



RESEARCH ANIMALS

How the RSPCA helps laboratory animals

The RSPCA's work to help lab animals is led by a small, dedicated team with specialist knowledge and expertise in a range of scientific, animal welfare and ethical issues.

The RSPCA's constructive and informed approach, and the positive results we achieve, are widely recognised and respected by the many governmental and non-governmental organisations we liaise with, both nationally and internationally.

Some current activities include:

- developing and promoting new approaches for reducing animal use and suffering – this includes our ground-breaking project aiming to ensure that no animals experience 'severe' suffering;
- helping the European Commission produce guidance for European Union member states on the effective enforcement of laws regulating animal use;
- bringing people together to identify and consider key welfare issues associated with specific animals (e.g. rats and mice, genetically altered animals, farm animal species, wild animals) to share experience and knowledge, challenge current practices and promote advances;
- delivering training on ethics, animal welfare and the law to people regulating, using and caring for animals in research and testing internationally;
- running workshops and producing guidance to help members of ethics committees effectively challenge whether and how laboratory animals are used;
- ensuring that students whose future careers may involve animal use fully understand the ethical, welfare and scientific issues involved.

To find out more about what we are doing to help laboratory animals, see: www.rspca.org.uk/laboratoryanimals





More than 100 million animals are used in research and testing across the world each year, including more than four million in the UK.

Animal experiments are done for many different purposes – and not all are ‘vital medical research’.

Lots of animals are used in research to try to understand more about medical conditions like cancer or Alzheimer’s disease, and to produce vaccines (including those used for our pets and for farm animals), pharmaceutical drugs or other treatments.

However, other animal research is done into conditions where treatment with pharmaceuticals is not the only option – such as obesity or drug addiction – or conditions that many argue do not need ‘treating’ at all, like male pattern baldness.

Animal research and testing is also done to answer questions such as how birds navigate when flying, or to assess the safety of new chemicals that go into products like paints and pesticides before they can be marketed.

Each area of animal use raises specific ethical, welfare and scientific issues and there is a range of views in society on how much suffering should be allowed and for what purpose.

Even housing animals in a laboratory environment can have a negative effect on welfare and – when it comes to the actual experiments – lab animals can and do experience pain and distress.

Sadly, sometimes this can be severe.



Scientists who use animals argue that there is currently no other way to achieve their scientific objectives, and that any pain or distress caused to the animals is outweighed by the potential benefits of their research. However, ‘necessity’ and ‘justification’ are both matters of opinion.

There is also serious debate and concern, including among scientists themselves, about the usefulness of many animal ‘models’ and tests, and we also know that some experiments are badly planned and designed, or poorly carried out. This wastes animals’ lives and causes suffering that could have been avoided.

We believe that much more can, and should, be done to avoid animal use and to reduce the suffering of laboratory animals.

There is much talk of ensuring ‘the highest possible standards’ of animal welfare – but these ‘standards’ are rarely explained. In practice, labs may do little or nothing above the minimum legal requirements for housing animals and reducing suffering.

The RSPCA’s primary goal is the replacement of animal experiments with humane alternatives worldwide.

Until this can be achieved, we work to help ensure that the minimum numbers of animals are used, they experience the minimum suffering, and their welfare is improved.

We work to help laboratory animals in five main ways:

- ensuring that the use of animals is challenged – both ethically and scientifically;
- working to achieve reductions in lab animal use and suffering, and improvements in welfare;
- striving for effective, well enforced regulation of animal experiments in the UK;
- raising standards of regulation and animal welfare internationally;
- promoting debate on the use of animals in research and testing which is open and honest.



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