

# SCIENCE & POLICY NEWSLETTER

*Updates on BC SPCA science and academic initiatives, animal policy, legislation and current events*

## BC SPCA provides unique learning opportunities for UBC students

Most people learn by doing, and the BC SPCA has hosted hundreds of high school, college and university students over the years to experience the day-to-day operations of our shelters and wildlife rehabilitation facility. For many, this time inspired their career in the field of animal care and/or research to help improve the lives of animals.

UBC Applied Biology students this summer faced a new challenge in the wake of COVID-19 as their spring classes moved quickly online to remote learning. In previous terms, UBC students could participate in practicums spending ~350 hours at various BC SPCA locations like the Vancouver Shelter, Charlie's Food Bank and Wild ARC, in addition to other community animal care facilities. With the uncertainty of an escalating public health crisis, UBC had to cancel in-person placements for the summer out of an abundance of caution.

Like many others looking for creative ways to pivot our important work, a new approach was considered - how could remote practicums be created? Students were still looking for meaningful ways to earn course credits in summer, helping animals and learning from experts in the field, but without being in the same room as them. The BC SPCA Science & Policy team came together to create five remote experiential learning opportunities, four under the guidance of BC SPCA managers trained in animal welfare and biology, and a fifth with the Animals in Science Policy Institute (AiSPI), which has close ties to the BC SPCA.



Surpassing cats and dogs in the length of stay in our shelters, rabbits can experience various welfare issues while in care and in homes. Developing evidence-based procedures and programs is key to improving their experience in shelters and to set them up for adoption success. Money Dosanjh's practicum focused on analyzing BC SPCA rabbit intake records and outcomes for the past 5 years to look at trends and opportunities for enhancing internal protocols. Myra Khokhar looked outside the shelter system and assessed past online ads in B.C. that advertised rabbit rehoming, to attempt to understand trends in ages, breeds, and costs of rabbits in the community for her practicum.

Contributing to the BC SPCA's AnimalKind Accreditation program, Emily Yau developed an auditing process for dog boarding and daycare

businesses by reviewing related literature and dog care practices, and evaluating online videos of dog group play in daycares. Breanna Zwick assisted Wild ARC by researching various databases in the context of complex data collected for its patients and she conducted a trend analysis for cases of wildlife caught by free-roaming cats or that hit windows.

Finally, Janella Schwab worked with AiSPI to conduct a systematic review of learning outcomes for education using non-animal alternatives to dissection and developed online resources for teachers making the switch. All five UBC Applied Biology students were very successful in achieving the summer practicum goals to apply their new knowledge to making a difference in the lives of animals – even remotely.

## Academic Partnerships

### Applied research in humane rodent control



Erin's research is a particularly close partnership between the BC SPCA and UBC Animal Welfare Program. Her research path started at the BC SPCA in 2014 supporting wildlife welfare projects and later the development of the AnimalKind

accreditation program: [animalkind.ca](https://animalkind.ca)

Through her work experience, Erin saw the knowledge and technology gaps that existed for humane rodent control, and started her MSc in September 2019 with BC SPCA chief scientific officer Dr. Sara Dubois on her committee. Erin is studying a new type of rodent trap using video monitoring to observe non-target animal interactions, and to evaluate the humaneness of captive bolt traps.

The BC SPCA is interested in expanding the use of humane pest control through research partnerships. When Erin completes her MSc research in fall 2021, she looks forward to returning to the BC SPCA to bring new knowledge and experience to her role to help wildlife welfare and AnimalKind programs grow. Humane wildlife control is a significant issue for municipalities, businesses, homeowners, and wildlife managers. Erin will be able to contribute to evidence-based policies and programs to help all sectors deal with these challenges based on the most current research in the field.

### Companion Animal Research Chair adapting to COVID-19

Even with the challenges of COVID-19, Dr. Sasha Protopopova and her students were busy in the last few months conducting remote research. An undergraduate research scholar explored the reasons for surrender and adoption of BC SPCA shelter rats and will soon submit a report of his findings. Unfortunately, the on-going pandemic derailed plans for an in-person "Animal Shelter" course. Dr. Protopopova has instead stepped up to take over and teach the "Animals and Global Issues" online course. The shelter course, along with an "Animal Motivation and Learning" course, is still planned for when in-person courses resume. Dr. Protopopova also received the good news that her proposal to build her lab in "Human-Animal Interactions and Companion Animal Welfare" was funded by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation. The renovations are expected to be completed in Summer 2021 and Dr. Protopopova and her students look forward to inviting companion animals and their guardians to participate in studies soon. This fall semester, Dr. Protopopova and students will be investigating behavioural rehabilitation of fearful rats, understanding human-animal interactions in the Vancouver Downtown Eastside, and determining the effect of background in dog profiles on adoption likelihood.

