

may be used to present differing views on the same subject. If references are used in these articles, they will be the minimum necessary to locate the source and support the argument being developed.

*Original and Review Articles* are written by anyone with the necessary knowledge, data or expertise to prepare 'hard' scientific reviews or to present new data. These articles will be refereed, and we are following a policy of sending out papers for review without identifying the author. The referees will remain anonymous unless they agree to be named.

*Legislation and Regulation* items are written by members of the editorial staff or appropriate experts, and every effort is made to ensure their factual accuracy.

*Meeting Reports* are written by persons who have attended the relevant meetings. Every effort is made to ensure factual accuracy.

*IJSAP Book News* consists of a conglomeration of reviews and news about the printed and electronic media. The reviews reflect the opinions of the bylined author.

*Letters to the Editor* is the department in which readers should point out errors and dispute opinions and statements made in earlier issues of the Journal. If a letter is very long and cannot be cut, we will place it in the *Comment* section.

As should be apparent from the above, the Journal may well contain articles which produce vehement disagreement from certain segments of our readers. In fact, if everyone agreed with everything printed in these pages, we would not be achieving our objective, namely, to act as a forum for constructive debate and dialogue. Perhaps it is unrealistic to expect the *Letters* page to be flooded with comments at this stage, but we hope that readers will not be hesitant about criticizing the Journal's content or style. We may not agree with all of the criticisms, but we will not ignore them.

Finally, we would like to thank all of you who had sufficient faith in the Journal to subscribe, some even before we had produced a single issue. There have been a few problems with distribution and we apologize for the long delay in getting the first issue out. We hope that you feel the wait was worthwhile.

## Troubled Times at the RSPCA

David Wilkins, Associate Editor

Animal welfare means different things to different people. To the farmer it can mean proper care of stock and prevention of disease; to the urban dweller it can mean the abolition of fox hunting and the provision of kennels for unwanted dogs and cats; to the countryman it can mean maintaining the countryside for wildlife; to the philosopher it can mean the appreciation of the rights of animals to live a life of freedom in which all natural instincts can be followed; to a scientist it can mean advancement in the diagnosis and treatment of disease.

When one considers that representatives of all these varied walks of life with their different ideological attitudes can come together under the umbrella of the largest British welfare society — the RSPCA — then one should not be surprised that arguments occur and that complete agreement is the exception rather than

the rule. Representatives must believe, if they are sincere, that their own individual views are important, and as in all democratic institutions, that they are entitled to express them.

Confrontation between advocates of extreme opinions has occurred from time to time. The most recent example within the RSPCA culminated in an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) in February this year, which stimulated a great deal of publicity in the United Kingdom. The acrimonious debate that took place was considered by many to be a sure sign of disintegration. This pessimistic view is not supported either by a closer examination of the underlying situation or by the developments since the EGM.

The background to the present problem would appear to be the rapidly changing attitude of many people toward man's exploitation of animals. There has always been a small minority of people which has taken the view that no exploitation is justified under any circumstances. The loud and constant voicing of their ideals has had the effect of pushing a much larger percentage of the population toward reappraising both the extent and manner in which animals are utilized for the benefit of man.

Those who now question some of the existing animal husbandry practices can no longer be dismissed as cranks or sentimentalists. They include internationally respected scientists, philosophers, ecologists, etc. Within this new approach to animal welfare there are differing opinions as to the extent to which one should go in the name of progress. It is also significant that, regardless of their differences, all these welfare oriented people have been thrown together as a result of the strong opposition to change that has come from the commercial purveyors of the more extreme examples of exploitation. It has produced an uneasy alliance.

A conflict of opinion has always existed, therefore, but it is important to establish why, within the RSPCA, this conflict has recently become acrimonious and subsequently public.

In part it has been created by the peculiar balance that exists between the voluntary workers who make up the RSPCA Branch membership and the National membership. A strong feeling has always existed that the Society's activities are largely financed by and based upon the work of voluntary people in the Branches. It is they who function at what is euphemistically termed the grass roots level. This can lead, as it has undoubtedly done recently, to a pronounced "holier-than-thou" attitude toward people in and outside the Society who are involved with animal welfare from a theoretical rather than a practical point of view. There may be justification for this attitude, but in itself it can and has led to confrontation. The National member may have no direct connection with any RSPCA Branch at all, and in this way a group of people has evolved which, albeit interested in animal welfare, is not sympathetic or even in agreement with the aims and objectives of the majority of RSPCA Members. The result was that certain fundamental differences in attitude appeared within the ruling Council of the Society which were not easy to reconcile.

A second and important factor lies in the nature of the welfare argument itself. It is a false assumption that an interest in or involvement with animal welfare in itself provides sufficient common ground for harmony. Many people may express a desire for change, but one immediately comes up against massive disa-

greement about the extent to which change should proceed and the methods which should be employed to achieve it. It must follow that this wish to change the 'status quo,' although fundamental to progress, can in itself create conflict. The more radical the desired change, the slower the progress. Slowness breeds impatience and in an organization as traditional as the RSPCA there will be a minority who will claim that progress can only be achieved if the organization itself is radically changed. Such an attitude is basically anarchical and nothing is more guaranteed to stimulate conservatism than for such an opinion to be expressed publicly and to be identified with a certain group of people.

These different approaches to animal welfare are always present to some extent, but a balance has been achieved, even though on occasion precariously. Compromise always has to be the basis of such a balance, and for various reasons the advocates of compromise have been missing in the recent troubles. It was inevitable that once the conflict became public it would spread. The moderating or temperate voices were not heard or if they were, not heeded. Those who became deeply involved in such a conflict became determined to win and anything less than victory was unacceptable.

This surge of feeling toward different attitudes to animals is inescapable and is occurring throughout the whole social structure of our so-called Western civilization. Some people, and this is the third important factor in the RSPCA's present problem, harness themselves to this surge and manipulate it to their own ends, sometimes with no regard to the practical realities. Such people are found in all forms of revolution, and there is no doubt that the exaggerated promotion of extreme ideologies can actually damage progress. It is this small minority which beyond all others has aggravated the situation within the RSPCA. However, it does not follow that the arguments or people are political in any sense. Radicalism has always been associated with the socialistic attitude, but to suggest that the arguments are of a political nature is to misunderstand the situation.

It would also be wrong to imagine that animal welfare in general suffers by such a conflict. Certainly in the short term some aspects of animal welfare receive a set back because too much involvement with internal argument and controversy impairs an organization's external functioning. However, the outcome of the present conflict might well be a reestablishment of values which in itself will lead to progress. During the course of this self-examination individuals might fail in their personal ambitions and some will be exposed to a charge of misconduct.

The whole point of democracy would be lost if expressions of opinion were suppressed. It could well be argued that the RSPCA has achieved its present stature and influence because its structure allows all shades of opinion to be aired and that occasional conflict is an indication of health rather than of sickness. To resolve internal conflict and to reach what is hoped will be the inevitable compromise should be an indication of strength and therefore should be to the benefit of animal welfare rather than to its detriment.