

UC Agriculture & Natural Resources

Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest Conference

Title

Animal rights and vertebrate pest control

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3x00q9jj>

Journal

Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest Conference, 13(13)

ISSN

0507-6773

Author

Brooks, Dale L.

Publication Date

1988

ANIMAL RIGHTS AND VERTEBRATE PEST CONTROL

DALE L. BROOKS, D.V.M., Ph.D., Animal Resources Service, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California, Davis, California 95616.

ABSTRACT: Many animal rights activists are very vocal in their belief that animals are more valuable or at least equally important to humans. There is little to no compromise in their overall view that the use of animals for food, fiber, teaching, research and testing does not result in improvements for other animals or societal needs. Today's activists are well prepared and very articulate in getting their views across to the public through the press and television media. An increasing number of the public is beginning to believe the activist allegations of inhumane animal practices. The biologist can no longer ignore these allegations; each of us must become active vocal proponents of the benefits of what we are doing and that we are caring people who practice the highest standards of animal welfare.

Proc. Vertebr. Pest Conf. (A.C. Crabb and R.E. Marsh, Eds.),
Printed at Univ. of Calif., Davis. 13:14-17, 1988

Animal rights is a difficult, complex, emotional issue that incites otherwise normal, logical people to expose their most unpleasant natures, short tempers, impatience, and inability to understand others' points of view (Fox 1986). The old saying, "all's fair in love, war, and politics," is also apropos to the wide spectrum of opinions and ideas about animal rights.

Most people think animal rights is a new issue, but it really isn't. Historically, the English in the late 1800's were early animal advocates (Rowan 1984). Victorian antivivisectionists viewed medical practice and science as a threat to morals and religion, that disease was a product of sin and folly, and experimental biology had undesirable behavioral implications on morals, society and evolution (French 1975).

For the past 50 years or so, the conception of animal rights people seemed mostly to be little old ladies in tennies. Today's animal rights activists are often well educated, articulate, and organized—and young. Their old name, "antivivisectionists," is pretty much out. Certainly the majority of modern people are concerned with the well-being of animals and with their interactions with humans, so we all think of ourselves as "animal welfarists."

The "animal activists" are those who really get involved, who vocalize their opinions and work to effect changes in society's attitude and treatment of animals. A few of these activists with more extreme views have become "animal rightists" who feel that animals should have rights at least equal to human beings. Our legal system considers animals to be chattel, or property, so beyond the existing laws about animal welfare and cruelty, animals do not have any legal rights. If one of several pending lawsuits is decided in favor of the rights of an animal, this court precedence will have a profound influence on all of us that have anything to do with animals. Certain particularly impatient animal rightists have formed the radical "Animal Liberation Front," a nebulous group of zealots who have claimed credit for terrorist activities involving breaking, entering, and trashing laboratories, stealing animals, and arson.

Another popular term is "speciesism," the tendency of

humans to treat certain species with more or less respect than others. Federal animal welfare legislation regulates only dogs, cats, monkeys, rabbits, guinea pigs, and hamsters. Rats and mice are not covered. In the Bible, rats and mice are vermin and the dearth of the earth, so many people feel that it's OK to hurt them and kill them, but it's not OK to kill "higher life forms." The real question of animal rights is whether or not speciesism is a true thing, whether or not man is more important than animals, whether or not there is any sort of hierarchy of rights among animals. Those who feel there is a true equality among species seldom grant any room for compromise. Most people who do feel there is a certain hierarchy still need assurance that the biomedical and agricultural community is sensitive to the needs of the animals they deal with.

The animal rights movement exists primarily in the wealthier developed countries among people whose time is no longer consumed by the hunter-gatherer survival relationships, in societies with time to sit and philosophize over the moral and ethical issues. Many of today's animal rightists have evolved from supporters of the causes of the 60's and 70's—sexism, feminism, racism, equality, peace and, frequently, vegetarianism (Singer 1975). Wrap up the energy of all these causes into a fight against animal misuse and you get a fairly radical animal rightist and his or her cause. These people have a sincere and fundamentalist approach. They impress the public and the press as people who really care and whose sensitivity comes from their hearts. It often appears, however, that a high percentage of the animal rightists (certainly not all of them) care more about animals than they do about people. Their pets are substitutes for their loved ones, children, spouses or significant others. Whenever they hear the words "animal uses," all they see are their beloved companions. There is no compromise to imagine animals used properly other than as treasured pets. This strong companion animal bond is often the most important aspect of their lives. A small number of the most philosophical animal rightists complain that animals are being treated as no more than indentured slaves and that they should all be set free to

roam and do as they please. Many of these people have very little knowledge of animal ecology or behavior (Fox 1986). They seem ignorant of the facts of life of predator-prey relationships and the food chain.

