

In brief

■ OY OY – NEW TOOL: Oyster farmers are set to benefit from a new tool that will help prevent disease outbreaks. Scientists at The University of Edinburgh Roslin Institute developed a chip loaded with thousands of pieces of DNA, each carrying a specific fragment of the oyster's genetic code. Using a tiny DNA sample from each oyster, the chip can measure small variations linked to physical traits. The tool will initially be used to spot oysters resistant to oyster herpesvirus, which causes major losses in young stocks.

■ ACTION AREA SUCCESS: Bovine TB incidence in Wales' intensive action area (IAA) has fallen by 35 per cent since it was set up in 2010, according to a report. Increased measures in the IAA, in north Pembrokeshire, include stricter cattle controls, improved biosecurity, badger vaccination, and testing all goats and camelids. The report suggested the measures were working, with the disease situation in the IAA improving faster than in a comparison area nearby, where incidence fell by 23 per cent in the same period.

■ COURSE: The College of Animal Welfare and the VPMA are helping those working in a veterinary practice undertake an Institute of Leadership and Management qualification, and save up to £800. For details, visit www.caw.ac.uk/ilm

■ TESTS APPROVED: The Kennel Club has approved three DNA testing schemes in Jack Russell terriers, following consultations with the breed health coordinator, for late onset ataxia, spinocerebellar ataxia and primary lens luxation.



Jeremy back on shelf as matches turn sour

A NATIONWIDE appeal to find a rare "lefty" snail a mate has backfired.

Last year, Angus Davidson – a reader in evolutionary genetics at The University of Nottingham – put out an appeal via BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme to find Jeremy the snail a mate, to further scientists' understanding of the genetics of the unusual creatures.

Lefty and Tomeu were found by a snail enthusiast in Ipswich and a snail farmer in Majorca,

respectively, and sent to the university for a "date" with Jeremy.

Unfortunately, sparks did not fly between Jeremy and his potential lovers. Instead, Lefty and Tomeu "fell" for each other.

Dr Davidson said: "It's like when you introduce your best friend to this girl you are interested in. So, Jeremy is back in the lab... but we can still do the science."

Lefty and Tomeu went on to produce more than 170 babies that coil to the right. Scientists believe this may be because their "mum" possessed both dominant and recessive genes.

Cat clinic owner predicts rise in feline-specific medicine

UNMET welfare needs and growing client expectations mean feline-only clinics will become increasingly common in the UK in the next decade, says a leading cat practitioner.

Jeremy Campbell, who runs The London Cat Clinic, laid out the advantages of a feline-only practice for patients and clients.

He said: "Many owners simply do not take their cats to the vet for routine check-ups because the journey to the clinic is so traumatic, and once they arrive, the cat becomes more stressed when faced with potential predators, such as dogs.

"By treating cats in a feline-only environment, they are immediately in a calm, non-threatening situation, and vets can examine them properly and diagnose any illness more accurately. This leads to a second benefit – the environment also has a calming effect on owners."

He added: "Working in an environment set up for one species, the equipment, accommodation and staff are focused

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on one goal – feline health and well-being."

Dr Campbell's clinic includes a range of equipment scaled down specifically for cats and cubbyholes they can use.

He said: "The deeper a vet's knowledge and expertise in feline medicine, the wider and more advanced the treatment options are likely to be.

"The profession already benefits from a significant number of feline-only vets, whether through their special interest in the species or advanced training.

"The exponential growth of International Cat Care (ICC) indicates a UK-wide increasing interest in single-species medicine.

By proxy, this will diffuse into the wider profession and improve the quality of the feline-specific care we are able to give.

"I believe this is a growth sector and expect to see more single-species practices opening in the next 5 to 10 years."

Benefits

Dr Campbell said practitioners wishing to streamline their skill set to become more species-specific have a number of training options in the UK, including postgraduate courses.

He added: "Cats are unique in their physiology and behavioural traits, and the way they display – or more accurately, hide – their symptoms makes expert care and understanding important."

Talking of the benefits of cat-only clinics, Dr Campbell said: "Owners would benefit from the expert knowledge and understanding a feline-trained vet would offer, and vet colleagues in general practice would be able to call on this knowledge when dealing with more complex cases."

