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ANIMAL WELFARE AND THE CONTROL OF VERTEBRATES

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ABSTRACT: The relationships between man and other animals have attracted increased attention and some controversy in recent years. Their importance in biomedical research, farming, and wildlife control are discussed in the United Kingdom context.

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It is tempting to begin this paper with "A journey around the species barrier" (Midgley 1983), a philosophical discussion of why animals matter, but we would still be traveling in 2 or 3 days' time. Suffice to say that we cannot help being interested in the other animal species with which we inevitably interact. The basic attraction of wild animals is the aesthetic pleasure to be derived from watching and hearing them pursuing their own affairs without interference. Studying the ways in which an animal adapts to its environment, how it reacts to other species and members of its own species is intellectually satisfying. Nevertheless we cannot avoid adopting a human standpoint and giving precedence to our own welfare and that of our children, since it would be fatal for our species if we did otherwise. But it is equally in our own interest to limit the growth of human populations and conserve the variety of nature, as elaborated by Charles S. Elton (1958). Man must take responsibility either for the destruction of this planet or for its continuance in an ecologically healthy state. His inhumanity to man is well-documented, not least by accounts of the many twentieth century wars, the Holocaust, terrorist acts, and media reports of persecution and child-abuse.

Somewhat paradoxically, there has been a concurrent awareness of the interdependence of life on earth and a concern, especially among young people, for the well-being of animals generally-fuelled by natural history programs on TV and radio, by films, exhibitions, travel, and the growth of wildlife societies. Birds, for example, attract great interest and are well protected in many countries. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which celebrated its centenary in 1989, has a membership of 650,000 and is believed to be the largest single-issue lobby in Europe. The subject of ecology, from being a specialist science 70 to 80 years ago, has been enlarged and popularized to political dimensions.

My official work, over a period of 40 years, entailed research on the interactions between mammals and birds and human activities, primarily farming. Quite early in my career I met Major Charles W. Hume, who founded the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (originally as the University of London Animal Welfare Society) in 1926, and realized how responsible and realistic were the attitudes of his organization to the practical issues affecting my studies. Hume (1962) believed animal welfare should be closely associated with science, with veterinary and human medicine, and that policies should be based on facts rather than sentimentality. With reference to Cardinal Newman's philosophy of religion being rooted in conscience, Hume notes that "conscience implies a sense of duty," and this infers a moral obligation and a human responsibility towards animals; not only those species which have been bred and reared to be of service to man, but also those which have been affected by man's environmental modifications, by such activities as agriculture, fisheries, mining, and urban development. There is some common ground here with the views championed by Howard (1986, 1989).

UFAW has contributed to many aspects of animal welfare, and I will confine my comments to animals in the laboratory, on the farm, and in the wild.

Laboratory Animals

Research with animals has been comprehensively reviewed by Uvarov (1984), who emphasizes that biomedical research in Great Britain is subject to strict legislative control, from the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 onwards; this act has been updated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, which further protects animals used in experiments. These experiments must aim to benefit man and/or other animals, and examples of fundamental discoveries leading to treatment of nervous, cardiovascular, respiratory, urinary, and other systemic malfunctions are listed, besides examples of vaccines for the prevention of animal diseases such as brucellosis, distemper, tetanus, anthrax, swine fever, and equine influenza. UFAW was a pioneer in this field, publishing in 1947 The UFAW Handbook on the Care and Management of Laboratory Animals, edited by the late Alastair N. Worden; a greatly expanded Sixth Edition appeared in 1987. Other publications refer to Standards in Laboratory Animal Management; Guidelines on the Care of Laboratory Animals and their Use for Scientific Purposes; Welfare and Housing of Laboratory Primates; Disturbance Index Method for Assessing Severity of Procedures on Rodents; Laboratory Animal Welfare Research-Primates; Laboratory Animal Welfare Research-Rodents; Guidelines for the Recognition and Assessment of Pain in Animals (UFAW 1984, 1987a,b; 1988a,b; 1989a,b,c,d,e). Sympathy for the needs of laboratory animals also finds expression in organizations such as the International Council for Laboratory Animal Science, Laboratory Animal Science Association, British Laboratory Animal Veterinary Association, the Institute of Biology and the Institute of Animal Technicians. As an aside, it is notable that the treatment of laboratory animals may be compared favourably with that of some patients at the National Women's Hospital, Auckland, during 1964-79 (Matheson 1989).

