



## THE HISTORY OF APWA-ICOFA

The Animal Personality and Welfare Assessment (APWA-ICofA) has its origins in Norway and represents more than two decades of development in the assessment of individual differences in domestic animals.

The work began in 2004, when the original Norwegian enterprise was established with the aim of developing a systematic and scientifically grounded approach to understanding individual differences in the personalities and behavioral responses of domestic animals.

From the beginning, the central idea was that animals should not be understood only in terms of species, breed, training, or observable behavior in a single situation. Individual animals differ in how they perceive and respond to their environment, people, novelty, challenges, and social situations. Understanding these differences can provide important information about both behavior and welfare.

Over the following years, the assessment system was refined through practical experience, research, and collaboration with professionals in animal behavior and welfare.

### Development of the Canine Assessment – 2004–2006

The first species-specific protocol was developed for dogs.

Although the enterprise was established in 2004, the first complete Canine assessment protocol was finalized in 2006 by Line Sandstedt and Dr. Christine Olsen.

The Canine assessment became the foundation for the broader development of the system. Its purpose was to move beyond isolated observations of behavior and provide a structured way of examining individual differences in how dogs respond to people, unfamiliar situations, environmental challenges, and other relevant stimuli.

The protocol was developed to assess the dog as an individual rather than to test obedience or training performance. Particular attention was given to behavioral patterns, emotional responses, coping strategies, social behavior, and responses to novelty and challenge.

Over time, the Canine protocol was further refined through repeated assessments, practical experience, research, and professional collaboration.

This early work also established a principle that later became central to the development of all APWA-ICofA assessments: assessment protocols should be species-specific and reflect the behavioral characteristics, emotional responses, coping strategies, and welfare needs of the species being assessed.

## **Development of the Feline Assessment – 2018**

In 2018, the work expanded to include a dedicated personality assessment for cats.

The Feline protocol was developed specifically around feline behavior and welfare rather than simply adapting the Canine protocol.

This distinction was important because cats differ considerably from dogs in their social behavior, communication, environmental needs, responses to unfamiliar people, and strategies for coping with challenging situations.

The Feline assessment was therefore developed to provide a structured way of examining individual differences in areas such as social responses, exploration, reactions to unfamiliar situations, emotional responses, coping strategies, and interactions with people.

The aim is not to place cats into rigid categories, but to develop a more nuanced understanding of the individual cat and how its personality and behavioral tendencies may influence welfare, management, human-animal interactions, and suitability for different environments or activities.

## **Development of the Equine Assessment – 2021**

The development of the Equine assessment began in 2021.

As with the Canine and Feline protocols, the goal was to develop an assessment specifically for the species rather than applying criteria developed for another animal.

The Equine assessment focuses on individual differences in how horses respond to people, unfamiliar situations, environmental challenges, and other relevant stimuli.

Attention is given to areas such as social responses, confidence, emotional reactivity, coping strategies, exploration, recovery after uncertainty or challenge, and the horse's responses to human interaction.

The assessment can be relevant in several contexts, including for owners and professionals who want to better understand an individual horse, as well as when evaluating horses considered for particular roles or environments.

This includes horses involved in animal-assisted services, where understanding the individual horse's personality, emotional responses, coping strategies, and welfare needs is especially important.

The purpose is not simply to determine whether a horse is "suitable" or "unsuitable." Rather, the assessment aims to provide information that can support decisions about management, training, environment, human-animal interaction, and welfare.

## **Development of Livestock Assessments – 2021**

Also in 2021, the work expanded to include livestock species.

Species-specific assessment protocols were developed for animals including pigs, cattle, goats, sheep, and chickens.

This development reflected an important principle within the assessment system: individual differences and personality are relevant not only to companion animals, but across domestic species.

The Livestock assessments therefore focus on species-specific behavior while also examining individual differences in responses to people, novelty, environmental challenges, social situations, and other relevant stimuli.

The goal is to contribute to a better understanding of the individual animal and how its behavioral and emotional characteristics may influence welfare, management, handling, human-animal relationships, and participation in different environments or activities.

The expansion into livestock also broadened the scope of the assessment system beyond traditional companion animal settings and reinforced its wider relevance to animal welfare.

### **From PADA to PADA-ICoFA**

The assessment was originally known as PADA – Personality Assessment of Domestic Animals.

As the methodology developed, it became increasingly connected to the International Community of Anthrozoology (ICoFA) and supported by a growing international network of trained professionals.

This international development created opportunities for professional exchange, training, collaboration, and further refinement of the assessment methodology across countries and disciplines.

The different species protocols continued to develop within this broader international framework.

### **Establishment of the International Advisory Board – 2025**

In 2025, an international Advisory Board was established to strengthen the scientific and professional development of the assessment.

The board brought together six experts with complementary expertise in animal behavior, personality research, animal-assisted services, animal welfare, and technology: Kenth Svartberg, James Serpell, Amy Binder, Melissa Winkle, Anna Zamansky, and Christine Olsen.

The Advisory Board provides an important foundation for the continued development of APWA-ICoFA.

By bringing together expertise from different disciplines, the board supports scientific exchange, critical discussion of methodology, and the identification of new research

opportunities. It also helps connect the assessment system with a broader international community of researchers and practitioners.

### From PADA-ICofA to APWA-ICofA – 2026

In 2026, the assessment was renamed APWA-ICofA – Animal Personality and Welfare Assessment.

The new name reflects the continued development of the assessment and its broader emphasis on the relationship between personality, emotional responses, coping, and animal welfare.

The change also emphasizes that personality assessment should not be viewed merely as a way of categorizing animals or predicting behavior.

Instead, understanding individual differences can help us better understand what an animal may find easy or difficult, how it responds to different environments and situations, and how we can better support its welfare.

This reflects a principle that has become increasingly central to APWA-ICofA: understanding an animal's individual characteristics is essential to supporting its well-being.

### APWA-ICofA Today

Today, APWA-ICofA continues to evolve through international collaboration, research, professional training, practical experience, and methodological refinement.

The assessment system now includes species-specific protocols for Canine, Feline, Equine, Pig, Cattle, Goat, Sheep, and Chicken.

Each protocol is designed around the behavioral characteristics and welfare needs of the relevant species while maintaining the same broader objective: to better understand the individual animal.

Research and scientific development are also becoming an increasingly important part of the work.

Collaborative research involving ICofA and the University of North Florida is exploring the assessment and its measurement properties, while collaboration with Tech4Animals is investigating the potential role of artificial intelligence in behavioral assessment.

At the same time, APWA-ICofA continues to develop an international network of trained professionals who contribute to assessment, education, professional discussion, and the continued refinement of the methodology.

More than twenty years after the work began, one principle remains at the center of APWA-ICofA:

Understanding the individual animal is essential to supporting its welfare.