

# Information Resources for the Exotic Animal Practitioner



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## KEYWORDS

- Animals • Databases as topic • Databases, bibliographic
- Evidence-based medicine • Information storage and retrieval/methods • Research
- Veterinarians • Veterinary medicine

## KEY POINTS

- When deciding where to search, consider what resources are accessible and where, or by whom, information about the topic and species of interest is likely to be published.
- The evidence pyramid provides a framework for selecting evidence-based information resources. If available, consult resources at the top of the pyramid first.
- Information relevant to exotic animals is published in a variety of veterinary medical, human medical, zoologic, and wildlife journals, which may not be indexed by easily accessible databases.
- A structured approach to searching a database enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of the search.
- All studies should be evaluated for validity and applicability of the results to patient care.

## INTRODUCTION

### *What Sources Do Veterinarians Use to Find Information?*

The increasing number of electronic resources available to veterinarians, along with widespread Internet access, means that, theoretically, answers to clinical questions are no more than a few clicks away. Surveys have shown that veterinarians use a variety of resources to find answers to the questions that arise in the course of daily practice. A survey conducted in 2000 found that veterinarians in the United Kingdom (UK) preferred to obtain diagnostic, therapeutic, and drug information from journal articles, textbooks, and conferences.<sup>1</sup> Databases and web sites ranked low on the list of preferred information sources. A decade later, when UK veterinarians were asked to choose which electronic resources they accessed for information from a predefined

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list, Google was the most accessed resource, with 71% of respondents reporting that they used this search engine.<sup>2</sup> Google was also considered the most useful electronic resource, followed by PubMed and Veterinary Information Network (VIN). Nonclinical veterinarians considered PubMed more useful than clinical veterinarians did. In survey of veterinarians practicing outside of the UK, VIN, International Veterinary Information Source, and PubMed were the most accessed and most useful electronic resources.<sup>3</sup> Similar to the survey of UK veterinarians, nonclinical veterinarians accessed PubMed more frequently than clinical veterinarians. In a 2014 roundtable discussion, 8 exotic animal veterinarians in academic and private practice reported using electronic databases (BIOSIS Previews, CAB Abstracts, Scopus and Web of Science), search engines (Google Scholar), VIN, and the web sites of professional organizations when investigating a topic.<sup>4</sup>

The survey of UK veterinarians reported that, when confronted with a difficult case, clinicians preferred to ask a colleague, consult a textbook, or contact a specialist. Less than 5% selected 'general Internet search' as their first source for information on a difficult case. In a survey of Belgian veterinarians, 64% of respondents contacted a colleague when confronted with an unusual case, 85% contacted a specialist, 86% consulted a laboratory, and 68% used the Internet.<sup>5</sup> Only 2.5% reported using PubMed, perhaps due to a language barrier. Collectively, these surveys suggest that clinicians prefer to receive information passively, in a summarized form, from a colleague, specialist, or textbook.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Do Veterinarians Feel There Is Information Available on Exotic Animals?***

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Although there are no formal surveys that focus exclusively on the information sources of exotic animal practitioners, the study of UK veterinarians did include clinicians who had exotic animal patients. The survey asked clinicians to list the 4 species they saw most frequently, the 3 most common presenting conditions for each of those species, and the amount of information they perceived to be available for each condition (none, a little, some, a lot, don't know).<sup>6</sup> Among veterinarians who performed clinical work, rabbits were the third most commonly seen species, after dogs and cats, and guinea pigs were the sixth most commonly seen species. Although clinicians felt there was a lot of information available on the most common presenting complaints in dogs, cats, horses, and cattle, they indicated that a lot of information was available for only 18% of common conditions in rabbits and 5% of common conditions in guinea pigs. The authors of this study hypothesized that the perceived low amount of information available on rabbits and guinea pigs was due to an actual dearth of published information about these species, difficulty finding or accessing information, or a combination of these factors.

## **EVIDENCE-BASED INFORMATION RESOURCES**

### ***What Are Evidence-Based Information Resources?***

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Evidence-based information resources provide "processed information on [the] best available research evidence which are critically appraised, integrated, concisely summarized, and regularly updated as new research evidence becomes available."<sup>7</sup> In human medicine, evidence-based information resources have proliferated, facilitating evidence-based practice (EBP) for doctors, nurses, and other human health care professionals. Veterinary medicine lags behind human medicine in the availability of evidence-based resources.

The evidence pyramid provides a model for evaluating information resources (Fig. 1).<sup>8,9</sup> Although there are many variations of this model, the relative rank of the major study designs within the pyramid remains reasonably consistent.<sup>8</sup> As one moves

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