

FIELD RESEARCH AND LABORATORY ANIMAL SCIENCE: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM EACH OTHER?

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There is relatively little exchange of information and ideas between field researchers and those who use laboratory animal facilities. They usually attend different scientific meetings and, when they do meet, often conclude that their standards and experiences are either difficult to implement in the other environment, or are not particularly relevant.

Research in the laboratory is usually performed on animals with a relatively standardised genotype and known health status, kept under controlled environmental conditions. They are, however, given limited opportunities for natural behaviour and relatively little environmental enrichment. They have frequent and close contact with humans. Veterinary and nursing care is usually readily available. Some form of institutional animal care and use committee, with a local ethical review process, is now commonplace.

Animal research, whether it takes place in the field or laboratory, shares many common challenges, including relationships to the mass media, animal rights organisations and the desire to publish peer-reviewed studies of high quality that are beneficial to science and society.

This presentation, given by a veterinarian used to working under laboratory conditions, will describe the principles accepted in the laboratory animal environment as “best practice”. Some of these may be unfamiliar to field researchers. The effort needed to establish and maintain an accredited laboratory animal unit will also be discussed. Relationships between the unit and researchers, regulators and the general public will also be highlighted.

The aim of the presentation is to stimulate the participants to discuss the relevance of laboratory animal standards to field research, and to help identify areas in which efforts are needed to improve standards – hopefully in both environments!