

AWI

Quarterly

Fall 2005 Volume 54 Number 4





ABOUT THE COVER: *In Memory of Ben White (1951-2005)*

"I dedicate this cover photograph of Atlantic spotted dolphins in the Bahamas, titled 'Family Portrait,' in celebration of Ben White's life and everything he did to protect dolphins, whales and other marine life. Ben touched so many souls from all walks (and swims) of life, and I had the good fortune of working with him on several campaigns. We've lost a great warrior, but his spirit lives on. Thanks for just being you, Ben." -Jeff Pantukhoff, president and founder, The Whaleman Foundation.

The Animal Welfare Institute's Ben White, a courageous activist who put himself at risk for animals countless times, died of cancer in July 2005. We remember Ben and his work on behalf of all living things through his own account of a chance meeting with dolphins that changed the course of his life forever (see story, pages 10-13).

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AWI Perseveres in Suit Against Ringling Bros.

There's a terrible secret lurking alongside the smiling faces of clowns and acrobats at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus. Endangered Asian elephants are beaten with sharp metal bull-hooks, confined in chains and hauled around the country for months on end. Three young elephants have died under Ringling's custody in recent years.

As Feld Entertainment, the circus's wealthy parent company, attempts to distract audiences from the abuse, we persist in our lawsuit for Ringling's mistreatment of Asian elephants, a violation of the Endangered Species Act.

Our legal bills continue to rise, and we are by far the smallest organization fighting Ringling—yet we've shared costs associated with the lawsuit equally with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Fund for Animals.

The lawsuit, filed in 2000, currently remains in the discovery phase in which the parties attempt to collect information from each other for use in the trial. We have gained access to critical materials, such as video footage of the drowning of a baby elephant named Benjamin.

Feld Entertainment attempts to drag on the lawsuit by withholding documents to which we are entitled. Meanwhile, PR flaks espouse the company's so-called compassion for elephants with deceiving campaigns. We expect a trial will finally be held sometime next year, though a date has not been set.

To raise money for this cause, over 100 elephant welfare enthusiasts joined together last July in Pacific Palisades, Calif. for the 2005 Benefit to Save Asian Elephants. Former Ringling employee and co-plaintiff Tom Rider, who left the circus to dedicate his life to revealing the cruelty he witnessed, educated the crowd with tales of his behind-the-scenes experiences.

While the event was a success, more funds are needed desperately for this costly effort. Donations earmarked for this litigation are tax-deductible and much appreciated; please contact us to learn how you can pledge your support or protest a Ringling performance in your hometown. 🐾



Between performances, Ringling elephants are confined by chains around their legs.

courtesy of Elephant Alliance files



Animal Welfare Institute QUARTERLY

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Michael Livinoy/Dreamstime.com

Amphibians such as newts lack protection from damaging UV radiation increases caused by ozone depletion (see story, page 7).



Natasha Down

These rabbits are provided with a solid structure house so they can be alone or hide when frightened (see story, pages 17-18).

CFC 2005: Help Us Help Them



If you work for the government and participate in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), please note our number is 1808. Thank you for your support.

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SAFE FOR NOW

Local residents claim wild horses have roamed the land around the town of Heber, Ariz. and the Mogollon Rim since the 17th century—and due to a temporary restraining order obtained by of the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), In Defense of Animals (IDA) and the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Wild Burros, they're safe for the time being. Unfortunately, if the US Forest Service (USFS) has its way, they won't be there much longer.

Approximately 300 to 400 horses, many of whom live in the 14,000-acre Heber Wild Horse Territory (designated as protected public land for wild horses under the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act) of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, are currently at risk of being rounded up and effectively sent to their deaths at a slaughterhouse. Each of these horses—even mares with foals—has been deemed “unauthorized livestock” by the USFS.

Some say the agency has wanted to remove horses from the area for years, and an incident that occurred three years

ago has given them an excuse. The USFS claims the animals came to the area from a nearby Apache reservation following the 2002 Rodeo-Chediski fire, so they are not wild horses native to the region. The fire destroyed many acres of land in Fort Apache Indian Reservation and Apache-Sitgreaves and Tonto National Forests, taking with it boundary fencing and possibly allowing more horses than was previously typical to move from adjacent lands. On Aug. 30, the USFS officially announced its plan to remove the horses who currently graze in the burned Rodeo-Chediski area along the Mogollon Rim.

This is a death sentence for the animals. Once these horses are removed as trespassers, they will be impounded and sold at the Valley Livestock Auction in Sun Valley, Ariz. The auction is well known as a hot spot for killer-buyers; the slaughterhouse representatives are typically able to purchase the animals cheaply because of a lack of demand from legitimate buyers. If sold at this auction, it is inevitable that the majority of these horses will go to slaughter.

HISTORY OF THE REGION

Meanwhile, the USFS claims it wants to remove the horses because they are causing environmental damage. Considerable amounts of time and funds have gone into refurbishing the land damaged by the 2002 fire, and the agency believes the horses may upset sensitive areas of the environment. However, the USFS seems to forget that wild horses are a historic part of this land, dating back to the time of the early Spanish explorers. Instead of attempting to manage a reasonable number of horses in the area, the agency is taking the easy way out—and destroying a living, breathing part of the environment in the process.

In 1971, the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act proclaimed, “Congress finds and declares that wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West.... It is the policy of Congress that wild free-roaming horses and burros shall be protected from capture, branding, harassment or death; and to accomplish this they are to be considered in the area where presently found, as an integral part of the natural system of the public lands.”



WILD FREE-ROAMING HORSES IN DANGER OF REMOVAL FROM ARIZONA PUBLIC LAND



photos: © Pamela Reed

Above and opposite page: Horses living in the Heber territory of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in Arizona may be removed by the US Forest Service and sent to an auction that will put them at risk of slaughter.

The definition stated by the Act implies that the horses the USFS wants to remove are indeed covered as long as they're on protected public land, unless it can prove they are “unauthorized livestock” who have not intermingled with *any* wild horses. It reads, “Wild free-roaming horses and burros means all unbranded and unclaimed horses and burros on public lands of the United States.” The agency says it intends to exclude the horses living in the protected Heber territory from its roundup (though we believe it has actually tried to zero out these horses for years)—and at the same time, it claims actual wild horse populations have not lived on the land in question for several years. Yet longtime residents beg to differ.

“Prior to the Rodeo-Chediski fires in 2002, I had seen herds of wild horses throughout the Heber/Overgaard area. The size of the herds have [sic] varied but have [sic] included at least a dozen horses at any given time,” said Ron Britz, a full-time resident of the area since 1980. “None of the horses... were branded or had any domestic markings, to the best of my knowledge.”

