

A Review of Fundamentals and Applications Involved in Stereotypic Behaviors in Zoo Animals

Wijethilake M.M.D. and Samarakone T.S.*

Department of Animal Science,
Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Animal and human activities that are repetitive, unvarying and purposeless are described as stereotypic behaviours. Frustration to perform normal behavioural patterns, brain malfunction or repeated attempts to fix some problems are identified among many causes of these behaviours. Stereotypic behaviours are observed in many categories of animals including farm and pet animals. However, in wild animals, especially mammals in captivity frequently perform stereotypic behaviours that indicates stress from inadequate adaptation to captivity which is a serious welfare concern. Some common forms of stereotypies observed in captive conditions include repeated swaying of the whole body from one side to the other, weaving with the head, swinging the trunk, lifting the feet and bobbing up and down with the head in captive elephants. Pacing, head-bobbing, rocking, walking in circles, compulsive licking, bar biting, and self-mutilation are commonly observed stereotypies in carnivores such as captive tigers, leopards and lions. In non-human primates, self-clasping, rocking, eye poking, pacing, coprophagy, head shake and hair picking have been commonly observed. In this review, fundamental causes of stereotypic behaviours, welfare implications and some strategies that have been adopted to mitigate stereotypic behaviours (i.e., social, feeding and environmental enrichments) are discussed mainly focusing captive elephants, carnivores and non-human primates.

Keywords: Behaviour, Stereotypes, Welfare

*thusiths@agri.pdn.ac.lk