

Welfare of zoo animals set to improve

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The wellbeing of zoological animals is set to improve following the successful trial of a new welfare assessment grid, a new study in the journal *Veterinary Record* reports.

Researchers from Marwell Zoo, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Surrey, trialled a series of monitoring strategies on primates and birds to help zookeepers ensure the health and safety of [animals](#) in their care. The introduction of the practice over a period of 13 weeks at two zoological collections in the South of England, clearly demonstrated the level of physical and psychological [wellbeing](#) of the animals, and the effect of certain interventions.

The welfare assessment grid requires daily monitoring of a range of factors, such as the animals' physical condition, their psychological wellbeing and the quality of the environment, as well as the daily procedures they experience. These factors were not all previously part of the regular health checks that zookeepers were required to assess when they were undertaking [animal welfare](#) audits. In each area the primates and birds were scored, helping to monitor their progress and highlight any potential problems.

Although welfare protection of zoo animals is enshrined in both European and domestic legislation, monitoring it comprehensively in zoos has proven difficult due to the absence of clear and consistent guidance.

Sarah Wolfensohn, Professor of Animal Welfare at the University of Surrey, said: "Ensuring a high standard of animal welfare is paramount for any zoo, but it has not always been possible. This innovative system will give zookeepers clear guidance on what they should be looking out for in terms of physical and psychological characteristics in animals, which will help monitor their overall wellbeing.

"Zoos are a key part of educating us all about our environment and the animals we share it with across the world, and we all want to know that the animals we do see in zoos are being given the best possible care for their [welfare](#)."

More information: W. S. M. Justice et al. Adaptation of the animal welfare assessment grid (AWAG) for monitoring animal welfare in zoological collections, *Veterinary Record* (2017). [DOI: 10.1136/vr.104309](#)

Provided by University of Surrey

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