The real question gets down to who's the most important—humans or animals? Many of us were raised in a northern European culture with the Judeo-Christian Bible ethic, and in Genesis it says that man has the dominion over animals and other living creatures (Brumbaugh 1978, Singer 1975). Well, this right of dominion is what is being questioned. Possibly our self-proclaimed position at the top of nature's pyramid does not confer any moral distinction except insofar as it makes us responsible for the well-being of those below us (Rollins 1981). We Americans are a generation who have been raised primarily in the city and spent many hours watching television. We suffer from "Big Bird Syndrome," in which all we know about animals is what we learned from watching "Sesame Street," where animals ARE people. Most people know little about how food and fiber get into those tidy, convenient supermarket packages. They have no idea where food products come from or how food animals are raised, and they avoid acknowledging that animals were killed to become the patty in their "Big Mac." Few of the millions of city dwellers have any knowledge or appreciation for the role of agriculture and non-pet animals in our society. We who are aware have a tremendous educational challenge to change the way many people think about animals.

How do the animal rightist and some of the public view researchers, teachers, farmers, ranchers and vertebrate pest controllers? To many people, these professions have an image of being insensitive and uncaring. We are cold-hearted conformists to the principles of the scientific approach. Our interests are self-serving to our needs to publish papers, create more jobs, prepare more projects to make sure that we continue in our present employment. The animal rightist does not consider our work to be a contribution to society. We are accused of having no sensitivity to any sort of suffering, in fact, no feelings whatsoever. We are here just to exploit, to challenge, to interfere with and to control animals, the environment, and society and for our own profit.

An increasing number of people think we have arrived at a stage in our scientific and educational system where we know everything we need to know that will benefit mankind, society, and other animals. Much of today's research utilizing genetic engineering and recombinant DNA is just too futuristic, going a step too far beyond the natural laws of nature. Animal rightists seriously believe that any additional research, teaching, and testing can be done with computer simulations and mathematical modeling. The public receives further "proof" of these beliefs from philosophers, theologians, and a small number of academicians in biology, animal science, and human and veterinary medicine who have become animal rightists.

The most radical animal rightists tend to be vegetarians who follow the teachings of Peter Singer's book Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals

(Singer 1975), and Tom Regan's Animal Rights and Human Obligations (Regan and Singer 1976). These two books expound the basic arguments for today's animal rights movement. Many of us saw the movie about World War II's "Patton." The general is standing in his North African bunker with his field glasses watching his American tanks battle with the German ones under the command of the famous General Rommel; seeing that his own tank forces are winning, he says, "Rommel, you magnificent bastard, I read your book," referring to the German officer's own treatise on the tactics of tank warfare. Many of us tend to ignore the animal rightists' entire movement, hoping it will all go away. Thus, I suggest you, like Patton, read your opponents' books. The nebulous, faceless, extremist group, the Animal Liberation Front, is encouraged to undertake radical terrorist activities. Over the last couple of years this group has claimed responsibility for burning a veterinary diagnostic laboratory, livestock slaughter and packing buildings, breaking, entering, destroying research facilities and the stealing of research animals. Research personnel have received death threats, bomb scares at their homes, red-spray painting of their homes and cars, along with slashing of tires. To date, this vandalism has cost millions of dollars in destroyed property, loss of animals, data, and time—much of these costs to the taxpayer. Fortunately, so far, no one has really been hurt, but it is just a matter of time before somebody will be a victim of the animal rights movement. Law enforcement agencies now list the Animal Liberation Front as a dangerous terrorist movement. The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and other animal activist groups disclaim any participation but are often spokespersons for these illegal acts. Their justification for their terrorism is to stop the needless murder of animals for food and biomedical research.

The point is that these animal rights groups are on the offensive. They are out there doing something. We, the traditional agriculturists, biologists, and researchers are just being reactive. We wait until allegations are brought against us. The more sensational the allegation the more likely it will be front page headlines: "Animals liberated from torturous research." "Thousands of innocent animals needlessly killed to profit the rich." Rarely does the press complain that some of the animal rightists' actions are illegal, that animals are being stolen, and that private and public property is being ravaged and individuals' rights invaded. The purported "guilty" scientists and liberated animals sell more papers.

