Thinkpiece

INCREASING OUR COMPASSION FOOTPRINT: THE ANIMALS' MANIFESTO

by Marc Bekoff

Abstract. Our relationships with animals are wide-ranging. When people tell me that they love animals and then harm or kill them I tell them I'm glad they don't love me. Many individuals, including scientists, ignore their responsibility when they interact with animals and fail to recognize that doing something in the name of science, which usually means in the name of humans, is not an adequate reason for intentionally causing suffering, pain, or death. "Good welfare" usually is not "good enough." Existing regulations allow animals to be treated in regrettable ways that demean us as a species. Compassion is the key for bettering both animal and human lives. A good way to make the world a more compassionate place for animals is to increase our compassion footprint. We could begin by deciding that we will not intrude on animals' lives unless our actions are in the best interests of the animals irrespective of our desires. It is simple to make more compassionate choices about what we eat and wear and how we educate students, conduct research, and entertain ourselves at the expense of animals. The time to make these changes is long overdue.

Keywords: animal emotions; animal protection; animal rights; animal sentience; animal welfare; anthropomorphism; anthrozoology; carbon footprint; cognitive ethology; compassion; compassion credits; compassion footprint; empathy; human-animal relationships

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Our relationships with nonhuman animals (hereafter "animals") are complicated, frustrating, ambiguous, paradoxical, and wide-ranging. When people tell me that they love animals and then harm or kill them I tell

Marc Bekoff (*http://literati.net/Bekoff*) is professor emeritus at the University of Colorado, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Boulder, CO 80309-0334; e-mail marc.bekoff@gmail.com.

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them I'm glad they don't love me. We observe animals, gawk at them in wonder, experiment on them, eat them, wear them, write about them, draw and paint them, and represent them in many varied ways. We often dispassionately ignore who they are and what they want and need, moving them from here to there as we "redecorate nature" and making decisions for them without their consent. Far too many of us, including practicing scientists, ignore the fact that we are responsible for our choices about how we interact with animals and that simply doing something "in the name of science" is not an adequate reason for intentionally causing suffering, pain, or death. "Good welfare" usually isn't "good enough" (*http://arbs.biblioteca.unesp.br/viewissue.php*). Surely we can do better in our relationships with animals and other people.

It is important to give serious attention to the emotional lives of animals (Balcombe 2006; Allen and Bekoff 2007; Bekoff 2007a, b; Bekoff and Pierce in press). Studying animal emotions is exciting, challenging, and frustrating. We already know a lot about animal emotions and sentience, more than we often give ourselves credit for. Behavioral and neuroscientific research shows that animals' lives are not all that private, hidden, or secret. Numerous lines of what scientists call independent evidence, information from many different disciplines, show that many animals have rich and deep emotional lives. When taken as a whole, the ensemble of data leads to no other reasonable conclusion. Scientific data (science sense), evolutionary biology, and common sense show clearly that animals have a point of view and preferences about what they do and do not like.

Anthropomorphic Doubletalk

Some readers may say, "Oh, you're just being anthropomorphic; we don't really know that other animals experience deep and enduring emotions." I find this to be a poor excuse often used to justify animal abuse and to shirk personal responsibility for one's actions. When someone says he is not sure if dogs, for example, have emotions, if they feel joy or grief, I say I'm glad I'm not his dog.

Many researchers engage in anthropomorphic doubletalk. Over the years I have noticed a curious phenomenon. If a scientist says that an animal is happy, no one questions it, but if he or she says that an animal is unhappy, charges of anthropomorphism are immediately raised. Like the dissonant personal beliefs of scientists, this doubletalk seems mostly aimed at letting humans feel better about themselves and allowing them to continue on their merry way doing whatever they choose to do to animals. Of course, inappropriate anthropomorphism is always a danger, because it is easy to get lazy and presume that the way we see and experience the world must be the only way. It also is easy to become self-serving and hope that because we want or need animals to be happy, they are. In fact, the only guard

against the inappropriate use of anthropomorphism is knowledge that results from detailed study of the minds and emotions of animals.

Many researchers now recognize that we *must* be anthropomorphic when we discuss animal emotions but that, if we do it carefully, what I call biocentrically, we can still give due consideration to the animals' point of view. Being anthropomorphic is doing what comes naturally. No matter what we call it, most agree that animals and humans share many traits, including emotions. This is merely an extension of Charles Darwin's well-accepted ideas about evolutionary continuity, in which it is argued that the differences among species are differences in degree rather than in kind. Thus, we are not inserting something human into animals but are identifying commonalities and then using human language to communicate what we observe.

