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However, whatever information is supplied for, and published in, the Register is available to the public.

RAVC director

From Mr M. J. R. Stockman

SIR.—I recently crept out of retirement from veterinary politics to attend BVA Council. While there, I heard a rumour to the effect that the next director of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps may well be a non-veterinarian and trust that this is just nonsense. If it is not, I hope that the profession will protest unanimously. What would be the reaction from the medical profession to a non-medical director of the Royal Army Medical Corps?

MIKE STOCKMAN
Riversdale
Stour Provost
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Bureau service for farmers

From Dr R. J. Esslemont

SIR.—In the light of the increasing uncertainty over livestock production, and the pressure on the farmer to be able to supply more and more animal records for statutory purposes, it would appear that there is real scope for vets to offer farmers a bureau service to hold data and report on the events as required. The person best equipped to do this certainly seems to be the veterinary surgeon, who can run such a service for all his clients from his practice.

Provided good quality software is used, the data can be in a common format and can be available for regional or national analysis if required. The service could be available at very low cost, with the fees to the farmer being charged only if reports and analyses are produced for him. This may be an area that deserves some Government subsidy to encourage private schemes. The alternative may be the production of costly systems devised by ministry scientists to be offered by ADAS at a fee.

I would be pleased to describe suitable schemes that have been developed at this university for use by practitioners.

R. J. ESSLEMONT
Department of Agriculture
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Wrong rhinoceros

From Mr V. J. A. Manton

SIR.—We are led to believe that 'the camera doth not lie'. Imagine my surprise when on opening my *Veterinary Record* this morning, I find on page 634 a picture of a white, or

square lipped, rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*) masquerading under a story purporting to support the protection of the black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*)! However worthwhile it is, and indeed it is tragically very necessary, to set up yet another poacher free sanctuary for one of the world's largest mammals, could you, Sir, of all people, not have found a picture of the correct species (and indeed of the correct genus!) to illustrate the point?

May I also refer you to a letter written by Keymer et al (I was one of the 'et al') in *The Veterinary Record* of 1969, volume 84, page 352, entitled 'Puma, mountain lion, cougar or *Felis concolor*'? There we pleaded for a professional journal, such as yours undoubtedly is, to set and maintain the lead in using correct scientific terminology to avoid misunderstanding especially among readers whose first language is not English.

V. J. A. MANTON
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Bedfordshire

Neutering

From Mr J. Gourley

SIR.—As a result of two motions on neutering cats and dogs adopted at the RSPCA AGM on June 30 it was agreed that: 'Pets can be neutered at any age, eg, when litters are being rehomed at seven or eight weeks old. To prevent unwanted pregnancies they must be spayed before the first season. It can be to the benefit of male dogs as well as reducing the problems they cause that those not required for breeding etc may be castrated. As with bitches they should be done before puberty and can be done as early as seven or eight weeks old.'

'However, when it should be done must be agreed with your veterinary surgeon.'

JIM GOURLEY
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Lancashire

Distribution of the State Veterinary Journal

From Mr M. Cooke

SIR.—I was disappointed to receive, with my copy of the June issue of the *State Veterinary Journal*, a letter from the editor, telling me that the journal will, after the next issue, no longer be available for public sale.

We are told that the format of the *State Veterinary Journal* is to change and that it will concentrate on 'briefing readers on animal health and welfare issues'. How can it be in the interests of animal health and welfare to restrain interested general practitioners from reading this material by restricting circulation to members of the State Veterinary Service?

Is this not another case of sinistro-dextrognoscopy? (Popularly known as 'mad ministry disease'.)

MARTIN COOKE
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Postscript

Mad poll disease

IS there anyone out there who would care to join 'Totaliser' in a survey designed to ascertain just how happy people are with polls and surveys; and just how useful, wasteful, infuriating and pointless they consider them to be?

The latest poll to be drawn to my attention was in the April 27 edition of *Today* where we were informed that, 'We asked a selection of people how happy they were with professions. Medical professions scored best, politicians and middle men (like estate agents) scored the worst.'

There is, of course, one aspect of this survey which we can be happy with; vets were actually included whereas usually, in surveys of this nature, they are ignored. Vets (94 per cent), were second only to nurses (98 per cent). Dentists scored 89 per cent, accountants 84 per cent, bankers 80 per cent, solicitors 72 per cent, teachers 71 per cent, architects 68 per cent and TV journalists 57 per cent; newspaper journalists were not rated.

The problem with polls is that they seek, and are often able, to be taken seriously as a measure of opinion; and as a measure of opinion it is a small leap to their becoming a measure of fact. Thus they are frequently used in arguments in the same measure as small children may proclaim that, 'Mummy said so.' Another equally false assumption is that the majority are invariably correct in their opinion. Nevertheless, those who promote polls ask us to believe that theirs is the true barometer not only to opinion but to truth. But, as Oscar Wilde observed, if you tell the truth often enough you're sure to be found out.

Recently (VR, May 19, p514) a correspondent inquired why so few members offer themselves for election to the RCVS Council. This in itself might lend itself to further polls: Why do you not offer yourself for election? Why did you not vote in the election? Why did you return an invalid ballot paper? Why did you not sign the ballot paper? Would you submit six votes when only five were allowed? Would you deface your voting paper? The answers to these questions would in turn further further polls such as, would you return your voting paper if in doing so the RCVS would give a donation to the RSPCA? Or, would you stand for the RCVS Council election if the offices of the Royal College were moved to Scotland? A third generation of polls might then emerge: 'We asked a selection of people whether they were happy with the answers given to the first and second generation questions.'

Finally, poll zealots might like to consider abolishing the RCVS Council and other elections in favour of conducting polls of a selected number of members.

A report in the *Sunday Telegraph* revealed that a Gallup survey showed that 40 per cent were very worried, 36 per cent quite worried and 29 per cent not very worried about 'mad cow disease'. One in four had stopped eating beef as a result of their concern. Perhaps the most surprising finding of the survey was that 4.5 per cent had never heard of the disease. The poll was conducted over the telephone and involved those over the age of 16. A survey of the 24 interviewees that had never heard of the disease would surely make interesting reading.

Hands up all who agree!

'TOTALISER'