By way of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act definition of “wild horses,” most of the 300 to 400 horses are covered by its protections. Investigation to date shows that the horses are unclaimed (and almost entirely unbranded) and living on protected public land, and there is no way to distinguish possible stray domestic horses from historic wild horses without a brand. Horses who do have brands should be

rounded up responsibly and returned to their rightful owners; the rest should be allowed to run free.

OUR FIGHT

Still, the USFS plans to round up these horses without any type of study, without any opportunity for public comment and without any media exposure. AWI and our aforementioned colleagues plan to fight this action aggressively. We were granted a temporary restraining order on Sept. 9 to stop the agency from removing the horses. This prevents the USFS from acting until Sept. 23, when a preliminary injunction hearing will be held. We are working with an Arizona attorney, Debra Sirower of Brian Cave LLP, to seek a preliminary injunction against the gathering of these true wild horses and their sale at auction, and we plan to do whatever is required to preserve their lives.

“We have much historical evidence that shows these horses are the descendants of the Spanish horses brought by the soldiers who accompanied Father Eusebio Kino as he traveled across Arizona after establishing the missions of San Xavier and Tumocacori,” said Dr. Pat Haight, southwest regional director of IDA. The available information verifies these horses existed in huge populations across the entire Mogollon Rim and the Heber territory throughout the large ranch eras of the 1800s and 1900s, when ranchers ran their cattle and domestic horses with the wild horses in the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest, she explained. This long history must be preserved. 🐾

Irresponsible Farming Practices Harm Animals Around the World

Millions Left Dead in Katrina's Wake

In early August, 250,000 egg-laying hens were killed in a fire at a Michigan factory farm. Sadly, this number pales in comparison to the animal fatalities caused by Hurricane Katrina at the end of the month. In addition to wildlife, companion and laboratory animals who drowned, reports indicate millions of farm animals died during the storm, and more were slaughtered or expected to die due to disease.

The vast majority who died were chickens raised for meat in confinement systems. Like the hens left to burn up in the fire, these animals were abandoned when disaster struck—and are commonly referred to as “live inventories” or forgotten. Responsible farming calls for a disaster management plan that places importance on the animals’ welfare. 🐾

Antibiotics Overuse Spurs Resistance

Drug resistance due to indiscriminate use of antibiotics in both animals and humans in Asia has fueled the spread of a pig-borne disease in humans living in southwest China since late June. Usually rare in humans and easily treated, streptococcus suis infected over 200 people in Sichuan province by mid-August, killing almost 20 percent of reported cases.

Meanwhile, avian influenza continues to flourish, largely due to the weakened immune systems of birds raised for meat who are force-fed mass quantities of antibiotics and housed together in cramped sheds. More than 60 people have died after contracting the virus, and officials have culled at least 140 million birds as a result. 🐾



Famphur, an insecticide commonly applied topically to livestock, is harmful to many species of birds who interact with cattle. Raptors such as the great horned owl risk secondary or tertiary poisoning as the chemical infects the food chain.

Insecticide Causes Birds to Fall from the Sky

Famphur, sold under the trade name Warbex, is an organophosphorus insecticide associated with bird die-offs; numerous dead magpies, robins and hawks have been discovered after treating cattle with dermal applications of the drug. The chemical can remain on cattle hair for over 90 days, posing a serious risk to birds who perch on the backs of cattle or ingest their hair. Secondary and tertiary poisoning of eagles and other raptors feeding on famphur-killed wildlife have also been documented.

A federal district court in Georgia recently sentenced Kahn Cattle Co. for violating the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The conviction stemmed from an incident in Jan. 2003 in which state law enforcement officials responded to White, Ga. resident reports that birds were “falling from the sky” and concluded that famphur-laced corn had been spread around the Kahn farm. They collected 3,326 dead birds, including several owl species, blackbirds, geese, crows, cardinals and blue jays. Many more likely went undiscovered. 🐾

Monsanto's Roundup: Deadly to Frogs

A new study says the agricultural biotechnology corporation Monsanto's popular herbicide Roundup is highly lethal to frogs. University of Pennsylvania researcher Rick Relyea has shown Roundup kills tadpoles at concentrations lower than those previously tested, and 98 percent died within three weeks. His experiments also prove the chemical's effects are not diminished by the presence of soil, and it killed 79 percent of adult frogs in only one day. Almost 113 million pounds of Roundup are used on farms each year, and the herbicide often drifts to small wetlands, putting the future of frogs in many areas in jeopardy. 🐾



Protect Animals and the Ozone Layer

Ask your supermarket for fruits and vegetables grown without methyl bromide.

If you thought the hole in the ozone layer was a problem of the past, think again.

The bad news is the global ozone layer is currently in its most fragile state, and recovery may be decades or longer away. An ozone hole roughly the size of North America continues to develop each year over Antarctica. This past winter, the ozone layer over the Arctic thinned to record low levels and alarmed scientific experts, some of whom fear an ozone hole may develop over the northern hemisphere within the next two decades.

The good news is that with your help, we can eliminate one of the major remaining obstacles to the ozone layer's recovery—the pesticide methyl bromide. This highly toxic chemical is used to sterilize soil before planting a variety of crops, including tomatoes, strawberries, peppers, cucumbers and melons. It is the most powerful ozone-destroying substance still in widespread use.

All life on earth depends on the protection provided by the ozone layer. This thin layer of ozone molecules screens out nearly 99 percent of harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. Many of the serious health risks associated with the radiation,

such as skin cancer, cataracts and suppression of the immune system, will be faced by both humans and animals.

Wild animals who are unable to protect themselves from the sun will be especially vulnerable to UV radiation increases. For aquatic animals, particularly those lacking a protective coat, increased UV radiation may severely impact their ability to survive during early stages of development.

Marine mammals are impacted indirectly by ozone depletion. Baleen whales such as the majestic humpback feed on tiny shrimp-like animals called krill, as well as a microscopic plant called phytoplankton. Both krill and phytoplankton lack protection from the most biologically damaging radiation, UV-B. Scientists have observed a direct reduction in phytoplankton production due to ozone depletion-related increases in UV-B radiation. This loss of a food source has serious implications for the entire marine food chain.

Because of methyl bromide's significant contribution to ozone depletion, countries party to the Montreal Protocol treaty agreed to phase out its use by January 2005 in developed countries and by 2015 in developing countries. However, due to heavy lobbying by ag-

riculture special interest groups like the California Strawberry Commission and the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, millions of pounds of methyl bromide are still being used in the United States each year. These groups have pressured the US government to take advantage of a treaty loophole to allow massive commercial use of methyl bromide past the deadline.

The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) works at both the national and international levels to put an end to the use of methyl bromide. You can aid our efforts by asking your supermarket to sell only ozone layer-safe fruits and vegetables, grown without the use of methyl bromide. Visit the Global Environment section of our website at www.eia-international.org to send a letter to your supermarket today. 🐾

DANIELLE GRABIEL is a campaigner for the Environmental Investigation Agency.

