

# Seeking to Increase Awareness of Speciesism and Its Impact on All Animals

## A Report on *Animal Ethics*\*

**Leah McKelvie**

*Co-founder "Animal Ethics"*

doi: 10.7358/rela-2015-001-mcke

leah.mckelvie@animal-ethics.org

---

*Animal Ethics* is a non-profit organization that seeks to raise awareness of speciesism. The organization's aim is to create a better world for all sentient animals. The group's work is based on the core belief that all sentient beings should be taken into moral consideration.

Founded in 2012, *Animal Ethics* is based in the USA. The organization provides educational materials in several languages, and has given talks in both English- and Spanish-speaking countries. Work will soon begin in Italy, with more countries to follow in coming months.

The organization was established after the founders realized how difficult it was for the public to find basic explanations of issues in animal ethics and for academic researchers in the field to find useful study results. *Animal Ethics* also addresses the concerns of animal advocates who have difficulty acquiring up-to-date information and relevant scientific knowledge. In addition, the founders realized there was a need for an organization with a focus on addressing speciesism in all its forms.

Although there is a worldwide movement advocating greater respect for nonhuman animals, there is a need for more antispeciesist education and research. While animal advocates often draw attention to particular ways nonhuman animals are harmed, the root cause – speciesism – is not usually stressed and is sometimes overlooked. As a result, some of the greatest harms animals suffer are under-addressed and there is little challenge to the speciesist beliefs and institutions that drive the lack of respect for animals in so many ways.

---

\* *Animal Ethics* can be found online at <http://www.Animal-Ethics.org>.

*Animal Ethics* differentiates itself from other animal advocacy organizations by focusing on the following:

1. Achieving an attitude shift about speciesism.
2. Providing information about under-addressed topics in animal ethics.
3. Producing academic research and publications.

The core issue in animal ethics is not that animals are callously treated and used as resources in particular circumstances. The real problem is that nonhuman animals are commonly disregarded in general, primarily due to speciesism. Speciesism is the discrimination against individuals or a group based on species membership and is the most widespread form of discrimination in the world today. Like other forms of discrimination, speciesism is unjustified because it disregards relevant factors such as whether the individuals in question can be harmed by our actions or inactions.

Once the spurious assumptions of speciesism are rejected, it becomes clear that we should give nonhuman animals the same consideration we give to humans. Respecting animals means not just avoiding causing them harm, but also helping them where and when we can.

Just as racism and sexism are embedded in people's unexamined beliefs and in society's institutions, speciesism appears to most people as part of the natural order of things. It seems obvious to many that humans are inherently more important than other animals, and that some nonhuman animals matter more than others. For example, it is often taken for granted that it would be wrong to treat dogs the way pigs are treated. In order for societies to change, their members must first recognize that there is a problem. That is why education about speciesism is crucial.

One of the key things the work of *Animal Ethics* shows is that all major ethical theories, if followed consistently, require that nonhuman animals, both domesticated and wild, be given much greater moral consideration than they are currently given. The organization's work also shows that if we are to be impartial, we must give the interests of all sentient beings the same consideration. This does not mean treating all animals the same as humans. It simply means that their interests, whether the same as those of humans or different, be impartially considered.

It is becoming increasingly understood that exploitation of nonhuman animals is unfair and unacceptable according to most ethical theories. However, attitudes towards animals in the wild are different. Many people think that for animals living in the wild, unaffected by humans, life is mostly good. It is simply not true. Most animals who ever live actually die shortly after coming into existence. This is because most animals are *r*-selected, meaning they give birth to many offspring in their lifetimes, sometimes laying thousands or even millions of eggs. In order for popula-

tions to remain stable, on average only one offspring per parent will survive long enough to reproduce. The rest will die, often painful deaths due to either starvation or predation.

Once the spurious assumptions of speciesism are rejected, it becomes clear that we should give nonhuman animals the same consideration we give to humans. Respecting animals means not just avoiding causing them harm, but also helping them where and when we can.

