Microchipping exotics and wildlife

MICROCHIPS have become the standard method of absolutely identifying individual animals, being universally easy to read and difficult to tamper with (Cooper, 2002).

For racing horses, dogs in Northern Ireland and – in the next couple of years – dogs in England and Wales, microchipping is/will be mandatory to achieve an unequivocal identification of each animal. The standard method of absolutely identifying individual animals, being universally easy to read and difficult to tamper with, is/will be mandatory for identification and certification (for example, all tor- toises – excluding Horsfield’s – are listed and hence must be identified and licensed).

For an animal to be legally capture-bred (in line with CITES and the Wildlife and Countryside Act [WCA] 1981), its parents must have been legally in captivity at the time of egg laying or conception. Without identification and CITES licensing, this is impossible to prove. Under the act there is a reverse burden of proof – that is, it is for the defendant to prove he or she is innocent, rather than the prosecution to prove guilt - so it is in the interest of owners and breeders of all captive-bred exotic animals to be able to confirm identification in support of their captive-bred status. Captive-bred birds may have a closed (solid and entire) ring applied when less than 10 days old (when the tarsus-phalangeal joint is small enough to get a ring on). It is vital for vets to be aware that if a closed ring is ever removed from a bird for medical reasons (for example, a broken leg or self-trauma by the ring), or if it becomes illegible, the ring is removed by a vet and simultaneously replaced by a microchip. In smaller birds, placement SC (rather than IM, as is normal in avian patients) will suffice to maintain continuity of proof of provenance.

Wild side
Under the WCA 1981, it is permissible to take a sick or injured protected creature from the wild to tend to it until fit to be released. There is no provision in the act for any action other than release (if fit) or euthanasia. In the event a wildlife casualty patient requires to be kept longer (more than six weeks) or permanently in captivity then the animal should be microchipped and certified by a suitably qualified and experienced vet as being “a temporary or permanent wildlife casualty.”

Suitably worded certificates are available on the AWLA wildlife website, but, under RCVS rules, no such certificate can be issued unless the animal is identified (that is, microchipped).

Microchipping is/will be mandatory not only for pets. The EU pet travel scheme, which intends to travel within the EU without quarantine must be achievable without the identification of each animal. All elements of the CITES system – regardless of the species – are listed and hence must be identified and licensed. As such, there is a legal obligation for identification and certification (for example, all tortoises – excluding Horsfield’s – are listed and hence must be identified and licensed)

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Wild side

Microchips become the universal method of identifying individual animals, being universally easy to read and difficult to tamper with (Cooper, 2002).

For racing horses, dogs in Northern Ireland and - in the next couple of years - dogs in England and Wales, microchipping is/will be mandatory to achieve an unequivocal identification of each animal. Any dog, cat or ferret that intends to travel within the EU without quarantine must meet all the rules of the pet travel scheme, including being identified with a microchip. Microchipping should be considered as the gold standard method for identifying individual animals - regardless of the species.

All things exotic
Many exotic species are controlled by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and, as such, there is a legal obligation for identification and certification (for example, all tortoises - excluding Horsfield's - are listed and hence must be identified and licensed).

For an animal to be legally captive-bred (in line with CITES and the Wildlife and Countryside Act [WCA] 1981), its parents must have been legally in captivity at the time of egg laying or conception. Without identification and CITES licensing, this is impossible to prove. Under the act there is a reverse burden of proof - that is, it is for the defendant to prove he or she is innocent, rather than the prosecution to prove guilt - so it is in the interest of owners and breeders of all captive-bred exotic animals to be able to confirm identification in support of their captive-bred status. Captive-bred birds may have a closed (solid and entire) ring applied when less than 10 days old (when the tarsus-phalangeal joint is small enough to get a ring on). It is vital for vets to be aware that if a closed ring is ever removed from a bird for medical reasons (for example, a broken leg or self-trauma by the ring), or if it becomes illegible, the ring is removed by a vet and simultaneously replaced by a microchip. In smaller birds, placement SC (rather than IM, as is normal in avian patients) will suffice to maintain continuity of proof of provenance.

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Table 1. Adapted British Veterinary Zoological Society guidelines for correct microchip implantation location in various species

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genera</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Correct microchip implantation location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>Ostriches</td>
<td>Pipping muscle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Penguins</td>
<td>SC at base of neck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All other avian species (if of appropriate size - generally &gt; 100g)</td>
<td>Left pectoral muscle (this should be performed under anaesthetic to avoid pain of IM insertion). Smaller species can be chipped SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Eels</td>
<td>Midline, anterior to dorsal fin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphibia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lymphatic cavity dorsal lymph sac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelonians</td>
<td></td>
<td>SC in left hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crocodilians</td>
<td>Anterior to nuchal cluster or the cranialateral tail. This is particularly good for hatchings of smaller species (where anterior to the nuchal cluster would be difficult) that should be checked within a few days of birth, as is the case for CITES species. It also has the advantage that if the crocodile is big, the chip can be read away from the sharp end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reptiles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lizards</td>
<td>Lateral aspect of left femoral area over quadriceps muscle, or SC on caudal half of left flank if too small or legs too skinny or absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>snakes</td>
<td>Left flank, anterior to cloaca. In this position the microchip is less likely to interfere with ingestion of very large prey or with handling. It is also much safer for the handler if dealing with venomous species and probably easier to implant, mainly in smaller species where fingers can get in the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primates</td>
<td>Back of the hand (can be trained to present hand for scanning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mammals</td>
<td>Elephants</td>
<td>Behind the left ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All other mammalian species</td>
<td>Large: left mid-neck SC Medium and small: between scapulae</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Microchip scanning.

Microchips are encapsulated with biopolymers and are reported to be 10 times stronger than glass chips, less likely to shatter and also weigh less, which can be important in very small species.

Reading distances also vary between chips from different manufacturers. Some animals do not tolerate handling well and longer reading distances (up to 30cm in some products) will allow identifi-
cation without the stress of catching and restraining the animal. Likewise, automated readers can be placed on tunnels, gates and nest areas of free-living animals in dens or enclosures, so microchips are automatically read without handler intervention.

The implant is important too. Features such as ergo-
dynamic design, non-return “click” systems and remov-
able needles make implanta-
tion smoother and subse-
quent sharps disposal easier and more cost-effective.

Procedure
SC microchip placement may be carried out by vets or suitably trained layper-
sons, while IM in thin-skinned species (this should be performed under anaesthetic to avoid pain of IM insertion).

**Which to choose?**

In addition to size, other factors can affect the most appro-
priate choice of microchip for each consult – regardless of
other factors will allow iden-
tification for immobilisation in most species with manual
implantation.

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dynamic design, non-return “click” systems and remov-
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tion smoother and subse-
quent sharps disposal easier and more cost-effective.

**How does your database compare?**

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