

Responses of red deer to restraint versus no restraint treatments in a y-maze preference test

J. C. Pollard, R. P. Littlejohn & M. Suttie

AgResearch, Invermay Agricultural Centre, Private Bag 50034, Mosgiel, New Zealand

To determine whether a y-maze could be used to assess the relative aversiveness of handling treatments used for deer, 24 stags were given two treatments, one administered in each arm of the maze: restraint in a deer crush (C), and walking through a crush (N). Individuals were tested over five days in two daily sessions of three runs. Runs were either "choice", where the deer chose between entering either arm, or "forced", where the deer were forced into one of the arms. Group 1 (n=12) were given choice runs only. Group 2 were given a forced run through each arm and then a choice run, in each of the first four sessions. No preference was shown by Group 1, while Group 2 preferred N ($p < 0.01$), including during the first choice run ($p < 0.04$). Group 2 took longer to be forced into the arm where they had received C than the arm where they had received N ($p < 0.05$). It was concluded that a y-maze may be useful in comparing the aversiveness of treatments used in deer husbandry, and that giving individuals a forced run through each arm of the maze followed by a choice was an effective means of presenting the treatments.