A word from the coordinator

The theme of our 8th newsletter is communication. We have been particularly active this year communicating amongst ourselves, with the international scientific community and with the general public. Below you can read about our activities at the Gothenburg Science Festival and about our annual meeting at Sigtuna. There are also the usual highlights from recent publications.

When applying originally to the Research Council Formas for funding, we stated that “This application consolidates the already existing collaboration between the two leading research groups in animal welfare in Sweden into one Centre of Excellence”. As you all know, communication is an essential part of creating a well-functioning group and it is the regular interaction between the different people working in animal welfare science that has meant that we have reached so far with the centre.

Linda Keeling, coordinator
Good turnout at Sigtuna
We were 35 people who gathered in Sigtuna on 11-12th of May for our annual workshop. The distribution was almost equal between SLU and Linköping University.

Our three invited plenary speakers were selected to represent the three themes within the centre. Mike Appleby from World Protection for Animals talked about animal welfare advocacy and science. He discussed his background in animal behaviour and the road he took from being a researcher at the Roslin Institute in the UK to being Chief Scientific Advisor in Humane & Sustainable Agriculture.

The other two speakers gave presentations summarising their own research and others in topics central to the work of the centre. Melly Oitzl, researcher from the University of Amsterdam, addressed the issue of early life stress and its effects on cognitive and emotional development. There are several projects within the centre that address this issue. Our final speaker Berry Spruijt, who is also from the Netherlands, discussed the issues of sentience in animals, a topic central to our concern for animal welfare.

Each plenary presentation was followed by four 10-minute talks by members of the centre. To promote discussion on the ideas raised in these short presentation we had short buzz group discussions before the questions to these speakers. This format worked well according to the evaluation afterwards and something that we may try again at our next workshop.

Success for the Centre at science festival
During the weekend 18-19 April, the Centre of Excellence in Animal Welfare Science participated in the Göteborg Science festival. The centre hosted three different activities related to animal welfare. As well as listening to shorter presentations, visitors were given the opportunity to try being a welfare scientist for a day, making behavioural observations from videos. In addition, dogs and owners from the public were invited to participate in behavioural tests, where the audience could do live assessments of the dogs' behaviour.
Collaboration continues on chick behaviour and immunology
During the spring and early summer Irene Campderrich Lecumberri, a PhD student from the Neiker Institute in Spain, came back to SLU to visit Linda Keeling for 3 months. Irene was here for 5 months last summer to carry out a project on early stress, rearing environment and their consequences at the immunological, behavioural and cognitive level of chicks. The project involves collaboration with Hanne Løvlie, Josefina Zidar and Emelie Jansson from Linköping.

Positive effects of early handling of piglets
STUDY In a pioneer study at SLU, assessing early handling using enforced tactile stimulation on piglets, it was found that early handling of piglets reduced fear of humans and a novel environment. The milder stressor of human presence without handling had beneficial effects for piglet’s performance. The results suggest that tactile stimulation may prepare offspring to cope with challenges in pig husbandry.

Read more by clicking the picture or the head line
Dogs' ability to ask humans for help is hereditary

STUDY Through domestication and co-evolution with humans, dogs have developed abilities to attract human attention. The aims of a study at Linköping University were to investigate variation in human-directed contact seeking in dogs and to estimate its genetic basis. To do this, 498 research beagles were tested in an unsolvable problem task.

Read more by clicking the picture or the head line.

Brain oxygenation in dogs during positive interactions

STUDY Functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) is a noninvasive technique developed for use on neonatal babies to explore the relative concentration of oxygenation and deoxygenated blood in the brain. Neuronal activity in the brain increases the oxygen consumption and this project aimed to investigate potential neural indicators during different types of positive interactions with dogs.

Read more by clicking the picture or the head line.
Peer reviewed papers


Invited lectures and plenary talks