Dr Campbell is keen for colleagues in mixed practice to further embrace feline medicine and suggested holding cat-only consultations at the end of the day.

"Whatever space you have, you can always do something to make the experience more palatable for cats," he said.

New clients who contact The London Cat Clinic are sent a list of "top tips" for encouraging cats into carriers. Staff also try to help if owners are concerned about transporting their pets.

Such measures could be implemented in practices, said Dr Campbell, who is keen to help colleagues across the profession and happy to look at patients in a second opinion capacity.

He said: "We are trying to build a network of independent practices that can talk to, and help, each other. For example, I recently had a call from a vet at another practice asking for a drug they knew I would have, being a feline-only centre.

"I want to help make cats happy and pain-free as much as possible – and hopefully the rest will follow."

ICC and its veterinary division, the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM), recognise the increasing trend for cat ownership and demand for good feline veterinary care.

ICC veterinary director Andrew Sparkes said: "ICC and the ISFM launched its Cat Friendly Clinic programme five years ago to encourage clinics to adopt a more feline-friendly approach to the clinic layout and facilities. This has been hugely successful, with more than 800 accredited clinics to date and more being added every day.

"While changes in a clinic can enable a much more cat-friendly approach and help enormously to reduce the stress of veterinary visits, having a cat-only clinic enables even greater opportunities to reduce stress for patients and provide a greater experience for cats and owners.

"There are a number of cat-only clinics in England, Scotland and Wales, and this trend is growing – mimicking the rise in the pet cat population."

General election: BVA champions animal welfare

ANIMAL health and welfare issues have been placed on a prime political platform by featuring heavily in the main political parties' general election manifestos.

The BVA has hailed the launch of Westminster's major parties' manifestos as a "win for animal health and welfare", with more than half of the organisation's manifesto recommendations being written into the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat priorities for the next Parliament.

After the general election was announced, the BVA produced a 20-point manifesto of key recommendations covering both Brexit and wider policy issues, which was sent to the parties and the BVA's parliamentary honorary associates and members.

Four key areas are outlined in the BVA's manifesto:

- securing a successful outcome for animal health and welfare after Brexit
- safeguarding animal health
- promoting animal welfare
- recognising the vital role of veterinary surgeons

In total, 11 of the BVA's 20 asks have been met by one or more of the three parties.

BVA president Gudrun Ravetz said: "While we are a relatively small profession, our critical and far-reaching roles in animal health, welfare and public health mean we are uniquely placed to offer the next government evidence-based and informed advice, and policy recommendations.

"Months of hard work by the Brexit working group, and the quick issue of our manifesto to the main political parties, enabled us to secure commitments on the profession's animal health and welfare priorities from all of the main political parties – whichever of them might take government after 8 June."

The BVA has launched a general election toolkit for BVA members, which includes the BVA manifesto for 2017, a template letter and a series of questions that can be posed to prospective parliamentary candidates at events and hustings.

For a breakdown of the parties' manifesto commitments, visit www.bva.co.uk/news-campaigns-and-policy/newsroom

Courses scoop awards

TWO leading courses in animal welfare education at The University of Edinburgh's Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies have received awards for their innovative approaches.

The on-campus Master's in Applied Animal Behaviour and Animal Welfare, and the online Master's in International Animal Welfare, Ethics and Law have received the Innovative Developments in Animal Welfare Award from the British Society of Animal Science and the RSPCA.

The programmes have been praised for the role they played in transforming the care of pets, livestock and wild animals worldwide, and lauded for improving the welfare of animals used in research.

David Argyle, head of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, said: "We are committed to training the animal welfare leaders of the future and are thrilled these programmes, run jointly with Scotland's Rural College, have been recognised for their success."



From left: Tamsin Coombs, programme coordinator, MSc Applied Animal Behaviour and Animal Welfare; Susan Jarvis, programme director, MSc Applied Animal Behaviour and Animal Welfare; and Fritha Langford, programme director, Online MSc International Animal Welfare, Ethics and Law.

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