Just as racism and sexism are embedded in people's unexamined beliefs and in society's institutions, speciesism appears to most people as part of the natural order of things. It seems obvious to many that humans are inherently more important than other animals, and that some nonhuman animals matter more than others. For example, it is often taken for granted that it would be wrong to treat dogs the way pigs are treated. In order for societies to change, their members must first recognize that there is a problem. That is why education about speciesism is crucial.

One of the key things the work of *Animal Ethics* shows is that all major ethical theories, if followed consistently, require that nonhuman animals, both domesticated and wild, be given much greater moral consideration than they are currently given. The organization's work also shows that if we are to be impartial, we must give the interests of all sentient beings the same consideration. This does not mean treating all animals the same as humans. It simply means that their interests, whether the same as those of humans or different, be impartially considered.

It is becoming increasingly understood that exploitation of nonhuman animals is unfair and unacceptable according to most ethical theories. However, attitudes towards animals in the wild are different. Many people think that for animals living in the wild, unaffected by humans, life is mostly good. It is simply not true. Most animals who ever live actually die shortly after coming into existence. This is because most animals are *r*-selected, meaning they give birth to many offspring in their lifetimes, sometimes laying thousands or even millions of eggs. In order for populations to remain stable, on average only one offspring per parent will survive long enough to reproduce. The rest will die, often painful deaths due to either starvation or predation.

Wild animals who survive for any length of time face many threats. These include disease, malnutrition, starvation and thirst, extreme weather conditions, accidents and injuries, parasitism, attacks by other animals, and psychological stress. Many people believe that nothing can be done to help these animals. Others claim that humans should not interfere. This is often due to a lack of pertinent information about the needs of animals and the possibilities for helping them without impacting their habitats in ways that

do more harm than good. There are many ways we can aid these fellow beings to alleviate their suffering and improve their lives.

For example, vaccination programs for wild animals under threat of disease have been carried out for decades, providing wild populations with immunity to diseases such as polio, measles, and rabies. There are supplemental feeding programs focused on certain populations in situations of hardship. There are also organizations that rescue orphaned wild animals and care for injured animals.

Our knowledge continues to grow each year, and rapid technological advancements make it increasingly easy and inexpensive to provide help in ways that were not even possible a few decades ago. Unfortunately, attitude changes towards helping wild animals in need have not grown at the same pace. We may face a situation in the future where it would be entirely possible to help wild animals on a large scale yet it will not occur in practice due to a lack of public support. Spreading the idea that wild animals really need our help paves the way for us to aid them in more ways and on a larger scale in the future as our technology improves. *Animal Ethics* also encourages research to develop more ways to help nonhuman animals in the future.

*Animal Ethics* has a website, <http://www.Animal-Ethics.org>, with a range of information on topics such as ethical theories and nonhuman animals and the relevance of nonhuman animal interests in everyday life, as well as news stories and updates on current events relevant to nonhuman animals. The site's resources are useful to animal advocates and to philosophy and ethics students who require resources for academic papers. In addition, the site provides fact sheets and public outreach materials that can be downloaded and used by the public. Individuals can also learn how they can get involved in a way that promotes animal wellbeing and an ethical approach to nonhuman animals.

Spokespeople for the organization give talks around the world, discussing speciesism, the arguments against it, and the relevance of sentience. Talks also address the fact that most of the world's suffering takes place in the wild, and that nonhuman animals often need our help in situations in which humans are not the cause of their harm. A table is set up weekly at Berkeley University to give interested students and faculty an opportunity to learn more. *Animal Ethics* has plans to organize conferences to encourage academic discussion and debate about the discrimination against nonhuman animals and related topics. The annual *Animal Ethics Essay Prize* is given for the best essay on a subject in the field.

One of the goals of *Animal Ethics* is public education, both online and in person. In addition to providing extensive information on its website,

print materials are distributed to libraries, restaurants, cafes, and community centers. Representatives of the organization set up tables at community events to share information and discuss animal issues with members of the public. An annual *Animal Ethics Day* will take place in different cities starting in 2015, in which talks, roundtable discussions, and activities for both adults and children will help increase awareness of and engagement with issues affecting nonhuman animals.