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Effects of group size and space allocation on physiological, behavioural and production-related welfare parameters of silver fox cubs

Keywords animal welfare, behaviour, fur farming, group size, physiology, *Vulpes vulpes*, space allocation, ,

Abstract

Traditionally farmed silver fox cubs are raised after weaning either in pairs or singly in a traditional fox cage (1.2 m²). How of housing foxes has been criticised because the foxes may have limited chance to exercise and to show social behaviour. Therefore the present study was to evaluate the effects of different social and spatial conditions on the welfare of silver fox cubs. The cubs were housed singly, in pairs or in quartets with space allocation of either 0.6 or 1.2 m² per animal. Behavioural, physiological and production-related welfare parameters were assessed. The results revealed that space allocation had only minor effects on the measured welfare parameters. With regard to social conditions, the results showed that the possibility for social behaviour is important for the young cubs. However, the welfare of the cubs may be jeopardised if they are kept in quartets beyond their natural dispersal time. The welfare of silver fox cubs could be enhanced by allowing the cubs to enjoy of social companionship during the first months of life and by separating them into pairs in later autumn.

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