Photos: The ozone hole over Antarctica (shown above in dark blue) has generally grown larger and lasted longer each year, diminishing our protection from the sun. Frogs are one of many species sensitive to these increases in UV radiation. Large marine mammals are also affected because radiation harms their food sources. Methyl bromide alternatives to keep crops healthy are available, but the chemical is still in widespread use. Strawberry field: Scott Bauer/USDA; Ozone layer: NASA



IWC 2005: Japan thwarts the ban on commercial whaling in the name of “science.”

The Shifting Balance of Power

The outcome of June’s International Whaling Commission (IWC) annual meeting, held in Ulsan, South Korea, was different from that of previous years. On paper, the pro-whaling nations had a simple majority—and while this was not enough to overturn the moratorium on commercial whaling, it could enable them to severely affect the meeting. The Animal Welfare Institute’s Susan Tomiak and Tom Garrett, former IWC commissioner, were in attendance.

On opening day, it all came down to who showed up with their fees paid and credentials in order. The IWC Secretariat somberly announced seven pro-whaling nations whose delegates were without paperwork and two countries, including the anti-whaling India, whose delegates were absent. Yet anti-whalers breathed a sigh of relief—for once again, the whalers had been thwarted by their lackadaisical allies. Over the next few days, whaling nation delegates displayed remarkable delaying tactics while the representatives from various countries scurried to get their paperwork in order.

Throughout the week, the balance remained in favor of the whales and led to the defeat of successive Japanese attempts to kill more whales. These included the striking of critical items from the agenda such as killing methods, small cetaceans, whale watching and the conservation committee; abolishing the Southern Ocean Sanctuary; resuming Japanese coastal whaling; introducing a schedule amendment for the completion of the Revised Management Scheme (RMS) and lifting of the moratorium on commercial whaling.

Japanese Whalers Continue to Kill

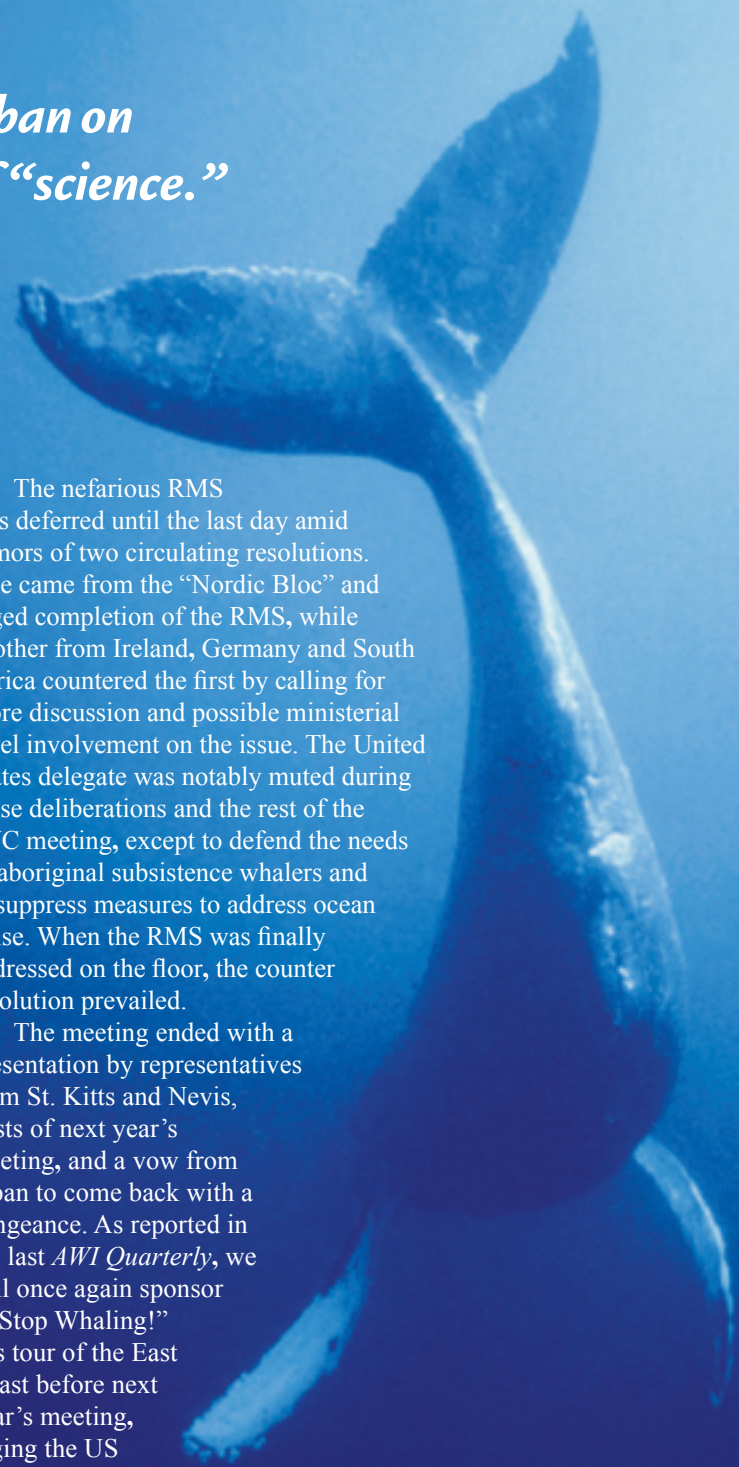
The glow from these victories diminished when a representative of Japan formally introduced the country’s intention to increase the number of whales killed for so-called scientific research. In addition to almost doubling the slaughter quota of minke whales to 935, the plan would allow the killing of 50 fin whales and 50 humpback whales each year within the Southern Ocean Sanctuary. A resolution condemning this proposal and urging the country not to proceed was successful, but since IWC resolutions are not binding, Japan’s delegate brazenly announced that the slaughter would begin later this year.

The nefarious RMS was deferred until the last day amid rumors of two circulating resolutions. One came from the “Nordic Bloc” and urged completion of the RMS, while another from Ireland, Germany and South Africa countered the first by calling for more discussion and possible ministerial level involvement on the issue. The United States delegate was notably muted during these deliberations and the rest of the IWC meeting, except to defend the needs of aboriginal subsistence whalers and to suppress measures to address ocean noise. When the RMS was finally addressed on the floor, the counter resolution prevailed.

The meeting ended with a presentation by representatives from St. Kitts and Nevis, hosts of next year’s meeting, and a vow from Japan to come back with a vengeance. As reported in the last *AWI Quarterly*, we will once again sponsor a “Stop Whaling!” bus tour of the East Coast before next year’s meeting, urging the US government to be active in its opposition to any effort to resume commercial whaling. 🐾

by Fundación Promar. The group’s Pricilla Cubero Pardo provided a Spanish translation for our swim-with brochure, and we are pleased it was useful in the campaign.