Anthropomorphism is a much more complex phenomenon than we might expect. It may very well be that the seemingly natural human urge to impart emotions onto animals, far from obscuring the "true" nature of animals, may actually reflect a very accurate way of knowing—and the knowledge that is gained, supported by solid scientific research, is essential for making ethical decisions on behalf of animals. I think that some individuals are far too worried about being anthropomorphic without realizing how important it is for gaining access to who animals are and what they feel (Horowitz and Bekoff 2007).

The Importance of Compassion: Minding Animals

Compassion is the key for bettering animal and human lives. Compassion can lead to justice for all. All over the globe people are talking about ways to lighten our carbon footprint and accrue carbon credits. But what about increasing our compassion footprint and accruing compassion credits? A good way to make the world a more compassionate and peaceful place for all animals, to increase our compassion footprint, is to "mind" them. Minding animals means recognizing that they have active minds and feelings. We also mind animals as their caretakers in a human-dominated world in which their interests are continually trumped in deference to ours.

To mind animals it is essential for people with varied expertise and interests to talk to one another, to share what we know about animals and use this knowledge for bettering their and our lives. Figuring out how science and the humanities, including those interested in animal protection, conservation, and environmentalism (with concerns ranging from individuals to populations, species, and ecosystems), can learn from one another is essential.

Think of the way we double-cross animals. Imagine an utterly exhausted polar bear asking "Where's the ice?" as she attempts to swim with her offspring from one ice floe to another as she had in years past only to discover

that the ice is gone due to climate change (*http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article767459.ece; http://online.wsj.com/public/article_print/SB113452435089621905-vnekw47PQGtDyf3iv5XEN71_o5I_20061214.html*). Imagine the anxiety and fear she feels as she, and perhaps her offspring, slowly drown.

We have a long way to go. Existing laws and regulations allow animals living on land, in water, and in air to be treated in regrettable ways that demean us as a species. Indeed, in the eyes of the law animals are mere property and can be treated like backpacks, couches, and bicycles with no legal recourse. The animals' eyes tell us that they do not like this at all. They have a point of view. Viewing animals objectively does not work.

We are only fooling ourselves if we claim that animals are adequately protected from pain and suffering. Over the past five years violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) in the United States have increased more than 90 percent (*http://www.all-creatures.org/saen/*). In 2006 alone there were more than 2,100 violations of the AWA, with the highest level of violations occurring in the areas of Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (58 percent) and veterinary care (25 percent). It has been estimated that about 75 percent of all laboratories violate the AWA at one time or another.

"In the Name of Science"

Despite global attempts to protect animals from wanton use and abuse, what we have been doing has not been working. As already mentioned, "good welfare" is not good enough. "Good welfare" and allowable research according to existing regulations permit mice to be shocked and otherwise tortured, rats to be starved or force-fed, pigs to be castrated without anesthesia, cats to be blinded, dogs to be shot with bullets, and primates to have their brains invaded with electrodes. Only about 1 percent of animals used in research in the United States are protected by legislation, and the legislation is sometimes amended in nonsensical ways to accommodate the "needs" of researchers. The desperation of science to rob animals of their sentience produces distortions that open the door for egregious and reprehensible abuse. For instance, here is a quote from the federal register:

> We are amending the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) regulations to reflect an amendment to the Act's definition of the term *animal*. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 amended the definition of *animal* to specifically exclude birds, rats of the genus *Rattus*, and mice of the genus *Mus*, bred for use in research. (Vol. 69, no. 108, 4 June 2004)

It may surprise you to hear that birds, rats, and mice are no longer considered animals, but that is the sort of logic that epitomizes federal legislators. Researchers are not allowed to abuse animals, so the definition of *animal* is simply revised until it refers only to creatures researchers don't need. We

know that mice are empathic beings who feel the pain and suffering of other mice, yet this scientific fact has not entered into discussions about the well-being of mice or other animals.

Excuses justifying animal exploitation such as "Well, it's okay, I'm doing this in the name of science" or in the name of this or that usually mean "in the name of humans." We are a very arrogant and self-centered lot. All practicing scientists need to take responsibility for their practices and always use the most humane and noninvasive techniques. This will produce more reliable data and also set an example for future researchers, including young children who might want to pursue a career in science.

