

Consultation on the Proposed Ban on Electric Shock Collars in England

Re the proposed ban on electronic collars used on cats and dogs in England: a ban has been in place in Wales since 2010 and Scotland has placed the use of collars under advisory guidance as a potential step towards implementing a ban. It is important that the lesson is learned from the recent experience of Scotland where the initial proposal was to limit the use of such devices to "qualified" persons only. This was recognised as effectively endorsing the administration of pain and was rightly rescinded.

Welfare effect of e-collars

The adverse effect of e-collars on canine welfare is well documented (Hiby et al 2004, Schilder et al 2004, Blackwell and Casey 2006, Schalke et al 2007, Steiss et al 2007, Yin et al 2008, Friedman 2009, CAWC Report 2012, Blackwell et al 2012, Cooper J et al 2010, 2011, 2014, Salgirli et al 2012, Lines et al 2013, Deldalle and Gaunet 2014, Lyons and Coulson 2015 et alia). It is particularly aversive in dogs where use extends beyond straying to use to prevent barking and predatory behaviours. When compared with non-aversive methods of training, in all cases, the use of shock collars caused short and long term effects that were contra-indicatory to use and which were largely ineffective in the long term training of dogs with regard to predatory behaviours. (Steiss et al 2007)

There is no question, as proved in the literature cited above, that electronic devices cause pain and that vibrating and chemical collars cause distress. What is also unquestionable and, moreover, has been known for 70 years, training with aversive methods prevents learning. Administering positive punishment does not teach the animal an alternative behaviour and is only effective in stopping the behaviour from recurring if timed with sufficient precision to enable the animal to make a connection between the pain and the behaviour. Most owners lack the skills to achieve this other than by chance. Even when professional dog handlers used the devices to train service dogs (Salgirli et al 2012), it was proven to damage the relationship between the handler and the dog which is key, not only to successful training, but to canine welfare. In effect, the very person that the dog has learned to trust becomes the person that inflicts pain and suffering. Thus the dog comes to regard the owner as being unpredictable and will present with stress indications such as raised cortisol levels and appeasing behaviours whenever in the presence of the owner. (Blackwell et al 2008, Polsky 2000 and Herron et al (2009)

It is well known that behaviours that are rewarded continue to occur. Tragically, punishing dogs is very rewarding for owners because they perceive that their methods are successful. The pain causes the dog to stop what it is doing at the time that it is administered. Appeasing behaviours are often interpreted as the dog exhibiting guilt for its behaviour and the owner therefore attributes impossible cognitive outcomes to the dog: viz. that the dog "knows" that it has done wrong and "deserves" to be punished and that, when the behaviour as like as not is repeated, the dog is doing it "deliberately" out of "spite" or some other form of perceived malice or refusal to be obey.

The use of seriously aversive and painful punishment can also cause a dog to redirect aggression towards the nearest target - be it a human or another animal. In just one example, canine law specialist Trevor Cooper successfully defended the owner of dogs that attacked two smaller dogs

because a so-called behaviourist had suggested the use of an electronic collar for "training" (Anon 2001). The owner administered a shock accidentally when first using the collar and her dogs associated it with the smaller dog that was, quite by chance, passing at the time. They later broke free of their owner and attacked two shih tzus that they met on another occasion. The dogs died of their injuries.

Contrary to popular belief and the recent statement by Tim Bonner, CEO of the Countryside Alliance, electronic collars are not the solution of last resort in preventing dogs from attacking livestock. The best way of preventing dogs from exercising natural predatory behaviours is to keep them on a lead around livestock, avoid areas where livestock may be with young, and to train alternative behaviours. Some breeds of dogs have been selectively bred for their herding and hunting instincts and may never be reliable around stock. Equally, all dogs have the potential to engage in predatory behaviour, regardless of breed and regardless of size. Only the implementation of education and enforcement of the more than 50 statutes that affect dogs, achieved by the input of sufficient resources to inform and police owner behaviour will be effective in reducing the distressingly large number of cases where stock is harmed by domestic dogs.