Increasing concern for the well-being of animals has led, regrettably, to some groups who fail to appreciate the advances made through biomedical research, resorting to burglary, violence and terrorism to achieve their ends. Since

1977, attacks have been made on laboratories, professors have been sent incendiary parcels, and last year the senior common room at Bristol University was blown up, fortunately when unoccupied. My sole personal experience of such behaviour was the "liberation" of wild-caught badgers (Meles meles) kept for tuberculosis research; the animals were subsequently killed by traffic on nearby roads.

Farm Animals

Agricultural and veterinary members of UFAW have ensured a concern for the health and treatment of farm stock, and contributions were made to a Government Technical Committee of Enquiry (Brambell 1965). In 1971 The UFAW Handbook on the Care and Management of Farm Animals was published, edited by a group including Roger Ewbank, the present Director. A third edition appeared in 1988 with the title "Management and Welfare of Farm Animals." It concentrates on the animals commonly farmed in Europe, and the inclusion of "welfare" in the title reflects the increasing concern of scientists, farmers, and the public in this subject. UFAW is consulted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Farm Animal Welfare Council about proposals for new or improved legislation, including the enforcement of welfare measures, livestock regulations, and the international transport of cattle. UFAW is closely linked with the Humane Slaughter Association (UFAW 1987c), which is also active in the Welfare of Livestock in Transit and has produced an educational video under this title for use in agricultural colleges, veterinary schools, by farmers, market workers, drivers of livestock vehicles, and lairage staff, illustrating ways of reducing stress and damage.

Wild Animals

The planned management of wildlife and its conservation includes cropping or culling animals where necessary. Man behaves as other predators and, in many cases, just removes individuals which are surplus to the carrying capacity of the habitat. When a species is sufficiently successful and numerous to cause substantial damage to agriculture and forestry, or to threaten the survival of other species of interest to man, it is seldom economically feasible to carry out a program of general population control of the undesired species over a wide area. It is usually necessary to concentrate the control effort on local areas, whether the tactics are concerned with modifying the habitat, cultural practices, the use of repellents, or direct catching and killing.

Soon after its founding, UFAW became involved in a long struggle to ban the gin, or leg-hold, trap and did not achieve success until 1958 (Thompson and Worden 1956, Hume 1962). During the three decades it was gradually appreciated that gin-trapping did not so much control rabbits (Oryctolagus cuniculus) as maintain them at a level that produced a maximum annual crop, the value of which was greatly outweighed by the damage to agriculture. UFAW pioneered the humane gassing of rabbits, which was eventually adopted as official policy, pressed on with a Parliamentary Bill to prohibit gin-trapping, and sponsored research on the rabbit. The year before, a Government Act prohibited the gin-trap, myxomatosis appeared, and during the ensuing years greatly affected the natural scene and stimulated much research (see symposia UFAW 1969, 1985; Thompson 1984).

At the Eighth Vertebrate Pest Conference (Thompson 1978) reference was made to bovine tuberculosis in the badger (Meles meles); and although progress has been made since then (Thompson 1984), and subsequently there has been a thorough review (Dunnet et al. 1986) resulting in a modified badger control strategy, the problem persists. At the urging of the Consultative Panel on Badgers and Tuberculosis, of which UFAW is a member, authority is now being sought to carry out a proper, randomized trial to compare the effects of TB in cattle, of control of badgers versus no control, on farms where a cattle TB breakdown is attributed to the presence of the disease in badgers-not before time, it could be said. Meanwhile, badgers are still persecuted by the criminal activity (illegal under the protection of Animals Act 1911) of digging them out of setts and killing them with the assistance of specially trained terriers. Last January a bill to protect badger setts and impose fines of up to £2,000 for anyone digging at or near a sett was introduced into the House of Commons, with Government backing and all party support.

In closing, I must pay tribute to the cooperative concern for wildlife management shown in Great Britain by a variety of organizations, which includes the Game Conservancy (1989), the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, the Farming and Wildlife Trust and the Standing Conference on Countryside Sports.

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