first independent commercial-scale trial provides robust evidence of the health and welfare benefits of slower-growing breeds of chicken.

"We hope it will help to drive changes in supply chains and large companies to bring about real improvements to chicken welfare."

The NGO-backed European Chicken Commitment (ECC) has attracted widespread attention from commercial broiler production, with several major brands already having signed up – including KFC, Nestlé, Marks and Spencer, and Nando's.

## Production trials

This study set out to interrogate the commercial welfare implications of two critical aspects of the commitment – a move to slower-growing breeds and lowering the stocking density.

The commercial-scale farm trial explored positive and negative welfare indicators in four production systems varying in stocking density and breed.

One slower-growing breed (the slowest) was stocked at a planned maximum density of 30kg/m$^2$, a second slower-growing breed at planned densities of 30kg/m$^2$ and 34kg/m$^2$, and the welfare outcomes were compared to those of a standard fast-growing breed stocked at 34kg/m$^2$.

At the lower density, the slowest-growing breed was found to have slightly better welfare than the other slower-growing breed – as indicated by lower mortality, fewer rejections at processing and better walking ability.

Differences in welfare of the slower-growing breed stocked at two densities were small. However, prominent differences were found between the standard fast-growing birds stocked at 34kg/m$^2$ and birds in the three other systems.

The standard birds experienced poorer health, indicated by higher levels of mortality, hock burn and pododermatitis, as well as greater rejections at processing. Furthermore, the conventional birds showed less perching on enrichment bales, as well as fewer positive "play" and "exploration" behaviours.

Ruth Newberry and Judit Vas, of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences Faculty of Biosciences, pointed to the importance of including indicators of positive experiences in animal welfare studies: "Until recently, play was hardly ever mentioned in studies of chickens.

"We found that, when you walk through a commercial flock, you just have to turn around and look behind you to see chickens frolicking in your footsteps. This was especially the case in the slower-growing flocks."

## ECC impetus

Philip Lymbery, global chief executive of Compassion in World Farming, welcomed the study and said it added further evidence that moving to slower-growing breeds is "an absolute must" for any company claiming to take chicken welfare seriously.

He added: "It adds further weight to the long-held view that fast-growing breeds are genetically selected to suffer.

"It also throws greater impetus on the need for companies to sign up to the ECC, switching their production or supply chains to birds with a more balanced growth rate.

"Fast-growing breeds should now quickly become a thing of the past."

## Heart operation no picnic for Yogi

**A ST BERNARD with a potentially fatal heart condition is on the road to recovery thanks to the team at Cave Veterinary Specialists in Somerset.**

Six-year-old gentle giant Yogi (**pictured**) was referred to the specialist team at the Wellington-based practice, part of the Linnaeus group, suffering from a pericardial effusion – a serious heart problem where fluid gathers around the heart.

A delicate operation to open the sac around the heart, called a pericardectomy, was led by Cave's small animal surgery specialist Malcolm Jack, assisted by specialist veterinary anaesthetist Will McFadzean, and RVNs Sophie Puzey and Bryony Gilder.

However, the operation wasn't without its complications.

Mr Jack said: "The pericardium felt very tight and under pressure and, when I cut into it, a large volume of very dark blood had to be suctioned away.

"As surgery progressed there was a constant, slow welling of fresh blood, but the source could not be identified. So we inserted a chest drain and performed an autotransfusion, which collects the blood and transfers it back into the patient. We also placed a catheter into Yogi's jugular vein, and administered one unit of packed red blood cells and two units of plasma."

Mr Jack added: "Yogi was in a critical condition at the end of surgery, but he stabilised after the transfusions and the haemorrhage stopped. We continued to monitor and treat him until he was able to go home, and we're very pleased to hear he's made such a good recovery."

Owner Kate Vardy said: "I must admit, I feared the worse, but prayed for the best. I'm sure I was a nightmare owner as I was telephoning them constantly, but the staff were brilliant. I'm so thankful. Everything was done so quickly – especially considering the COVID-19 situation."

Ms Vardy also paid tribute to the canine charity Pet Blood Bank UK, without whose blood and plasma service Yogi's story could have ended differently.

She said: "I'd encourage other dog owners to think about their dogs donating blood as I now know just how valuable and life-saving a service it is."

● More information on Pet Blood Bank UK is available via www.petbloodbankuk.org

## Vet group launches BAME scholarship programme

**IVC Evidensia is setting up a scholarship to fund up to 12 vet school undergraduates from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.**

The group's referral director Amanda Boag is leading activity to launch the scholarship, and said she will be working with universities and other partners to raise awareness of the available funding.

She said: "As industry leaders, we need to make sure we are at the forefront of driving the industry forward. Encouraging diversity within our group is hugely important to us and this scholarship scheme is a great start.

"It will help pave the way for more positive changes in the industry we work in and love, improving it for future generations."

Group chief executive Steve Clarke said IVC would also ensure a support network, mentoring programme and support for student societies would be in place.

He said: "As a gay person who grew up in the 1970s and 80s, I fully understand prejudice and the impact it can have – especially in the workplace. We are committed to promoting equality in every aspect of our working lives, regardless of colour, gender, sexual orientation, disability or religion.

"We take seriously our responsibility to build a culture and organisation that respects diversity and inclusion. We take this stance not to garner publicity, but to demonstrate our support to all our workforce, and the clients and communities in which we all work.

"The BAME scholarship scheme is part of this initiative. But it's not just about giving money – it's about action, too. That's why we also recognise the need to build a support network for these undergraduates to thrive and flourish, and we want our BAME colleagues to be fully involved in the planning of that support."

More information is available by emailing bame@ivcevidensia.com

# Survey aims to gauge telemedicine impact in pandemic

**VETERINARY clinicians are being urged to take part in a new study to find out the extent they have turned to telemedicine during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

A study is being led by Sarah Caney, chief executive of Vet Professionals; Rachel Dean, director of clinical research and excellence in practice at VetPartners; and Danièlle Gunn-Moore, professor in feline medicine at The University of Edinburgh.

The questionnaire, being hosted by Vet Professionals, aims to understand more about vets' and VNs' experiences of telemedicine during the pandemic – particularly when access to veterinary services was limited.

In terms of the survey, telemedicine refers to consultations that are not in person, but instead conducted via video, telephone or email. It can be for remote diagnosis, treatment and/or monitoring of patients.

It features 14 questions and should take about 10 minutes to complete, with all data processed in accordance with data protection laws.

The results of the study will be summarised in published articles, papers and presentations. For full details and to take part in the survey, visit bit.ly/3c91jHL

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