

**Guidelines for the Welfare of  
Yearling Fallow Deer During the use  
of Rubber Rings to Prevent  
Antler/Pedicle Growth**

# **Guidelines for the Welfare of Yearling Fallow Deer During the Use of Rubber Rings to Prevent Antler/Pedicle Growth**

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# **1. Introduction, Purpose and Scope**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The issue of these guidelines follows a formal request from the New Zealand Fallow Deer Society that the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) approve a non-surgical procedure intended to minimise injury caused by the presence of antlers and/or pedicles in entire fallow bucks. This request was referred to the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) by the CVO.

*The Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Deer During the Removal of Antlers* ("the Code") was published in 1992.

Aspects of the Code that refer to the prevention of antler growth in fallow deer are:

### **3. The Nature of Deer Antler**

*... It is possible to prevent the annual growth of antlers (polling) in deer, either by a major surgical procedure requiring the removal of tissues from which the antlers and pedicles grow, or by non-surgical methods. The surgical process must be carried out under anaesthesia by a veterinarian. Non-surgical prevention of antler growth should be undertaken only after consultation with a veterinarian and by procedures approved by the Chief Veterinary Officer.<sup>1</sup>*

## **1.2 Purpose**

These guidelines are intended for all people responsible for the welfare of yearling fallow deer and who intend to use rubber rings to prevent antler/pedicle growth.

## **1.3 Scope**

These guidelines were approved by AWAC on 29 August 1997 and come into effect on 1 October 1997, the date that the Chief Veterinary Officer approved the procedures in the Appendix.

## **1.4 Revision**

These guidelines are based on the knowledge and technology that was available at the time of publication and may need to be varied in the light of future advances.

AWAC will review these guidelines when deemed necessary and, in any event, these guidelines will be reviewed 12 months after they come into effect.

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<sup>1</sup> Code, p.3



## **2 Quality Assurance System**

### **2.1 QA system**

To ensure that standards of animal welfare and husbandry are maintained each fallow deer farm using these procedures must comply with the quality assurance system and procedures established by the National Velvetting Standards Body (NVSB) to ensure that the conditions of these guidelines are being met.

### **2.2 Records**

The maintenance of good records is an integral part of a quality assurance system and good farm management.

Adequate records will assist in the detection of any husbandry, health or breeding problems.

Accurate records must be kept each time the procedures are used and any adverse reaction to the use of rubber rings noted. Recording requirements will be described in the NVSB procedures.

### **3 Procedures for the Use of Rubber Rings**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The *Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Deer During the Removal of Antlers* deals with the issue of antler removal in all deer.

Because of welfare and management considerations specific to yearling fallow bucks (spikers) these guidelines are specific for the prevention of antler growth in fallow spikers.

#### **3.2 Justification**

Yearling fallow bucks (spikers) which have had velvet removed using the procedures in the *Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Deer During the Removal of Antlers* generally develop re-growth that may have to be removed on up to a further two occasions. These animals will also develop bony pedicles which can potentially cause injury to other deer and are thus undesirable for welfare reasons.

Spikers with hard antler (spikes) or pedicles demonstrate aggressive behavioural tendencies and are known to cause serious injury and/or death to other members of the herd. Animals without pedicles are easier and safer to handle.

Currently, the best available management procedure for fallow deer farmers to improve whole herd welfare, with minimal stress and interference to the individual animal, is the removal of spikes by the application of rubber rings to the base of the pedicle early in antler development.

These procedures are a simple and pragmatic approach based on previous experience of this technique by the industry. It allows maximum flexibility to change the procedures and technical standards as knowledge evolves.

#### **3.3 Surgical procedures permitted for polling of deer**

Polling of deer may be achieved surgically by removal of tissues from which the antlers and pedicles grow. This process must be carried out under general anaesthesia by a veterinarian and is not covered by these guidelines.

#### **3.4 Administrative procedures**

The lay person wishing to apply rubber rings to the pedicle of fallow bucks must possess an adequate knowledge of all issues of welfare relating to the procedure and be competent to an agreed standard in performing the practical procedures.

Fallow deer farmers wishing to participate in this programme are required to:

- register with the National Velveting Standards Body (NVSB);
- provide confirmation of a consultation with his or her veterinarian. This consultation will enable the veterinarian to establish that the person carrying out the procedure has adequate facilities, is sufficiently aware of health and hygiene requirements, has undertaken any vaccination programme that may be deemed appropriate, and is aware of any possible untoward sequelae<sup>2</sup> that may occur with the use of the procedure. Where the consulting veterinarian is familiar with the property, this consultation may be conducted by telephone, otherwise an on-farm consultation may be needed, at the discretion of the consulting veterinarian.
- Agree to on-farm visits by the NVSB or their representatives for monitoring purposes;
- Agree to supply such information as may be requested from time to time by the NVSB as part of the monitoring programme.

### **3.5 Monitoring**

It is important for the efficacy of these procedures that the programme is regularly monitored.

