

# BA faces legal challenge for refusing to fly lab animals

Tom Whipple, Science Editor

September 19 2018, 12:01am, The Times



British Airways refuse to take animals if they are for medical research

DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES



Share



Save

British Airways and other airlines are facing a legal challenge from scientists to try to end the blockade on flying animals for research.

Although airlines carry animals if they are pets or for zoos, campaigning by animal-rights activists has meant that almost all refuse to take them if they are for medical research.

Scientists have found it increasingly hard to access the animals that they say they need to perform research into diseases such as muscular dystrophy and Parkinson's.

Now the US National Association for Biomedical Research, a non-profit organisation representing animal researchers, has filed a complaint with the US Department of Transport.

It argues that by excluding research animals but taking the same species if they are for other purposes, four carriers including British Airways are breaking rules concerning discrimination. “There’s been a haemorrhaging of airlines over the past 10-12 years,” said Kirk Leech, from the European Animal Research Association. “Their refusal is . . . based on potential PR problems.”

He said the issue was now not only about moving larger animals such as dogs and primates. “I know of a significant public research institution in Portugal that had to get a genetically modified mouse from Lisbon to Porto.” It could not be moved by road, and the only airline that would take it did not go direct. “This one GM mouse had to go from Lisbon to Frankfurt, Frankfurt to Porto. That makes no sense.”

He hoped that opening up the US airline market would encourage carriers to resume flights in Europe. “Animal research is a global endeavour. They are bred in one part of the world and transported to another. This is a drastic step, but there seems to be no way forward. Airlines have refused to budge.”

The complaint, which was lodged this week, also implicates China Southern, Qatar Airways and United Airlines. The airlines have until September 26 to respond, before the Department of Transport formally investigates.

Dominic Wells of the Royal Society of Biology, said: “It’s ethically very questionable whether they should kowtow to one particular group that makes a lot of noise, when the consequence is delaying or preventing treatment for serious diseases.”

His own research uses dogs for studying Duchenne muscular dystrophy, and he said that they are essential but ironically the lack of transport means that more dogs may be used than are necessary. “In the absence of transport, there are problems generally with increased animal wastage. Therefore to some extent by banning the movement of animals, an increasing number of animals are used,” he added.

United States

Aviation

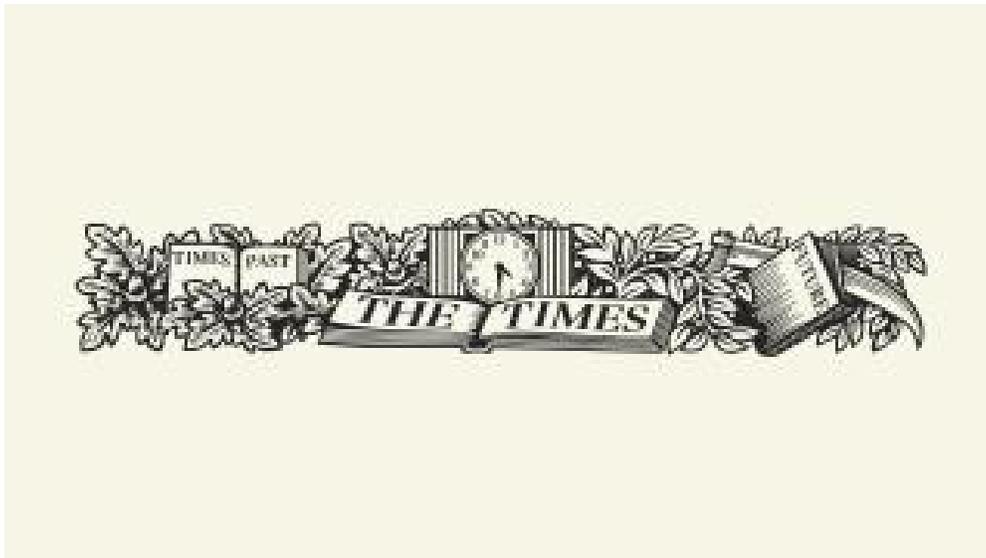
Transport



Share

Save

### Related links



LEADING ARTICLE

## Animal Airlift

When should a government be able to tell a privately run airline what it should and should not...

September 19 2018

Comments are subject to our community guidelines, which can be viewed [here](#).

### Comments (34)

Newest

