Social Housing of Social Species

Purpose
The purpose of this document is to describe requirements for the social housing of social animals.

Background
The 8th Edition of the ILAR Guide states "Appropriate social interactions among members of the same species (conspecifics) are essential to normal development and well-being (Bayne et al. 1995; Hall 1998; Novak et al. 2006). Single housing of social species should be the exception and justified based on experimental requirements or veterinary-related concerns about animal well-being. In these cases, it should be limited to the minimum period necessary, and where possible, visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile contact with compatible conspecifics should be provided... The need for single housing should be reviewed on a regular basis by the IACUC and veterinarian." Both AAALAC and OLAW have position statements supporting the concept of social housing as the default for social species.

Definition
For the purpose of this policy, social species include: nonhuman primates, dogs, cats (excluding intact male cats), pigs (excluding boars), sheep, goats, cattle (excluding bulls), horses (excluding stallions), alpacas, llamas, rabbits (excludes bucks and excludes does kept for less than 6 months), ferrets, rodents (excluding adult male mice and female hamsters), marsupials, chickens (excluding roosters), psittacines, quail, ducks, turkeys, fish, and songbirds. Social housing refers to housing animals in same sex, compatible pairs or groups in the animals' primary enclosure.

Policy
Social housing will be considered the default method of housing for social animals. Single housing for experimental reasons must be described and justified in the IACUC protocol and approved by the IACUC. Single housing for veterinary reasons or because of social incompatibility must be documented in the animal's medical record or cage card. Each facility housing social animals must develop an SOP for social housing and include a description of the process for determining social incompatibility. This SOP must be approved by the facility veterinarian.

Procedure
General Procedures:

- Social animals will be housed in compatible pairs or groups, rather than individually, unless a single housing exemption has been approved in the relevant protocol or social housing poses an undue risk...
to the animals in question as determined by the facility manager and/or the area veterinarian.

- If the protocol-driven need for single housing is necessary only for a portion of the study, the animals should be socially housed before and after that time.

- Single housing of social animals post-operatively does not require a specific exemption approval in the relevant protocol. However, single housing must be for the minimum amount of time post-operatively necessary for recovery and/or healing as described in the animal care and use protocol.

- Single housing for pre-anesthetic fasting does not require an exemption.

- When social animals must be housed singly, conspecifics should be housed in visual, olfactory, and/or tactile range whenever possible.

- When animals are left singly housed due to attrition of cage mates on study, or uneven experimental group sizes, consideration should be given to re-housing with other conspecifics when possible depending upon the expected duration of the study. When repairing is not possible without disruption the study, singly housing is acceptable for the remainder of the study.

- When social animals must be housed singly, environmental and/or food enrichment, exercise/release into larger enclosure, and/or human interaction shall be provided unless scientifically contraindicated.

- Husbandry staff, veterinary staff, and the IACUC are expected to monitor for single housing instances and ensure that single housing is approved in the relevant protocol.

- This policy will be revised with the addition of new species to the census.

Breeding:

In many breeding arrangements pregnant females will be housed singly prior to birth. This does not need to be included in the IACUC protocol as an exemption as it is understood that this is a necessary part of maintaining a breeding colony. Facility SOP’s for colony management should describe the breeding program.

If there are unbalanced litters (e.g. 4 females and 1 male) resulting in an animal not having an appropriate cage mate at weaning, attempts should be made to identify a cage mate. However if this is not possible, a note should be made in the animal’s record/cage card.

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