## Wild Animal Welfare

### Municipalities making waves reducing rodenticides



Every year hundreds of domestic and wild animals receive emergency medical care to combat the deadly effects of secondary poisoning from eating rodents killed by rodenticide, while unknown numbers of others suffer painful deaths. To combat rodent infestations, rodenticide is widely used by homeowners, businesses, building owners and municipalities. Alternatively, effective preventative measures protect local wildlife and save money over the long term.

In late summer, the BC SPCA encouraged citizens to contact their local municipal councils about the use of anti-coagulant rodenticide in their communities. Following the example of the Districts of North Vancouver and Saanich, at least eight other communities in B.C. have added or discussed motions to end or limit the use of rodenticides on municipal-owned infrastructure.

The BC SPCA encourages all municipal councils to review their pest management strategies, including assessing the feasibility of incorporating the BC SPCA's AnimalKind standards for wildlife and rodent control into pest control contracts, similar to an existing move by the City of Delta and the Vancouver Parks Board. The standards focus on wildlife-proofing, removing attractants and humane exclusion methods, instead of trapping and relocating or killing, and also outline best practices to avoid or limit rodenticide use. Learn more at: [animalkind.ca/pestcontrol](http://animalkind.ca/pestcontrol)

## Companion Animal Welfare

### New standards for B.C. animal rescues

This August, the Animal Welfare Advisory Network of British Columbia (AWANBC) released its long-awaited Animal Rescue Standards of Practice. The AWANBC, of which the BC SPCA is a member, is an organization that brings together animal groups from across the province to collaborate on strategies for companion animal welfare issues.

While national standards for animal shelters have existed for a number of years, up until now, there were no comparable guidelines for animal rescues in B.C. to follow. Developed with assistance from the BC SPCA and other organizations, the Animal Rescue Standards of Practice are based on an extensive review of animal welfare literature and existing standards in other jurisdictions. Animal welfare professionals, AWANBC members, and the public were consulted to help ensure their scientific rigour, feasibility, and accessibility.

Though voluntary, the standards will help to professionalize the sector and aid people seeking to volunteer with and adopt from reputable organizations. Development of an accreditation program to accompany the standards, also through the AWANBC, is underway. Learn more at: [awanbc.com/projects/](http://awanbc.com/projects/)

### AnimalKind dog training online

Following initial COVID-19 precautions, the “demand” for dogs soared as house-bound families decided to add new canine members to their homes. As a result, BC SPCA AnimalKind accredited dog trainers have been kept busy, albeit with adjustments to their usual procedures.

Trainers switched to offering outside-only classes, with physical distancing and masks. Many trainers also began to use online platforms, such as Zoom and Facetime, for their private and group training sessions. Others, who before the pandemic had been successfully offering online

training to clients in remote communities, now found themselves with clients from all over B.C.

Dog training is inherently a “hands-on” activity, requiring timely delivery of treats or toys to reinforce learning. However, trainers are typically focused on coaching dog guardians through training activities and teaching them to read their dog’s body language, which translates well to video calls. Online sessions also allow trainers to curate videos that demonstrate the exact training activity and dog behaviour that they would like clients to observe – and the video can be re-watched as often as needed.

All the changes made by AnimalKind trainers are helping to ensure guardians continue to have access to humane, effective and science-based training for their beloved dogs.



## Farm Animal Welfare

### Raising the bar for animal welfare in organic agriculture

Every five years, the Organic Federation of Canada reviews the Canadian Organic Standard. This ensures standards reflect new advancements in scientific research as well as what society expects for organic foods.

BC SPCA representatives participated in the recent revision process starting in 2018, acting as a strong voice for improving animal welfare on organic farms. The BC SPCA submitted feedback regarding proposed revisions and encouraged our supporters to take action and also submit their feedback as part of a public comment period.

While many animal welfare issues were discussed, poultry welfare was a major area of interest. The BC SPCA is happy to see that changes have been made in regards to outdoor access for poultry, now requiring overhead cover for shade and protection while on range, and enriched verandahs for laying hens when weather or disease risk restrict outdoor access.

The BC SPCA recommends organic meat, eggs, and dairy as a better food choice than conventionally raised products. Organic standards don’t provide the highest level of welfare, but third-party certification and auditing verifies that farms are compliant with ongoing improvements. The new standard is set for publication in fall 2020. Learn more at: [spca.bc.ca/ethical-food/](https://spca.bc.ca/ethical-food/)

### Meet the team: Farm Animal Welfare

The BC SPCA’s Science & Policy Division includes four teams – AnimalKind, Companion Animal Welfare, Wild Animal Welfare, and Farm Animal Welfare. The Farm Animal Welfare team works to improve the lives of farm animals by increasing public awareness and advocating for evidence-based changes to provincial and national laws.

Melissa Speirs (below, left) completed an MSc in Animal Behaviour and Welfare at the University of Guelph. Before moving to work for the BC SPCA in 2019, Melissa worked with Ontario farmers to improve animal welfare. Kristen Jakub (below, right) is also an alumna of the University of Guelph’s Animal Behaviour and Welfare MSc program, who moved to work for the BC SPCA as our Specialist, Farm Animal Welfare in early 2020.