Bill and Reno: A Scientist and His Dog

It is all too easy to push aside the animals' point of view and shirk responsibility. Just when I think I've heard it all, something happens that surprises me. One such event took place a few years ago that made me ask myself, "Isn't a dog a dog?" It seems like a no-brainer to me, but a very bright friend and colleague made me keep asking this question and trying to figure out how he and others could argue otherwise.

I was visiting a major American university where I was going to give a talk on the nature of animal emotions. A friend, let's call him Bill, came up before the lecture, and I asked him how his dog Reno was doing. Well, for more than five minutes Bill extolled Reno's deep emotional life: He loved to play with his friends, missed Bill when he was gone, had separation anxiety, and a few days ago was jealous of the attention that Bill was giving his daughter. "Why," Bill exclaimed, "Reno even knows what he can and can't do when he plays, like he has some moral sense!" A bright, emotional, and virtuous dog, Reno was. He was happy, he knew social rules and right from wrong, and he told Bill this without hesitation.

I was thrilled to hear these stories, because Bill always had been one of those researchers who claimed that we really don't know what animals are feeling and in some ways we can't be sure that they are feeling anything. While animals do act "as if" they experience an array of various emotions, it is too early to make any grandiose pronouncements about their feelings.

My excitement was short-lived. During the question-and-answer time following my talk Bill went for my throat, accusing me of being far too anthropomorphic and too sure of myself. He did it in a sort of lighthearted academic way, and when he was done I simply asked him to recall for the audience the conversation that we had had before my lecture, about Reno's emotional life. Bill turned slightly red, then said, "Well, you know what I meant when we were talking before. I was just letting my hair down and telling stories about Reno. I really don't *know* that he enjoys playing with his friends or that he is depressed when I leave him alone. And I feel rather certain that he wasn't *really* jealous of the attention I was giving to my daughter; he just behaved as if he were."

Frankly, I do *not* know what Bill meant. He was quite comfortable telling me about Reno's feelings in one context but not the other—a distancing mechanism that is used by many people who live with dogs, cats, rats, birds, and other animals at home and who also confront them or similar animals in their laboratories. Bill didn't even seem to know that there was a disconnect—dissonance, psychologists call it—between the things he told me in the space of an hour. And he ignored the fact that humans and many other animals share ancestral parts of the brain that are important in positive and negative emotions, so that it is not at all surprising that Reno would experience and express an array of different emotions.

Similar conversations take place at cocktail parties when it is permissible to let one's hair down and not feel a need to sanitize animal feelings with all sorts of "Well, you know what I mean" disclaimers. I feel sorry for dogs who live with humans who wonder if they really have feelings.

There seem to be inconvenient truths that drive people into indefensible situations. Many individuals have vested interests in what they are doing and how they evaluate information. They are resistant to change even in light of solid scientific data and don't seem to realize that they are being inconsistent in their views on what animals know and feel depending on whether they are at work or at home. Conventional wisdom tells them that it's okay to see dogs in different lights as different beings, depending on where they are and to whom they are speaking about their close companions. However, it is conventional wisdom and bad biology that resulted in animals' losing their minds and hearts "in the name of science." Conventional wisdom has been a large part of the problem, so it will not likely be the solution to reconciling how dogs and other animals are portrayed in different venues. The least we can ask for is consistency in different contexts. Isn't a dog a dog wherever we encounter her?

Empathy in Mice

Scientific evidence is mounting that animals, even rodents, have the capacity to feel empathy. In June 2006, researchers reported in the journal *Science* the first unequivocal evidence for empathy between adult nonprimate mammals. Dale Langford and her colleagues demonstrated that mice suffer distress when they watch a cage-mate experience pain (Langford et al. 2006). Langford and her team injected one or both members of a pair of adult mice with acetic acid, which causes a severely painful burning sensation. The researchers discovered that mice who watched their cagemates in pain were more sensitive to pain themselves. A mouse injected with acid writhed more violently if his or her partner had also been injected and was writhing in pain. Not only did the mice who watched cagemates in distress become more sensitive to the same painful stimuli, they became generally more sensitive to pain, showing a heightened reaction, for example, to heat under their paws. The researchers speculated that mice

probably used visual cues to generate the empathic response—which is interesting because mice normally rely most heavily on olfactory communication.

