Diary of a parliamentary intern

Veterinary parliamentary intern to Lord Trees, Hannah Jordan, announces the appointment of her successor while reporting that June had an animal welfare flavour.

We are days away from the summer recess and over the past few weeks the Houses of Parliament have been adjusting to the new Government. There has been much excitement on the lawn adjacent to my office at Number 1 Millbank, with Boris Johnson getting an earful from news presenter, Jon Snow, after he rubbed the Davies Commission for coming out in favour of Heathrow expansion; there was also much interest in George Osborne’s summer budget.

Last month we attended the consistently enjoyable BVA Animal Welfare Foundation’s annual discussion forum. There were great debates on antimicrobial resistance, animal population management and the use of advanced veterinary procedures, but the highlight for me was Steve Wotton’s session on the science of slaughter. It was interesting to hear how the latest research into animal stunning methods and potential best practice sits in comparison with the global trade and industry position on stunning, which was clarified for me at the recent OIE General Session in Paris.

Also in June, I took part in the Animals Behaving Badly conference, organised by CABI and the Royal Veterinary College (VR, July 18, 2015, vol 177, p 63). The presentations were excellent and, as well as taking away some ideas for my cat consults mental toolkit, there was some good discussion about fulfilling the five freedoms – particularly the freedom to express normal behaviours. Although these are enshrined in the Animal Welfare Act 2006, this continues to seem impotent without enforcement.

Following the advertisement for a new parliamentary veterinary intern, Anthony Ridge was appointed at the end of the month and will start in October. Not only was it a truly fascinating experience for me to sit on the other side of the table, but it was an honour to be included in the interview panel and a pleasure to meet the interviewees.

The hunting with dogs question has come to the fore once again and, although the Commons vote on amendments to the Hunting Act was dropped, a topical oral question on the subject was heard in the Lord’s chamber. Lord Trees managed to get his comments heard by the Minister of State for the Home Office, Lord Bates, when he asked the minister to agree that, while culling animal populations for specific purposes was generally accepted by society, we should do all we can to dissuade individuals from pursuing leisure activities that result in the death of animals. In the event, Lord Bates avoided the question and steered the conversation back to focus on the amendments raised in the Commons – the use of dogs to flush out pest species.

But for now, I am taking off my research hat and heading out into the sunshine in my swimming hat, to get another open water swim under my belt before the Woburn triathlon on September 6; I’m running in memory of Kat Adams MRCVS and I want to do her proud. Despite a recent small altercation with a car door during training, my race at Blenheim went reasonably well.

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