British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council

Position Statement on the Rational and Responsible Use of Antibiotics in Wildlife

Introduction

The use of antibiotics in wildlife medicine is largely empirical, with few peer-reviewed trials to establish safe and effective dosages. This reliance on anecdotal evidence and extrapolation from domestic species poses significant risks, including the development of antimicrobial resistance.

Policy statement

Veterinary surgeons must adhere to rational and responsible use policies, which should apply equally to wildlife. The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 prohibit prophylactic antibiotic use except in exceptional circumstances, requiring evidence-based assessments.

Key principles

1. **Evidence-based use**: Prophylactic use of antibiotics in wildlife rehabilitation centres, often based on empirical rationale, is now considered illegal without proper risk assessments. Some centres report success without antibiotics, suggesting alternative practices should be explored.
2. **Impact on gut microbiome**: Antibiotics can adversely affect the gut microbiome, with potential long-term impacts on wildlife health.
3. **Mitigating risks**: Rational and responsible use of antibiotics is crucial to mitigate these risks and prevent antimicrobial resistance.

Recommendations

1. **Conduct research**: Encourage more peer-reviewed trials to establish safe and effective dosages for wildlife.
2. **Explore alternatives**: Investigate and implement alternative practices to antibiotics in wildlife rehabilitation.

3. **Education and training**: Provide ongoing education and training for veterinary surgeons on the rational and responsible use of antibiotics in wildlife.
4. **Monitoring and evaluation**: Regularly monitor and evaluate antibiotic use in wildlife to ensure compliance with regulations and best practices.

Conclusion

The rational and responsible use of antibiotics in wildlife is essential to prevent antimicrobial resistance and protect both wildlife and human health. By adhering to evidence-based practices and exploring alternatives, we can ensure the well-being of wildlife while minimising risks to public health.

For more information on antimicrobial resistance, please visit the UK Government website on antimicrobial resistance.