The biomedical community must become involved in educating the public on about what we do and why we do it. Too often we sit around and talk to each other, nod our heads in agreement and say, "Hey, we're the good guys, we know what we're doing, and we're really contributing to the betterment of the world." Presently, a lot of people don't understand, appreciate, or believe in science, research, and universities. It is imperative for you to communicate the who, what, when and why of your job. Recent surveys showed that 60-70% of the population feel it's OK for science to use animals as long as there are assurances that the animals are not suffering. That means one in three do not support animal

research. A recent California vote in San Bernadino County on whether the local pound should release animals for research won, but by only 51%. There's a significant segment of the population out there that is really not confident about what we're doing. We can no longer just go assuming that the animal rights people are merely an extremely vocal minority of a few crazies. The animal activists are effective spokespersons, and they are winning over the public's opinion.

The general public has little understanding of why or how animals are used for testing. Frequently the same people who want more assurances of human safety and protection of our environment are the ones who say we don't need to use animals for testing. They fuss about animal traps and poisons but also refuse to support testing of biological controls (Howard 1986). They release test animals, which may not survive in the wild anyway, that are used to establish maximal toxicities to protect wild animals. There is little understanding of the animal welfare laws that regulate the use of animals for product safety testing.

Too often the animal rights groups, with the help of the press, allege some torturous act, and the beleaguered researcher then must spend most of his or her time and effort explaining why it's not so. We need to stop being so defensive, always trying to explain why we aren't doing whatever we're accused of doing. We must learn to be positive, emphasize the benefits of what we're doing, and whenever possible, to do it in a couple of short, quotable sentences. Most TV news programs give your view only 60-90 seconds of coverage, and the newspapers like quotable one-liners for their story captions. Long involved statements are often taken out of context for whatever will have the most emotional impact. Provide the details of your work in a brief written handout. Remember always to communicate in terms that are easily understood. Only your mother and teachers are impressed by big words and scientific jargon.

Primary schools are eager for 15 to 45-minute programs about animals, science and agriculture. The Humane Society has taken advantage of this opening and produced an excellent, superbly organized manual on the care and use of animals that primary school teachers can easily work into a daily lesson plan (Junior Leagues of Boston, Champaign-Urbana and Ogden 1981). Subtly and effectively, the manual puts forth the vegetarian's and animal rightist's points of view on the use and care of animals for teaching, research, testing, factory farming, hunting, and entertainment. The animal activists are getting their views across to children at a receptive and formative age. Each of us who believes that animals play a broader role in society beyond that of companion pets must get involved in primary and secondary school career days and the numerous other opportunities to give short presentations. The University Extension, 4-H, Farm Bureau, and biomedical groups need to cooperate with one another and with the schools to provide easy-to-use and readily available instructional aids. Have tours of your facility. Be open to the public; any time you have a closed shop the public thinks you are hiding something. Explain and show what you're doing.

Recently, environmentalist groups have joined forces with the animal rights groups. Together, they are a very powerful lobby. Our only solution is to get involved, to show by example that we, too, are caring people and are considerate of the animals we use.

Volunteer your time to a local speakers bureau, give talks for civic groups, join the Humane Society—read and listen to the other side. Be informed; remember that both sides of most arguments have some elements of truth, some room for improvement, and some need for compromise.

The areas for compromise and improvement will always consider the 3 R's. The reduction in the numbers of animals used for research, refinement of experimental techniques, and the replacement of animals by alternative models (Russell and Burch 1959). During the past 10 years most biomedical facilities have reduced their numbers of animals by over 30% (Rowan 1984). This reduction of animal use for teaching, research, and testing is due partly to an expanded database that can be more reliable in mathematical and computer modeling and other advances that improve our technology. The lobbying of animal activists must be credited with nudging often balky scientists toward the 3 R's, but we must also point out to the public that it is these scientific advances that are making the 3 R's more achievable. The biomedical community will foreseeably be able to reduce further the numbers of animals it needs, but it will probably never totally eliminate the need for them.