Electronic collars are also not a solution to the problem of dogs barking where use can exacerbate the underlying fear causing the vocalisation. Just as humans speak for a variety of reasons, dogs bark for a variety of reasons, and the underlying cause needs to be identified before it can be dealt with. The *PDSA PAW Report 2017* found that 93,000 dogs are never walked at all - no wonder their frustration is exhibited in barking and other unwanted behaviours. 1.8 million dogs (19%) are being left alone for 5 hours or more on a weekday. Little wonder that they exhibit natural consequences of loneliness and boredom such as barking. Terriers are popular because people find small dogs easier to handle and especially appealing. Terriers are bred to be very vocal, yet are being punished on a daily basis for the very behaviour that we have bred them to exhibit when used for their original purpose of eradicating vermin. Other breeds such as the Finnish Spitz are bred explicitly for their barking in the hunting field, a trait not so popular in a London flat. The *PDSA PAW Report 2017* found that 1.2 million dog owners (13%) undertook no research whatsoever before buying a dog: most owners buy a dog on looks alone and have unrealistic expectations of how dogs' needs and behaviours.

Basic training and education are essential for all dog owners as well as their dogs. There are an estimated 8.5 - 9.5 million dogs in the UK, depending on the source of the figure. The *PDSA PAW Report 2017* found that 1.2 million dogs (13%) received no training at all. The research also showed that there has been a significant decrease in the number of dogs completing a course of training from 16% in 2016 to 12% in 2017 and a decrease in the number who went to one or more organised training classes from 21% in 2016 to 17% in 2017. Of those that do train their dogs, many think that a short bout of puppy training is sufficient. Such courses may comprise just a few weeks of basic advice with no guarantee that the trainer is qualified or experienced. Even where the advice is good, a 6-8 week course is insufficient to fit the dog for the life that it is about to lead and certainly not sufficient for inexperienced or uneducated owners. It is increasingly difficult also for qualified trainers to find suitable, affordable venues that permit dogs, especially in urban areas where space is at a premium. In my own area of west London, I have spent more than 2 years trying to find a venue

that will take dogs without success. Rates are in the region of £90-£100 per session, making the building of a new business extremely risky from a financial point of view.

There are many aspects to dog ownership in this context that compromise canine welfare and that make it more likely that owners will resort to aversive methods if given the opportunity.

Cooper et al (2010, 2011 and 2014) found that manufacturers did not always provide instructions for use of a collar, owners did not always read instructions and that there was no consistency in advice given. Owners were often likely to use the collar at maximum strength on first implementation. Additionally, there is considerable variation in the shock received by the animal which depended on skin type and whether the animal was wet (from perspiration or precipitation) or dry. Collars have been proven to be defective on occasions and poor quality collars likely to appeal because of their relatively low price, are readily available online.

The scientific literature has documented the "learned helplessness" that can be engendered by administering electric shocks to animals extensively since Seligman (1972) published his experiments on dogs. Those experiments would not now be sanctioned by ethics committees, and rightly so; yet it is still legal for uneducated owners and handlers to administer electric shocks to dogs and cats when they exhibit natural straying or predatory behaviours and vocalisation.

Witmer GW et al (2007) found that electric fencing was ineffective at keeping cats and "most species" at bay whereas physical barriers were successful. There are many methods and easily available recommendations for deterring cats and, of course, training is an option, although few cat owners pursue it actively. Fences may cause shocks to be administered to cats without their owner's knowledge or permission and could result in unwanted behaviours that are difficult to identify and eradicate.

Scope of Ban

As it is not possible to effect a ban on online sales outside of the UK, control must rest principally with use by the owner, handler or trainer. However, the ban should include also a ban on sales by retail outlets, including online sales clearly linked to those outlets. Such a ban would fit easily into an amendment to the AWA and provide an opportunity to educate owners to undertake training using non-aversive methods, not least because they are the most effective. This of course would need to be policed effectively. The law should require retail outlets and online sites linked with those outlets to carry a notice explaining that the use of electronic collars is prohibited and why and retailers should be encouraged to provide a suitable alternative source of information for non-aversive training.

The Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010 state that "*It is prohibited for a person to...be responsible for a cat or a dog to which an electronic collar is attached.*" A similar prohibition should be imposed for England and can be policed for dogs through the requirement for owners to ensure that their dogs can be traced via a microchip and up to date database. Ideally, this should be extended to cats, although, of course, legal obligations on cat owners are of necessity considerably less than those for dog owners. The entry and search under warrant in connection with offences section of this Act is also appropriate to any legislation that may be passed in England.