Captivity and swim-with programs are growing at an alarming rate in Central America and the Caribbean. In light of this fact, we would like to applaud the Radisson Seven Seas Cruise line’s decision to discontinue its dolphin encounter programs out of respect for wild dolphins. 🐾



background: AWI archives

Caught on Tape

Undercover investigators shoot a hard-hitting film of a Norwegian whale hunt.

The Norwegian government claims about 80 percent of whales the country’s hunters kill die instantly, and the remainder die within two minutes of the impact of the harpoon. Footage from a new film reveals this is not always the case. In May 2005, two investigators from the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) filmed a whale hunt off the northern tip of Norway. Susan Tomiak of the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) spoke with EIA Director Jennifer Lonsdale to hear how the film was made and why it’s so important.

Was this a difficult or dangerous mission?

Well, we knew that it would be difficult—not because anyone would be harmed, but because if the investigators were discovered attempting to document a hunt, efforts would have been made to stop them. Another problem was the 500-meter exclusion zone around whaling vessels at sea. The penalty for entering this zone is about \$10,000, and it was up to the investigators to figure out how to film the hunt without being caught or fined.

So how did they do it?

They traveled inside the Arctic Circle to the most northwesterly tip of Norway to the town of Vardo. There they could see whalers operating offshore, but they were too far away to film. Later, the investigators woke up at about 6 a.m. to see a whaling vessel leaving Vardo. As they drove along the coast road, it became clear that the vessel was looking for whales about 400 hundred meters from the shore, despite choppy seas and considerable pitching and rolling of the vessel. The investigators hid in the rocky cliffs and began to document the vessel’s activities.

You mean they started filming?

Yes—as soon as the vessel started following a minke whale, the camera started rolling and did not stop until the whale was brought aboard the vessel. The pursuit took over one-and-a-half hours. Finally, the harpoon was fired, impaling the whale in the lower abdomen. Eleven minutes later, a

rifle shot was fired in an attempt to kill the whale. Six more rifle shots followed in the next three minutes, as the men on board struggled to winch the whale to the side of the vessel. The harpoon appeared to have passed right through the lower abdomen, tearing a massive hole.

How did the camera capture all these details from so far away?

The camera operator used a high definition video camera so the footage could be magnified extensively without a great loss in quality. This revealed a huge amount of information, including the last blow from the whale, which marked the time elapsed from the initial harpoon strike to the last visible sign of life at 14 minutes and 28 seconds.

Why is that so significant?

It demonstrates the inherent cruelty of whaling and the inability of whalers to ensure that they achieve an immediate or at least quick death each time they fire a harpoon.

What kind of impact does a film like this have?

The film is unique because it is the first time a whale hunt has been filmed without a break from the beginning of the pursuit

to the final death of the whale, including the subsequent hauling of the animal aboard the vessel. It includes crucial scientific information that will make a significant contribution to discussions on the methods used to hunt whales, and it is a clear demonstration that whaling is not just about numbers—it is also about the suffering inflicted on each individual whale who is harpooned. We distributed 100 copies at the 2005 International Whaling Commission meeting, where the UK Government presented data on the hunt to the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods. As a result, the welfare concerns of whales were given greater attention at the meeting than ever before. 🐾

For more information, please visit www.eia-international.org and www.whalewatch.org. To obtain a copy of this video, contact Susan Tomiak at susan@awionline.org or (703) 836-4300.



The killing of a minke whale by the crew of the Norwegian whaling vessel, Willassen Senior, is captured on videotape by undercover investigators.

© WSPA/EIA



The Dolphin's Gaze

by BEN WHITE

We sadly inform you that world-renowned animal and environmental activist Ben White died in late July. A non-violent freedom fighter in what he called a 300-year war against nature, he had the conviction to use any means to make the world a better place. The eight years he spent protecting old-growth forests, whales, dolphins and other wildlife as a representative of the Animal Welfare Institute will never be forgotten—and his courage and dedication are already missed.

In the 1970s, Ben's life was forever changed while swimming with dolphins in waters off the coast of Hawaii. "I was suddenly aware that the entire world is conscious," he told the media when asked to describe the incident. Several years ago, he wrote about his experience, and a version of this article was published in the 2003 book Between Species: Celebrating the Dolphin-Human Bond. In this issue, we pay tribute to Ben through his inspiring words on the fleeting moment that called him to action.

One brief experience 30 years ago charted the entire course of my life. It was the morning I first swam with the wild dolphins of Kealakekua Bay. I'm still trying to figure out exactly what happened. All I know is I was a different person when I crawled from the sea than the one who plunged in an hour before. Colors were brighter. Gratitude for being alive moved me to a strange combination of laughter and tears. My old worldview had collapsed on itself. A new one had sprung from the sea, from my swim and from the dolphin's gaze.

I am not a "new-ager." As a lifelong professional tree climber and longtime single daddy, I love solid and sure things, like the steel snap of a climbing clip telling me I am safely tied in. I believe in the tangible. But my source of sustenance has always been a personal relationship with Nature. As a kid, I found solace exploring creeks and forests.

When others of my generation scattered across the globe searching for spiritual teachers in the Himalayas or in the zendos in Japan, I wound up—at the age of 20—living by myself on a jungle hillside on the Kona coast of the big island of Hawaii. Three or four times a week, I would follow the winding asphalt road down to the bay, kick off into the warm clear water and enter the dazzling world of reef life. In the evening I climbed, dripping wet, back

home to my little plastic and bamboo tipi tucked beneath two coconut palms that clattered in the breeze.

I meditated and studied Zen Buddhism and Lao Tzu. I was intrigued by the concept of enlightenment and collected odd stories that described the onset of this flip-flop of consciousness. One told of a solitary monk who attained enlightenment after decades of concentration. While sweeping his secluded cabin, a pebble thrown by his broom thwacked against the wall with a peculiar sound. Bingo! He was changed forever. Other stories told of realized beings that could trigger enlightenment with just a glance.

I assume that I have not passed that elusive golden doorway into enlightenment. I still get moody and depressed and bark at my kids. Only twice in my life have I experienced a gaze that really reached to the bottom of my soul and turned me inside out. Once was from a yogi I met in Southern Oregon in a cave behind a waterfall. The other was from one of the dolphins in Kealekakua Bay.

For a couple of weeks I had been watching dolphins glint in the sun as they played in the bay. Viewed from my hillside high above, one after another would smash through the ocean surface and spin high into the air with the most amazing pirouettes before splashing down. The joy and abandon in their movement beckoned to me. I wanted to play. Inviting a few laid-back friends to join me on the mile or so swim out to the dolphins, I found no takers. When I asked why the dolphins kept flying out of the water I was solemnly told that it was their way of shedding parasites. Sort of like saying Baryshnikov soared due to ants in his pants.