The rationale for monitoring is to assure all parties of the effectiveness of this technique in a large variety of farm situations and to provide data on which AWAC can review these guidelines.

These procedures will be monitored at a level sufficient to assure the well-being of the deer involved in the programme.

The level of monitoring will be determined by independent statistical advice and will be carried out by, and at the discretion, of the National Velveting Standards Body (NVSB).

The results of auditing will assist in planning the extent or necessity for ongoing monitoring in accordance with a programme administered by the NVSB.

The NVSB will receive the returns from participating farmers and keep records of random site monitoring records.

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<sup>2</sup> Abnormal conditions or complications.



### **3.6 *Mustering and Handling***

The animals selected for the procedure should be run into properly designed yards where they will not be overcrowded or alarmed by noise or unusual visual stimuli.

The design of the race and yards should be such that the deer can be yarded with minimal stress to the animals and minimal risk of damage to the developing antler buds.

Any device that immobilises the animal by the use of an electric current, such as the Stock-Still Electro-immobiliser, is not a device approved by the Chief Veterinary Officer and must not be used.

### **3.7 *Procedures for non-surgical prevention of antler/pedicle growth in fallow spikers***

The procedure involves the application of standard rubber elastrator rings about the base of the pedicle as early as practicable in the pedicle/antler development phase.

The rubber rings must be applied as close to the head as possible. This gives the greatest probability of retention as well as minimising the size of the pedicle left to cause injury.

Two rubber rings must be applied to each pedicle. This minimises the risk of loss of the rubber rings which could allow the return of blood flow to the antler which, in turn, may cause pain.

This technique may be used only after consultation with a veterinarian and in accordance with procedures approved by the Chief Veterinary Officer as set out in the Appendix.

### **3.8 *Aftercare***

Animals must be inspected after the application and before they are released.

Animals must be inspected regularly in the first seven days after the application.

Animals should be kept under observation in accordance with good stock-sense. Although few problems are likely to be encountered, if any problems do occur which cannot be corrected by the owner or supervisor of the animals, veterinary advice must be sought.



In the event of both rubber rings breaking there could be pain associated with re-perfusion<sup>3</sup> and post-ischaemic<sup>4</sup> swelling. Veterinary supervision must include instruction by the supervising veterinarian to the deer farmer on what to look for, how to react and at what point the veterinarian should be called in.

### **3.9 *Changes to these Guidelines***

These guidelines may be modified by AWAC as a result of the monitoring programme using the data obtained from the NVSB, farmers, veterinarians and others involved in the monitoring programme.

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<sup>3</sup> The reintroduction of blood into blood vessels that have been deprived of fluids.

<sup>4</sup> Swelling due to the local diminution of the blood supply due to obstruction of the inflow of arterial blood

# Appendix

## Technical Procedures for the Use of Rubber Rings to Prevent Antler/Pedicle Growth in Yearling Fallow Deer

### 1. Application

#### 1.1 *Equipment and facilities*

Facilities for adequate restraint are essential, e.g. a crush or tunnel, depending on the preference of the farmer.

Standard elastrator rubber rings and applicator are required.

All equipment should be clean and free of faecal contamination.

The procedure should not be carried out in wet or muddy conditions.

#### 1.2 *Animal health*

Animals should be healthy and the antler buds should be free of mud or other contaminating material that might contribute to the development of inflammation or infection.

#### 1.3 *Time of Application*

The rubber rings are best applied as early as possible in the course of antler development, i.e. as soon as the antler bud development is such that the rubber ring will stay in place.

The ideal time of application is when the antler is 3 – 5 cm long.

Since not all animals will be at the same stage of antler development at the same time, it may be necessary to repeat the muster as others reach a suitable stage of antler development.

If left too late (e.g. antler development greater than 5 cm) the procedure is unlikely to be effective because of calcification of the antler. These animals should have their antlers removed in accordance with the *Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Deer During the Removal of Antlers*.

## **1.4 Procedure**

- Deer should be held with the minimum necessary restraint for the minimum necessary time.
- Place the prongs of the elastrator directly against the skull and roll the rubber ring off onto the antler, as close to the skull as possible.
- Repeat with a second ring. Often the second ring can be placed closer to the skull.
- Repeat on the second antler.
- Ensure that both rubber rings are securely positioned.

## **2. Post-application observation and records**

The length of time required for the antler to shed is variable, depending on the initial size of the antler.

Animals must be observed closely a number of times to enable the farmer to detect swelling, inflammation, or infection. If any abnormalities are observed, a veterinarian should be consulted.

Because antlers develop at different rates and times the deer will be yarded on several occasions as each group reaches the desired spike length of 3 – 5 cm long. Each time the deer are yarded in the first two weeks or so those previously treated with rubber rings should be examined to ensure that the rings are intact and that there are no abnormalities.

Information is to be supplied to the NVSB in accordance with the procedures for NVSB Administration of the Fallow Spiker Programme.



## **Notes**