Animals and humans will continue to suffer various maladies, and we can neither stop seeking remedies nor find cures for them overnight. We must be realistic that progress takes time, and we must consider a broad spectrum of balanced objectives for animal use for the future. Defending how we care for and use animals needs to be assessed by a balanced team of reviewers. Too often the scientific community tells the public that we have adequate peer review and controls. Many view this as letting the fox guard the hen house!

We need a spectrum of qualified points of view from biologists, agriculturists, conservationists, sociologists, ecologists, environmentalists, resource analysts, and veterinarians who can provide a qualified view of the many ways to solve the challenges facing society (Fox 1986).

In addition to peer reviewers, we need to include individuals who appreciate the position of animals in the food chain and who recognize key sentinel animals and plants. The appointment of a lay person to these review committees is important, as these individuals often play the role of a "devil's advocate," bringing out points of view that might not be considered otherwise. The selection of this lay individual is not always easy. Animal rights groups campaign to be represented, sometimes to the detriment of the review committee when they become obstructive of all progress. Gaining access to confidential information, they may inappropriately make wild allegations to the press when the rest of the peer committee does not go along with their ideas. The majority of biomedical facilities presently have good review committees resulting in excellent public relations. Other

groups that deal with animals should consider and implement animal care committees even when not mandated by existing animal welfare laws. This will help to show the public that we are doing our best to safeguard mankind, the food supply, and our environment. Certainly the developers of biocides must consider not only the 3 R's—reduction, refinement, and replacement—in their product's development and safety testing, but also how many animals beyond the target species will be killed, damaged, or made to suffer. Must we always use higher concentrations of more lethal components? What are the secondary non-selective effects? How can biodegradability be improved?

Vertebrate pest controllers call their discipline integrated pest control. We must learn not to rely on ever higher concentrations of lethal materials but rather seek out the admittedly less-profitable, time-consuming approach of timing the application of minimal chemicals to coincide with most vulnerable biological cycles (Rudd 1964). Similarly, in medicine we still tend to rely heavily on using more drugs and surgery rather than the less-dramatic and less-profitable preventive public health programs. We also need to put forth better public arguments for the need of basic research to provide the foundation for applied research.

The scientific community must become proactive for needed legislation to provide the standards for care of each animal and plant species. What are the proper standards for care, the definition of stress, acute and chronic pain, and how do we reduce or alleviate suffering? Unfortunately we don't have all the answers to provide these standards. Yet the scientific community contains the experts who must work towards establishing these answers. Too often the animal welfare activists initiate legislation, and the scientific community comes forward in its "Johnny come lately" defensive posture on why the proposed legislation is not needed or incorrectly written. When we scientists recognize a need for legislation for a specific animal, plant, or environmental concern, let's take the time and effort to be proactive.

We also must provide more training for all levels of personnel. Everyone needs to understand the pros and cons of the animal welfare issues. We all need to be able to provide

the best standards of animal care and use in properly reviewed and approved experimental designs.

Remember that humaneness is an attitude that each of us must demonstrate by example. A logical, balanced behavior shows our respect and reverence for all life. We are doing our best to improve an imperfect world, to minimize cruelty, suffering, and destruction of the environment. The public needs to know that.

LITERATURE CITED

- BRUMBAUGH, R.S. 1978. Of man, animals and morals: a brief history. In: *On the fifth day: animal rights and human ethics*, R. K. Morris and M. A. Fox (eds.), Acropolis, Washington, DC.
- FOX, M.A. 1986. *The case for animal experimentation*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.
- FRENCH, R.D. 1975. *Antivivisection and medical science in Victorian society*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- HOWARD, W.E. 1986. *Nature and animal welfare*. Exposition Press of Florida, Pompano Beach, Florida.
- JUNIOR LEAGUES OF BOSTON, CHAMPAIGN-URBANA AND OGDEN. 1981. *Humane Education Projects Handbook*.
- REGAN, T. and P. SINGER (Eds.), 1976. *Animal rights and human obligations*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood, New Jersey.
- ROLLINS, B.E. 1981. *Animal rights and human morality*. Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York.
- ROWAN, A.N. 1984. *Of mice models and man: a critical evaluation of animal research*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- RUDD, R.L. 1964. *Pesticides and the living landscape*. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.
- RUSSELL, W.M.S. and R.L. BURCH. 1959. *The principles of humane experimental technique*. Methuen Press, London.
- SINGER, P. 1975. *Animal liberation: a new ethics for our treatment of animals*. New York Review, Random House, New York.