A dozen excuses argued I shouldn't swim out to the dolphins. Finally the desire for adventure overwhelmed the fear of risk. Sitting at the surf's edge, just barely able to see distant dorsal fins slice the surface, I strapped on mask, snorkel and fins, lowered my head and started kicking. The water world was familiar, the moving reef life a comfort, until it began dropping away. Hawaii is just the tip of the largest mountain in the world; its base is thousands of feet underwater. I was tiny, almost naked, alone, flying over this abyss until I could no longer see the bottom, just light shafts from the sun not-quite-converging far below in the indigo depths. A giant barracuda angled toward me, a flashing silver bullet. But he passed by, heading toward the shore, without any sign of notice from his flat round eye.



Ben leads activists dressed as turtles at the 1999 World Trade Organization protest in Seattle, Wash.

On and on I kicked. Now and then I raised my head to check my progress. Thoughts raced: yep, they're still there, dorsal fins mimicking the short choppy surface waves. But geez, they're big, much bigger than I thought. Maybe this little swim isn't such a good idea after all.

I really started to get scared, but it was too late to retreat. They had spotted me. Two dolphins suddenly shot from out of nowhere straight toward me. I heard an odd trilling series of clicks and felt a ratcheting vibration shudder through my chest and belly. I had been echolocated.

One dolphin kept coming at me. I wondered if dolphins really did kill sharks by ramming into their bellies like in the show "Flipper." There was no place to hide. I was totally out of my element, defenseless. Then the dolphin slid by on my left, maybe 8 feet away, and regarded me from stem to stern with one long piercing gaze.

dolphins: William Rossiter

In only 53 years, Ben did what most of us could only do in our dreams. During his career as an activist, he slept atop old-growth trees to prevent logging, he scaled New York skyscrapers to hang protest banners and freed dolphins from holding nets around the world. His first mission as a representative of AWI was to jump in the Pacific Ocean to end a Navy research vessel's use of underwater sonic testing near Hawaii. His next major effort, the "march of the turtles," will go down in history as his most famous publicity event; hundreds of people donned turtle costumes to protest the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle. Ben's final adventure involved halting a huge seismic experiment off the Yucatan coast—twice. He was a genius at raising public awareness, and he was no stranger to danger.



Earth Island Institute



Earth Island Institute

Ben, shown twice in front of the Japanese Consulate in San Francisco, Calif., stirs up an international outcry over the capture of an entire pod of wild orcas by Japanese fishermen in 1997.

In trying to understand this moment and why it triggered such an epiphany, I keep thinking about that gaze. We are told that eyes only receive, not send. I don't believe that. My favorite game as a bored kid in school was to stare at the back of another student. Invariably they would turn around. Something comes out of eyes.

What happened when that dolphin looked at me? I was humbled to the dirt. All of my insecurities and fears were shaken out like so much dust; inspected, laughed at and discarded. The gaze stripped me of all swagger and presumption.

But it was more. I said the dolphin "regarded" me. I have known many dogs; close friends I loved dearly. But I have never seen such complexity, humor and *recognition* in the eyes of any creature other than humans, and rarely enough in those. Inside that sleek gray dolphin body was a person. No doubt about it: a self-aware, evaluating, conscious, thinking, playful and accepting person.

If dolphins had "persons" inside of them, then almost everything that I had been taught about human specialness and our perch upon the crown of creation was a crock. A whole string of logical assumptions tumbled like dominoes. If dolphins are persons, then all other creatures must also be persons, even if their eyes don't shake my innards quite the same way. And if all other creatures were persons, self-aware entities like me, then the world was infinitely richer. The axiom that all other creatures except for humans were just inert props for our starring role on earth was exposed as a deadly lie, keeping us isolated from our greater family. The world was suddenly huge and welcoming, with every facet calling out to me. I had found a place I belonged. It replaced the sterile stage upon which I had briefly performed.

The guard dolphin let me pass. Soon I was surrounded by a pod of about 50 dolphins. (Years later I learned that this family, now much besieged by seekers just like me, is one of only two resident pods of spinner dolphins known.) All around me swam old, scarred bull dolphins, little babies snug alongside moms and mating dolphins belly to belly. Frisky young dolphins raced under me before exploding through the sea's silver ceiling, only to whack down seconds later wreathed in rainbow bubbles.

The dolphins moved with so little apparent effort, as if they were watermelon seeds squirted by invisible pinched fingers. In contrast, I felt sillier than a fish out of water. I was a man off land—goofy, elbows and knees hanging down while superior beings showed me what individual movement could be.

Too soon, the dolphins vanished. No more symphonies of squeaks, clicks and whistles. They simply disappeared. I couldn't even see them when I lifted my head to peer above the chop. I yearned to follow, to join their world, to learn a little more. But I had to go back to land, to people.

Kicking the mile back to shore, the world was brand new and in Technicolor. A sense of obligation followed directly on the heels of euphoria. I had been given a glimpse into the world of the Other. It had cracked me open. These creatures needed nothing from me. They were complete. But all over the world, human beings were hurting dolphins and whales who were not able to speak in their own defense. Why couldn't I, as a human being, try to speak their voice within the world of human laws and practices? I made a solemn vow to use my life to protect these creatures from my own species.

During almost three decades now, the vow has led me into over 50 countries and many foolhardy missions. It took me to Japan, Mexico, the Bahamas and Florida to cut nets to free captive dolphins and whales. It has led me to many interminable meetings of the International Whaling Commission, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, where the stroke of a pen can doom or save thousands of individuals.

Of course, those who kill or capture whales and dolphins don't believe that their victims are "persons." They certainly don't believe that I was recruited to the dolphins' service that day out in Kealakekua Bay.

Their disbelief doesn't matter, because the dolphins' gift to me on that morning has been so pervasive and enduring. The realization that this earth is peopled with conscious entities weaving a musical, sexual, emotional matrix of diverse form and mind has transformed my world into a miracle renewed each day. My final gleaning from the dolphin's gaze is this: not only does our greater family of life on earth wish us well, but they have been waiting forever and a day for us to join in the dance as full participants, instead of lonely paper tiger bosses.

I'm still a wallflower at this dance, just starting to get acquainted and learn the steps. But the simple fact that I have been invited to the party fills me with delight. 🐾

Between Species: Celebrating the Dolphin-Human Bond, edited by Toni Frohoff and Brenda Peterson and published by Sierra Club Books, can be purchased at www.amazon.com. More of Ben's articles and photographs that commemorate his life are available at www.awionline.org/benwhite.htm. Please contact us if you would like a printed copy of the materials.

Ben and the Sea Shepherd crew sit on the bow of the Divine Wind in 1987, en route to confront Japanese drift net vessels in the North Pacific.

photo: Peter Wallerstein



Jim Frohoff

Ben speaks at a 1994 rally at Ballard Locks in Seattle, Wash. to save sea lions.



