

Striving for Common Ground: Humane and Scientific Considerations in Contemporary Wildlife Management

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Although there is a diversity of opinion about how to view the relationship between humans and wildlife, recent political pressures from the current administration make it mandatory that these diverse groups coalesce to use their combined leverage to halt the planned incursions into the remaining habitats of wildlife. It is also important to begin to see nature as a complex and interrelated whole, and to respect the integrity of that whole, rather than simply select individual species for affection and protection.

Zusammenfassung

Obwohl verschiedene Meinungen über die Beziehung zwischen Mensch und wilder Fauna bestehen, wird es durch den jüngsten, von der gegenwärtigen US Regierung ausgehenden politischen Druck unumgänglich, dass sich alle noch so verschiedenen Gruppen zusammenschliessen, um gemeinsam den Hebel anzusetzen,

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der die geplanten Eingriffe in den für wilde Tiere verbleibenden Lebensraum aufhalten kann. Es ist auch dringend notwendig, die Natur als ein komplexes und in sich verknüpftes Ganzes zu betrachten und die Integrität dieser Einheit zu respektieren, bevor man einzelne auserwählte Tiergattungen zum Schätzen und Schützen herausgreift.

The Mixed Bag of Opinions About Wildlife Conservation

It has been said some people can find more to disagree about on the head of a pin than in the entire knitting basket, let alone in the garment being knitted. This expression may describe the field of wildlife conservation and management today. One need not look far before division, disagreement, and dissension become all too apparent. We are a field marked by a dissipation of energies and purpose, by controversy, and by misleading and counterproductive stereotypes and dislikes. Despite this divisiveness, the context in which we operate is characterized by two obvious facts. First, as a proportion of the American population, relatively few people care deeply about the welfare of wildlife and the well-being of our natural environment. Second, we are faced, as perhaps at no time since the nineteenth century, with obstacles and forces bent on setting back the apparatus and public support that have been erected to protect, preserve and intelligently manage wildlife and the natural world. In other words, we are confronted with a situation demanding now, more than in recent memory, the need for cooperation, common ground, and mutuality of purpose.

For those who suggest that variations in ideals and intentions among resource managers and humanitarians make cooperative interaction impossible, I would suggest that a closer look at the historical record indicates otherwise. Indeed, the origin of natural wildlife protection—marked by the passage of the Lacey Act in 1900—provided us with a

dramatic illustration of what could be accomplished when differences from within were set aside in the interest of meaningfully confronting much larger and more ominous forces from without. In his excellent doctoral dissertation, "The Struggle for Wildlife Protection in the United States: Attitudes and Events Leading to the Lacey Act," Theodore Whalley Cart (1971) described a time when scientists, humanitarians and sportsmen worked in successful concert to halt the butchery and profligacy involved in market hunting and the mass killing of birds for the millinery trade during the latter nineteenth century. The slaughter of the buffalo and decimation of song, shore, and seabird populations galvanized these disparate wildlife constituencies, whose combined efforts resulted in America's first Federal legislation to protect wildlife. As Cart noted, "the factors that caused natural scientists, sportsmen and [humanitarians] to join in supporting the Lacey bill stemmed, in part, from the distinct interests of each group. [Nevertheless,] common to all was the mounting and fearful realization that further indulgence of pioneer attitudes toward the use of wild animals would lead shortly to the extinction of many species—wildlife was in danger."

Political Pressures Aimed Against Wildlife

And, in my opinion, given the present sociopolitical and economic climate, wildlife is again in danger. More than at any time since that period, it behooves us to set aside erroneous characterizations of managers, nature lovers, humanitarians, and sportsmen to con-

front the increasingly polarizing and insidious tendencies of the current administration. It is clearly the moment for coordinating scarce resources, energies and enthusiasms, rather than dissipating them on internal quarreling and bitter divisiveness. Together, humanitarians, scientists, managers, sportsmen, bird-watchers and other wildlife groups can begin the uphill struggle to defend and preserve our common and precarious natural heritage.

Fortunately, there are a number of areas of mutual concern where the perspectives and interests of these diverse constituencies can converge. Among the most important of these is the "non-game" area, where all wildlife—game and non-game, vertebrate and invertebrate, native and exotic—can become the focus of concern as components of the overall ecosystem. Perhaps the most critical addition to such an expanded wildlife program is the most imperiled part of the system, the threatened and endangered species. Relatedly, increased attention will have to be aimed at the retention and acquisition of critical habitat basic to the continued vitality of wildlife populations.

Concerning the issue of harvest and control of animals, inevitable differences will arise among the views of managers and humanitarians. Nevertheless, all can strive toward the practice of humane and compassionate treatment of animals. In this regard, managers, humanitarians, and scientists can seek to define norms and establish procedures for less painful capture devices, for sensibly and kindly removing excess animals, and for instituting animal control practices that focus on the offending animal, rather than on the entire species.

Certainly, the bottom line in this attempt to find common ground will be the fundamental search for an ethic of the land and its living components that embraces both scientific and humane

considerations. However, we will need to move beyond simple affection for animals to a broader ecological appreciation of species in relation to their land base. As Joseph Wood Krutch (1970) once remarked, "Love is not enough." Instead, we will have to promote an empathy, not just for individual animals, but also for species and their interconnectedness.

As Roger Tory Peterson (1981) once remarked, people once thought of the universe as an intricate, delicate clockwork, the handiwork of a loving God. In such an analogy, the living species were the component parts of the system. Love for animals was not the essential ingredient in this understanding but rather, respect, awe, and an affinity for the whole as something as precious as its constituent parts. Similarly, a sense of the beauty and the aesthetic qualities of animals was considered not so important as a feeling for the immense complexity and intricacy of the overall system. Most of all, an appreciation of the need to save the various functioning elements was based not just on an ethic of short-term self-interest, but on a visceral knowledge that the well-being of animals was in some way ultimately related to the long-run survival of man. In our time, Aldo Leopold (1968) best articulated this perspective, a glimmer of which he provided us in his classic, *Sand County Almanac*. He remarked:

Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language. The quality of cranes, lies, I think, in this higher gamut.... When we hear his call we hear no mere bird. We hear the trumpet in the orchestra of evolution. He is the symbol of our untamable past, of that incredible sweep of millenia which underlies and conditions the daily affairs of birds [as well as] men.

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