Other researchers were quick to note the importance of these unanticipated findings. Renowned primatologist Frans de Waal (2006) said of Langford's research, "This is a highly significant finding and should open the eyes of people who think empathy is limited to our species." These data confirm that empathy is an ancient capacity probably present in all mammals. Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp (2006) similarly remarked, "If it turns out that the 'empathetic' effect in mice is mediated by the same brain mechanisms as human empathy, then the evidence would be truly compelling that Langford's model actually reflects evolutionary continuity in a pro-social mechanism among many different mammalian species."

Sadly, one of the researchers who was part of the team suggested that an opaque barrier be used to separate mice so that they could not know what was happening to another mouse, because mice who observe each other during experiments may be "contaminating" the data. I am sure that if you saw what was going on in the other cage you'd prefer not to see it, either. Here is a good example of a scientist shirking his responsibility to provide the animals he uses with the very best care possible.

The Privilege of Studying Animals

Studying nonhuman animals is a privilege that must be taken seriously and not abused. Although the issues are difficult and challenging, they are not impossible. Certainly we must not let the animals suffer because of our inability to come to terms with difficult issues or to accept responsibility for how we treat them. Questioning the ways in which humans use animals will make for more informed decisions about such use. By making such decisions in a responsible way, we help to ensure that in the future we do not repeat the mistakes of the past and that we will move toward a world in which humans and other animals may share peaceably the resources of a finite planet.

There is a continuing need to develop and improve general guidelines for research on free-living and captive animals. These guidelines should be inspirational and aspirational as well as regulatory. In our efforts to learn more about the worlds of other animals, we need to study many different species. We must not be afraid of what learning about other species may bring in terms of knowledge about animal consciousness and intelligence and their ability to feel pain and suffer. We should not continue to view animal suffering from afar, nor should we blind ourselves to the many ways in which we cause harm to the world around us.

What I fear most is that if we stall in our efforts to take animal use and abuse more seriously and fail to adopt extremely restrictive guidelines and laws, still more and even irreversible damage will result. Our collective

regrets about what we failed to do to protect animals' rights in the past will be moot. We need to enter into close and reciprocal relationships with all beings in this more-than-human world.

Our starting point should be that we will not intrude on animals' lives unless we can argue that we have a right to override this maxim, that our actions are in the best interests of the animals irrespective of our desires. When unsure about how we influence the lives of other animals, we should err on the side of the animals. Some guiding principles include:

- taking seriously the animals' points of view
- putting respect, compassion, and admiration for other animals first and foremost
- erring on the animals' side when uncertain about their feeling pain or suffering
- recognizing that almost all of the methods that are used to study animals, even in the field, are intrusions on their lives—much research is exploitative
- recognizing that speciesist assessments based on vague notions of an animal's cognitive or mental "complexity" are misguided
- focusing on the importance of individual animals as opposed to species membership
- appreciating the variations among individual animals and the diversity of the lives of different individuals in the worlds within which they live
- valuing common sense and empathy, even though traditionally these qualities have had no place in science
- using broadly based rules of loyalty and nonintervention as guiding principles
- informing all potential readers of scientific papers how animals were negatively affected by the research so that others can avoid making the same mistakes
- recognizing that humans are necessarily anthropocentric and that the nonconsenting animal's point of view can never be adequately assimilated into the utilitarian calculus regardless of how right-minded individual persons are

Animals should be used only as a last resort, and the researchers are responsible for the choices that they make as they "do science." Limitations of time, money, and energy are not satisfactory excuses for using animals when alternatives are available or can be developed, which is often the case.

Accruing Compassion Credits

It is time that people began to think about how to accrue compassion credits, as they do carbon credits (see for example *http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1709186,00.html*). Every individual can make positive changes for all living beings by weaving compassion, empathy, respect, dignity, peace, and love into his or her life. It is simple to make more compassionate choices about what we eat and wear and how we educate students, conduct research, and entertain ourselves at the expense of animals. Increased compassion for animals can readily lead to less carbon because of the inverse relationship between these markers especially in our consumption of factory-farmed meat from highly abused animals (*http://www.ciwf.org.uk/globalwarning/index.html*).

We also can focus on the value of individual lives when we try to restore animal populations and ecosystems. It is fair to ask whether the life of an individual should be traded off for the good of its species, for example when we try to restore wolves to Yellowstone National Park and individual wolves die so that others might live.