Lisa Mathine

Ben unfurls an anti-Ringling Bros. banner in Spokane, Wash. in 1996.



Mac Howley

Ben testifies at a recent hearing of the National Marine Fisheries Service.



Inhumane Trapping Prevention Act H.R. 3442

A 2-year-old cat named Princess was playing outdoors when she suddenly found herself in agonizing pain after stepping into a steel jaw leghold trap. With every ounce of strength she could muster and the heavy trap still clamped to her right paw, Princess dragged herself to the front porch of her home. The cat was rushed to a veterinary clinic where a portion of her paw was amputated. Unfortunately, the number of animals who suffer this same fate or worse each year is in the millions and continues to rise.

Due to its non-selective nature, the steel jaw leghold trap not only causes endless suffering to intended targets, but to pets, deer, birds, endangered species and even children. Eighty-eight nations have already banned the trap in recognition of its inherent cruelty. Representative Nita Lowey (D-NY) and Christopher Shays (R-CT) introduced the Inhumane Trapping



Two-year-old Princess accidentally fell prey to a barbaric steel trap; a portion of one of her paws had to be amputated as a result.

Prevention Act to end the use of steel jaw leghold traps in the United States. Over 30 members of Congress are already cosponsoring the bill; please contact your Representative to urge his or her cosponsorship today. 🐾

American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act

As we go to press, two actions in the Senate to end horse slaughter are anticipated. Senators John Ensign (R-NV) and Mary Landrieu (D-LA) will be reintroducing the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, a companion bill to H.R. 503, which is currently before the House of Representatives. We also expect the Senate to vote on an amendment to end horse slaughter for one fiscal year, giving us time to fight for the permanent ban. This amendment was overwhelmingly adopted in the House of Representatives last June. 🐾

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Please contact your legislators on behalf of these important bills:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1) Urge your Representative to support H.R. 3442, the Inhumane Trapping Prevention Act.</p> <p>2) Ask your Senators and Representative to support the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act.</p> | <p>* Address Representatives:
The Honorable (full name)
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515</p> <p>* Address Senators:
The Honorable (full name)
US Senate, Washington, DC 20510</p> |
|---|---|

In Memory of the Honorable James H. Scheuer

During the more than a quarter century that he served in Congress, Representative James H. Scheuer (D-NY) was known as an activist on environmental, housing and consumer issues, according to *The Washington Post*. But Scheuer, who died on Aug. 30 at the age of 85, was best known to us for his staunch opposition to the use of steel jaw leghold traps, which he called "an atrocious act against all of nature." He was a sponsor of early legislation to end use of these "insidious devices." We will miss this outspoken humanitarian. 🐾



Passage of CAFTA Puts Animals in Danger

In late July, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) passed by an incredibly narrow margin in the House of Representatives. Its ratification is in the interest of large corporations, many of which contribute to the inhumane treatment of animals. One of CAFTA's biggest disgraces is its ability to trump the rights of family farmers in the name of agribusiness profits. The practice of factory farming will flourish under this agreement, harming animals raised for food and the livelihood of Central and North American humane family farmers. While factory farming is common in the United States, this will be a new development in Central America. Environmental laws will be gutted as well, causing habitat loss and other problems for countless species of wildlife. 🐾

University of Nevada Cited for Violations of Lab Animal Care

A paddock full of dehydrated pigs with foaming mouths was only one of the horrific sights Hussein S. Hussein witnessed at facilities owned by the University of Nevada at Reno (UNR).

Following a seven-month investigation, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) cited the UNR College of Agriculture with 46 violations of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) between May 2004 and March 2005. UNR President John Lilley reported only "areas of administrative and facilities' non-compliance" were found, but offenses documented by the USDA include a failure to provide water, adequate housing and veterinary care. To avoid a hearing before an administrative law judge, the university agreed to settle the matter by paying a civil penalty of \$11,400.

The investigation was spurred by allegations made by Hussein, a well-known animal nutrition researcher and UNR associate professor with a dedication to improving research conditions. "I love animals, just as a person," Hussein said. "I chose my profession to care for animals."



Ten pigs were left in Hussein's facilities without his knowledge. Abandoned by UNR and left to suffer in housing conditions comparable to living on a factory farm, many developed skin problems and suffered from dehydration.

Hussein first became aware of animal welfare problems at the university in July 2002, when another faculty member informed him an entire herd of Angus cattle owned by the school was being starved and neglected. "That really disturbed me at the highest level," he said.

Soon after, Hussein learned 45 pregnant sheep died after being left without food or water for four days. He was appalled by the fact that no one was punished or even held responsible for the deaths and began to question the university's entire program. Unfortunately, sheep and other livestock used for agricultural research are not protected under the AWA.

In light of the situation, Hussein shut down his own research facility. "I felt it was unethical for me to continue to teach my students how to care for animals," he said. Hussein explained he still does not approve of the school's environment, and will not re-open his facility until something changes.

But the animal abuse at the university is not his only problem. After Hussein contacted the USDA, the university apparently went after him instead of trying to change its ways. When Hussein tried to make a case to the USDA, there was insufficient evidence to charge the university with retaliating against him for serving as a whistleblower. Currently, no further action is being taken by the agency.

Despite the university's payment of the stipulation, the situation has not been mended. Hussein has three animal abuse-related lawsuits against the university system in action, and UNR has not owned up to the cruelty occurring on its grounds. "I keep going to court because what they're doing is wrong," Hussein said. 🐾

Our Animal Legislation: A Timeline



Of all the existing federal laws to protect animals, 15 passed due to the substantial efforts of the Society for Animal Protective Legislation (SAPL). Nine strengthening amendments have also been ratified under SAPL's guidance. Today, we continue to seek improvements on existing laws and focus on issues such as banning the use of steel jaw leghold traps, the slaughter of horses for human consumption and the sale of dogs and cats to laboratories by random source dealers. An updated timeline of all legislative initiatives advanced by SAPL over its 50-year history is now available. To receive a free copy, please contact us. 🐾

Bequests to AWI

If you would like to help assure the Animal Welfare Institute's future through a provision in your will, this general form of bequest is suggested:
I give, devise and bequeath to the Animal Welfare Institute, located in Washington, D.C., the sum of \$ _____ and/or (specifically described property).

Donations to AWI, a not-for-profit corporation exempt under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3), are tax deductible. We welcome any inquiries you may have. In cases in which you have specific wishes about the disposition of your bequest, we suggest you discuss such provisions with your attorney.