Impact on e-collar suppliers and manufacturers

The Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association is based in Belgium and as such, subject to European as well as national legislation. Unfortunately, European law is largely silent when it comes to the welfare of companion animals, although Austria, Denmark, Finland and Germany all ban electronic collars. Whilst Britain remains a member country, a ban on sales in England would send a clear message that aversive methods of training will not be sanctioned by domestic governments and will support the extension of the ban to, at least, other European nations.

Manufacturers can make more ethical profits from non-aversive training aids and, like the purveyors of slave shackles, can turn swords into ploughshares. There is still a role for electric fencing to contain livestock, although that also has its limitations as animals often learn how to overcome it.

In conclusion, there is no place in the modern world for training using aversive methods and no one should be permitted to use electricity to shock an animal in the name of learning or livestock preservation.

References

Anon (2012) *The Use of Electronic Pulse Training Aids in Dogs and Cats*, Companion Animal Welfare Council

Blackwell E and Casey R (2006) *The use of shock collars and their impact on the welfare of dogs: a review of current literature*, RSPCA

Blackwell E et al (2008) *The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behaviour problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs*, Journal of Veterinary Behaviour: Clinical Applications and Research, September/October, pp 207-217

Blackwell EJ et al (2012) *The use of electronic collars for training domestic dogs: estimated prevalence, reasons and risk factors for use, and owner-perceived success as compared to other training methods*, BMC Veterinary Research, V8(93)

Cooper J et al (2014) *The welfare consequences and efficacy of training pet dogs with remote electronic training collars in comparison to reward based training*, PLoS ONE 9 (9)

Cooper J et al (2011) *Studies to assess the effect of pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse systems on the welfare of domestic dogs*, Project AW1402A, DEFRA

Cooper J et al (2010) *Studies to assess the effect of pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse systems on the welfare of domestic dogs*, Project AW1402, DEFRA

Deldalle S and Gaunet F (2014) *Effects of two training methods on stress-related behaviours of the dog (Canis familiaris) and on the dog-owner relationship*, Journal of Veterinary Behaviour: Clinical Applications and Research, V9(2), pp 58–65

Friedman SG (2009) *What's wrong with this picture? Effectiveness is not enough*, Journal of Applied Companion Animal Behaviour, V3(1), pp 41–45

Herron ME et al (2009) *Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviours*, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, V117

Hiby EF, Rooney NJ, Bradshaw JWS (2004) *Dog training methods—their use, effectiveness and interaction with behaviour and welfare*, Animal Welfare, V13, pp 63–69

Lines J et al (2013) *Characteristics of electronic training collars for dogs*, Veterinary Record, V16, pp 288

Lysons R and Coulson N (2015) *A Review Of Recent Evidence In Relation To The Welfare Implications For Cats And Dogs Arising From The Use Of Electronic Collars*, Welsh Government

Polsky R (2000) *Can Aggression in Dogs Be Elicited Through the Use of Electronic Pet Containment Systems?*, Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science, V3(4), pp 345-357

Salgirli Y et al (2012) *Comparison of learning effects and stress between three different training methods (electronic training collar, pinch collar and quitting signal) in Belgian Malinois police dogs*, Revue de Médecine Vétérinaire, V163(11), pp 530-535

Schalke E et al (2007) *Clinical signs caused by the use of electronic training collars on dogs in everyday life situations*, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, V105, pp 369-380

Schilder MBH et al (2004) *Training dogs with help of the shock collar: short and long term behavioural effects*, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, V85, pp 319-334

Seligman MEP (1972) *Learned helplessness*, Annual Review of Medicine, V23(1), pp 407–412

Steiss J et al (2007) *Evaluation of plasma cortisol levels and behaviour in dogs wearing bark control collars*, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, V106, pp 96-106

Witmer GW et al [Eds] (2007) *Managing vertebrate invasive species: proceedings of an international symposium*, USDA/APHIS Wildlife Services, National Wildlife Research Centre, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA

Yin S et al (2008) *Efficacy of a remote-controlled, positive-reinforcement, dog-training system for modifying problem behaviours exhibited when people arrive at the door*, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, V113, pp 123–138