Making every attempt to coexist peacefully and to do so in the most compassionate ways possible is a win-win situation. Compassion for animals will make for more compassion among people, and that is what we need as we journey into the future. Cruelty to animals has serious implications for humans. Studies by Frank Ascione, Phil Arkow, Barbara Boat, and many others show that children who are cruel to animals are significantly more likely to commit violence against humans later in life; the absence of empathy for one indicates lack of empathy for the other (*http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa10.4/raupp.shtml*). Indeed, studies of prison inmates reveal that as many as 75 percent of violent offenders had early records of animal cruelty (*http://www.arkonline.com/violence.html*). The Humane Society of the United States has a program, called "First Strike," devoted to learning more about the connection between cruelty to animals and to humans (*http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/first_strike_the_connection_between_animal_cruelty_and_human_violence/*). The Society & Animals Forum and the Human/Animal Violence Education Network have launched similar programs that deserve our support (*http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa10.4/raupp.shtml*). Along these lines, Albert Schweitzer (1923) wrote: "Until he extends his circle of compassion for all living things, man will not himself find peace."

It may seem trivial to claim that we are the future, as are our children and theirs, but I think it bears repeating. There is much work to be done, and every human plays a role in fostering more compassion, respect, and love for animals. Each of us is responsible for the choices we make, and each makes a difference. As we learn about animals and come to appreciate them for who they are, this knowledge can produce growth and tolerance.

By loving other animals we make the world a better place for all beings, including ourselves. Showing children that animals are emotional and moral beings is critical (Bekoff 2008).

Human relationships with animals are full of contradictions and ambivalence as well as deep connections and love. On the one hand, animals are used and abused in a sickening and morally distasteful array of human-centered activities. On the other hand, animals are revered and worshipped and form an indispensable part of the tapestry of our own well-being. They make us whole and make us feel good. In many situations it's a double-cross, as we welcome animals into our lives and then treat them as if their lives don't count. We slaughter, silence, and squelch sentient beings with little more than a fleeting thought and with reprehensible indignity. The love-hate relationship that humans have with their animal kin makes life difficult for all.

What is thoroughly unacceptable is that animals often are used to define who we humans are in the great chain of being, and the chain is then presented as a hierarchy in which humans place themselves separate from and above other animals, when we are no better than mice or rabbits or dogs or cats. Hierarchical speciesism results in endless harm and is bad biology. Trumping the interests of animals in the name of science really means in the name of humans. We declare that we are special and better and more valuable than our animal kin and go on to close the door on the lives of other animals. We shut down our senses and our hearts to their pleas that we should take them seriously for who they are and not for what we want them to be in our narrow anthropocentric view of the world.

Let us not forget that throughout the world animals have no legal standing. They are merely property, like backpacks or bicycles, and humans are their owners. Animals can be legally abused, dismissed, disenfranchised, moved here and there, bartered, harmed, and killed. Often this happens in the name of education, science, entertainment, clothing, or food—self-serving excuses that boil down to "in the name of humans." Shame on us. Animals are not merely property. Even young children know they're not (*http://connecticutforanimals.blogspot.com/2007/11/hartford-courantop-ed-7-yo-ct-ar_12.html*).

The Animals' Manifesto

Animals want to be treated better, with more dignity and respect, and we can make their lives easier and more comfortable by paying attention to what they are asking for. Like us, other animals normally seek pleasure and avoid pain. Here are ten overlapping reasons why animals deserve far more than we've been giving them.

- They exist, and we share Earth with them.
- This land is their land, too.

- They are more than we previously thought.
- We are alienated from them.
- We need to mind animals and look out for one another.
- We are powerful and must be responsible for what we do to them.
- What we are doing now isn't working.
- "Good welfare" isn't "good enough."
- We need to increase our compassion footprint.
- We all can do something to make the world a more compassionate and peaceful place for them and for us.

I offer these ten reasons to stimulate discussion, not because they are the only reasons why we need to unravel the notion of animal welfare and treat animals with more respect and dignity but because reflecting on these (and other) reasons will force us to be more responsible for what we do to other animals and help to expand our compassion footprint. More compassion is always needed in the world. It's easy to make small, simple changes in our interactions with animals. Ultimately, compassion for animals will make for more compassion among people, weaving more empathy, respect, dignity, and love into all our lives.

Animals are asking us to treat them better or leave them alone. So, let us increase compassion. Animals and future generations of humans will thank us for our efforts.

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