Ex-Dealers Plead Guilty to Felonies

A charging document filed at a hearing by the Department of Justice on Aug. 30 states that former random source dealer C.C. Baird and his wife Patsy “knowingly and intentionally 1. received random source dogs and cats from prohibited sources... [and] 2. prepared false and fictitious paper and electronic acquisition records intended to deceive” by passing off random source animals as purpose-bred and using straw men to conceal the true source of animals. The Bairds backdated acquisition records to circumvent Animal Welfare Act (AWA) mandated holding periods and to ensure missing pets could not be tracked to their premises. They each pled guilty to a felony.

In an effort to encourage leniency, the Bairds entered their pleas prior to being charged with any crime. They consented to criminal forfeiture of \$200,000 and their Arkansas home and former kennel facilities, which sit on about 700 acres valued at about \$1.1 million. They will pay an additional \$42,400 to compensate the animal rescue groups that took custody of the 126 animals initially seized from Baird's property in August of 2003.

The Bairds made millions of dollars selling dogs and cats for experimentation until their US Department of Agriculture (USDA) licenses to operate were surrendered earlier this year. The forfeiture was part of a settlement agreement reached with the USDA to resolve charges of hundreds of AWA violations. US District Judge J. Leon Holmes is expected to sentence them for the felony charges at the end of the year. The Bairds were clearly scofflaws with no compassion for the unfortunate animals they used for their own financial gain; we hope the judge will sentence them to well-earned prison time coupled with a hefty fine. 🐾

Call for Refinement Proposals

AWI offers funding for projects to improve the welfare of laboratory animals.

The Animal Welfare Institute is offering up to eight \$6,000 Refinement Awards to North American residents, thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor. Studies aimed at the refinement of the housing and handling conditions of animals assigned for research or education will be considered for funding.

Please note proposals will *not* be funded:

- if the data collection procedure inflicts avoidable stress, and/or
- the study implies the killing of animals during or after the data collection process.

Applications should be in the form of a letter that elaborates how the study is likely to enhance animal welfare and outlines in detail the methodology that will be applied to achieve this objective. The application letter must not exceed three pages, and it must include assurance that the applicant:

- has day-to-day experience with the housing and handling of laboratory animals,
- will personally both collect and analyze the data of the proposed study and
- will submit a final report along with an abstract.

The report may be edited for publication in the *AWI Quarterly*, and award recipients must submit a manuscript summarizing their findings to a scientific or professional journal/newsletter/magazine.

Please send your application as a Microsoft Word document e-mail attachment to Viktor Reinhardt at viktor@snowcrest.net by **Jan. 27, 2006**. Notification letters will be mailed to all applicants by **March 31, 2006**. Awardees receive \$5,000 of the grant at the beginning of their studies and the remaining \$1,000 when they submit their final reports by **Jan. 31, 2007**.

If you have questions, please contact Viktor by e-mail using RA06 as the subject heading. 🐾



M.K. Meijer, Utrecht University, the Netherlands

Mice kept in research laboratories have a strong urge to build their own nests, preferably with paper-based material.

In research, the size of the cages in which rabbits are kept is important, but the way their living quarters are enriched is just as significant. In fact, an unfurnished cage is so boring for rabbits that it may cause them to develop behavioral pathologies such as stereotypical bar gnawing, tail biting and hair pulling. However, the rabbits in my care do not show any of these bizarre behaviors, probably because we do our best to provide them with living conditions suited for their species.

Rabbits are social animals. When given the choice, they clearly prefer to be in the company of another rabbit. Companionship is the best form of enrichment that we as caregivers can provide for our animals. All our female rabbits live in either pairs or small groups.

Play Time

Sharing a large enclosure provides the individual rabbit substantially more space and hence possibilities for hopping and leaping that are lacking in small, standard single cages. We furnish each enclosure with a solid structure house that individual rabbits can flee to in the event of an alarming situation, or simply enjoy time on their own. An attached ramp makes it easy for the animals to climb onto the roof.

Rabbits like to dart into safe burrows. Rather than giving them PVC pipes, which are rather sterile and too hard for gnawing, we often place empty cardboard boxes into the cages. The rabbits love them. They hide in them and climb on top of them in order to have a good vantage point. Then

they chew on them and finally destroy them. Cardboard boxes can create a big mess, but do not require extra time for keeping the cages clean. Milk crates, open transport cages, big plastic buckets and empty plastic drums sawed

paper bags in which the shavings come that are the great attraction. I place a transport cage or bucket into the empty bag to keep it open, and the rabbits spend quite a bit of time hiding inside and chewing the heavy paper. They

only stop once the bag has been completely chewed and flattened; one bag keeps the rabbits entertained for about two to three days. We also give them empty toilet paper rolls. Although I do not often see them playing with the rolls, they are usually chewed up into tiny pieces by the next morning.

Other play items I give my animals are empty water bottles filled with rocks or marbles, large plastic balls, shower curtain rings, Kong toys, rawhide chews and wood sticks. They do play with these objects, but usually for less than one hour daily. Often I find a toy at the very same spot that I placed it the day before during my next morning visit. Obviously, a toy



Room to Hop

Hands-on caregiver Natasha Down of Canada's York University shows how rabbits socialized in simple ways lead dramatically enriched lives.

in half are other good alternatives. The rabbits do not lose interest in them, and they use them often as a quiet place for their siestas.

We use aspen wood shavings as bedding for our rabbits. It is not so much the shavings, but the empty big

lacks the responsiveness and ever-changing challenge of another rabbit companion, and therefore loses its attraction relatively quickly.

Some toys can entertain the rabbits quite a bit, while others receive hardly any attention. I have found over the



Photos: Natasha Down

Something as simple as a big bag can provide days of enjoyment for rabbits at York University who like to hide inside and nibble at the paper. A transport cage tucked inside ensures it won't collapse and offers the rabbits additional hiding places.



Natasha Down

Cardboard boxes, upside-down crates, a ramp, old milk crates, wood shavings, scraps of paper... what looks like a mess to us greatly enriches the lives of the rabbits who not only enjoy their surroundings, but the company of each other.

years that my rabbits do not get tired of objects they can hide in or under, as well as chew and destroy. Objects that make a noise when being pushed around are interesting at first, but quickly lose their novelty. Individual rabbits seem to have favorite toys, but again, the interest is never long lasting. I like to give the rabbits toys on a rotational basis, exchanging them with different objects once a week when their cages are cleaned. This way, old toys regain some of their original attractiveness each time they have been removed for a while, cleaned and placed back into the rabbit cage.

