

UK & Ireland Regional Conference 2026

The UK and Ireland region held their biennial regional meeting. This year we headed to the University of Nottingham, Sutton Bonington Campus. The day started with an amazing keynote presentation from Dr Ilyena Hirskyj-Douglas who spoke about her work on technology and animals, answering questions like: Do parrots have favourite friends to video call, and what music do white-faced saki monkeys prefer listening to? Her talk explored what giving animals agency over technology reveals about their social cognition and decision-making abilities, and how using computers affects their own and their human companions' behaviours. Peppered with really great anecdotes, it was a perfect start to a fabulous conference!

There was then a really fabulous range of talks - from philosophical discussions about animal death, to using behaviour as a welfare indicator in reptiles, and whether we can use ethology to understand how non-human animals see the future to how personality affects animal experiences and responses to pain and human-animal interactions. The presentations were of an excellent standard and they prompted some really good discussions!

For the first year we also had two workshops from Dr Lisa Yon and Dr Louise Evans.

Lisa Yon hosted a workshop entitled 'Qualitative Behavioural Assessment: A method for evaluating the fifth domain?' where participants learned more about what qualitative behavioural assessment is and the potential opportunities to employ it to understand more about animals affective experiences.

Louise Evans hosted a workshop entitled 'Judgement Bias: Windows into Animal Emotion and Cognition' where participants were told more about judgement bias and the important role it plays in animal cognition and welfare and how we can use experimental paradigms to measure judgement bias tasks. They were then tasked with designing a judgement bias task – harder than it sounds when you are given a species and a context to work with, and it may be one you know nothing about!

We are very grateful to all of our fabulous speakers and attendees who came and contributed to the day. This year we were able to offer two student prizes (Winner and Highly Commended Presentations) and we are delighted to announce that they were:

Highly commended presentation: Abbie-Louise Smith for her work on public perception of cow-calf separation

Best presentation: Julia Machado for her work on judgement bias in great apes

The conference was bittersweet as it is the last one Keelin and I will be hosting (although unfortunately Keelin couldn't attend in person), as we are stepping down to make way for shiny brand new regional secretaries. We are really grateful to have had the opportunity to hold these positions for this time and thank everyone in the region for their support.

