

RESTRAINT AND HANDLING OF CAMELS

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ABSTRACT

Camels have been domesticated for thousands of years and are easily managed if accustomed to handling by people. The handler must know offence and defence behaviours and utilise those techniques that are safe for the handler, humane to the camel and effective in accomplishing the desired task. Restraint may be psychological, physical and in some cases involve the use of drugs. Special facilities for handling camels include stocks, chutes and a body harness that keeps the camel in sternal recumbency.

Head restraint includes temporary halters of rope or synthetic fabric or leather halters and nose plugs. The camel is able to kick or strike in any direction, thus the camel should be maintained in sternal recumbency, kept within stocks or hobbled to limit the swing of the legs.

Chemical sedation utilises the same drugs (xylazine, butorphanol, detomidine, medetomidine) as are used in cattle and horses, with special consideration for dosages.

Key words: Bactrian, behaviour, camel, dromedary, immobilisation, restraint, sedation

A camel's response to restraint varies with its age and stage of life. Before employing any form of restraint, ask yourself three questions.

1. Is it safe for handlers? 2. Is it safe for the animal? and 3. Will it be possible to complete the task to be done? The tools of camel restraint include psychological restraint, confinement, physical barriers, manual restraint and chemical restraint. Selection of the appropriate tool requires an understanding of normal behaviour, anatomy, physiology and means of offence and defence utilised by the camel.

The following are procedures and concepts that have served the author. Some techniques are extrapolated from the literature.

Offence and defence

Camels have been domesticated for thousands of years and are easily managed if accustomed to handling by people. Improperly trained adult camels (zoo, privately owned and feral camels) may inflict serious fatal injuries to an unsuspecting handler. Even well-trained adult bulls may become belligerent and dangerous while in rut.

Spitting

Although camels, particularly young

camels, may project saliva from their mouth, more commonly they spew stomach contents. Both bactrian and dromedary camels may spew first compartment stomach contents at people when they become angry or frustrated. Although the literature commonly states that bactrian camels do not spit, the author has first hand experience that they do. Spitting is not a behaviour used to intimidate another camel, as is the case with South American Camelids (SACs). While one may predict the projectile pathway in SACs, thus allowing a handler to point the head away from people, not so with camels. They are able to spit out of the side of the mouth, spraying a handler standing at their side. A muzzle inhibits spitting (Figs 1 and 2).

Biting

Camels are able to open the mouth wider than any other ungulate, making them capable of grasping any part of the human body, including the head (Fig 3). Adult male camels have a formidable array of caniniform teeth (Fig 4). There are three caniniform teeth in each upper jaw. The most rostral tooth is an incisor that has migrated caudally to become caniniform. The caudal canine is actually the first premolar that has migrated rostrally to become caniniform. Each lower jaw has

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