Food for Fun

Food is also a great source of enrichment. My rabbits get fresh hay on a regular basis. Unlike with toys, I see no indication that the animals lose interest in this natural substrate promoting not only foraging, but also nest-building behavior. I sometimes give them a small (10 inches) or large (3 feet) branch. The rabbits seemingly enjoy stripping all the bark, but beyond that, they have little use for the branches. There are also little commercial rabbit toys that you jab fruit and veggies onto and hang from the sides of the cage, like a kabob. It is not very time consuming to prepare these toys and the rabbits like them.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are favorite treats. My rabbits love homemade dried fruit and whatever else I share with them. I only have to open the door of the room before all the rabbits approach me eagerly, waiting for their turn to get a treat. These regular, positive interactions with the animals have nothing to do with sentimentality, but they are a safeguard so the rabbits are not afraid of me, and will allow me to handle them during experimental procedures without getting distressed. The affectionate relationship with the animals in my charge is a basic condition so research data collected from them is not skewed by avoidable stress reactions.

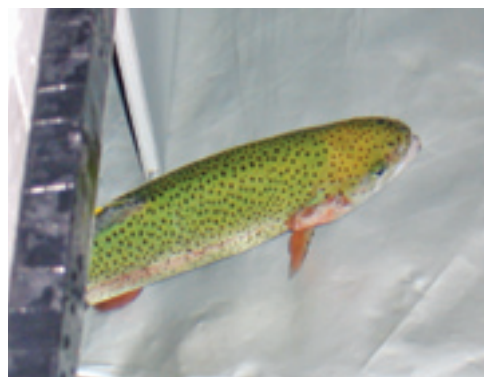
Housing rabbits together, providing them with objects they enjoy and fostering an affectionate relationship with them is a simple but very rewarding task. It creates a humane living environment that promotes the well-being of the rabbits. After all, happy, healthy and relaxed rabbits make better research subjects and provide more reliable test results. 🐾

It is not uncommon to find a variety of whole fish displayed on ice at any average grocery store. Yet practically every other type of meat is cut into portions and wrapped in clean packages that bear no physical semblance to the animal from whom they came. While most people in our Western culture would find it disturbing to see whole cows and pigs on sale for meat, most have no problem with the sight of a large salmon laid out in a similar manner.

Our emotional distance from fish may stem from the general feeling that they fall below the phylogenetic line where sentience begins. This may be because our present knowledge of assessing suffering in fish is inadequate—in part because fish do not typically display traditional and obvious signs we are familiar with in other animals. They are not capable of facial expression, nor can most species of fish vocalize; given their general anatomical structure, changes in body posture are extremely limited. Consequently, their use in scientific experimentation, in place of birds and mammals, is seen as ethically acceptable.

Overcoming Taboo

It's not surprising then to see that, according to statistics provided by the Canadian Council on Animal Care, there is a rising trend in the use of



Stephanie Yue

A case of classical conditioning—cued by a blue light signal, a trout swims through a door into an adjacent chamber in order to avoid an oncoming plunging dip net.

fish in research. In Canada, there was a 463 percent increase between 1975 and 2002, resulting in over 600,000 fish used for scientific research in 2002. Fish consumption has also risen steadily, mostly due to increased interest in a healthy alternative to traditional protein sources such as beef, chicken and pork. Huge numbers of fish are used by humans on a regular basis.

However, recent anatomical, physiological, neuropharmacological and behavioral studies suggest fish can suffer in ways similar to “higher” vertebrate animals. Considering the large numbers of fish we use, these findings should be enough of a reason for us to consider their welfare as a serious matter. In addition, animal welfare should be defined by how an animal “feels”—not just by how well it physically copes with environmental conditions such as absence of disease, lack of injury and good growth. Since sentient creatures have the capacity to subjectively and consciously experience things, it makes sense to investigate the fish’s capacity to suffer.

This is the project our fish welfare group at the University of Guelph is currently undertaking. It is not a trivial endeavor, for whether fish even possess the neuroanatomical structures that generate the phenomenon of consciousness is still a subject up for debate. The topic of consciousness has had a tumultuous history itself, and it has been less than a couple decades since words like “consciousness” and “sentience” have reappeared in scientific animal literature. We are only slowly overcoming the taboo of studying conscious thought processes and voluntary behavior.

From our studies on highly domesticated rainbow trout, we have seen these fish show behavior that is much more flexible and complex than was previously acknowledged. We have found that trout have some cognitive capacity that rivals that of mammalian laboratory animals, like rats. They not only show the ability to learn, but they also have memory of the things they learned—so they can anticipate events and adjust their behavior accordingly. This means some of

What Fish Feel

Researcher Stephanie Yue of the University of Guelph in Canada shares her team’s surprising findings on fish sentience and ponders the ethical implications.

their behavioral repertoire is “purposeful” and lends evidence toward “conscious” behavior.

Analyzing Fear

Most of our experiments delve into the phenomenon of fear. We try to tease apart which responses to negative stimuli (in our case, an oncoming dip net) are likely to be reflexive and which are deliberate. These experiments often require fish to be trained in tasks ranging from simply swimming away from an area where an aversive stimulus resides, to highly artificial and relatively sophisticated tasks such as pressing a lever in order to obtain a reward.

We found that trout follow similar behavioral patterns when frightened, as do other animals like mice. Mice show avoidance, fleeing, freezing, and scanning of their environment and general decrease in activity followed by gradual resumption of normal behavior. Mice are deemed sentient animals with the capacity for a range of subjective experiences. Why then should these same behavioral patterns, when seen under similar experimental paradigms, not be employed as evidence toward the possibility of

subjective experiences in fish?

There is more evidence that fish *do* have some level of consciousness than there is evidence against it, and it is logically more likely that fish are sentient animals than they are not. What level of consciousness they possess, however, remains to be determined. We still have much to learn before we can properly generate guidelines specifically tailored to the needs of different species of fish kept in captivity. Yet we are moving in the right direction by entertaining the notion that fish may indeed be worthy of more moral consideration than they have had in the past. 🐾

This research project was made possible through a grant from Animal Welfare Institute and the Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing.



Stephanie Yue

Not unlike a rat who will press a lever for a food pellet, the trout in this photograph presses a pendulum for a food reward during a recent investigation of fear responses in rainbow trout.

“Sponging” Dolphins May Reveal Animal Culture

Culture, “the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties especially by education,” was once thought of as only a human trait. Today, we know it is present in some animal societies. However, only primates have demonstrated methods of tool use that are learned through culture—until now. Off the coast of Western Australia at Shark Bay, 15 bottlenose dolphins and seven of their offspring seem to pass on the behavior of using sea sponges as tools for protection.

Biologists first witnessed dolphins with sea sponges over their beaks two decades ago and have studied the clever “spongers” ever since. “Sponging” occurs when a bottlenose dolphin picks up a sea sponge from the ocean floor and wears it over her beak as protection from sharp coral and unknown hazards, possibly while foraging for fish and other prey. Unfortunately, it is difficult to observe these animals on the ocean floor.

In June, a group of researchers from around the world published an online study of the Shark Bay dolphins. Findings from the study ruled

out any ecological explanations, and since none of the other approximately 119 dolphins in the area are spongers, biologists have concluded habitat is not forcing the behavior. The research also determined any genetic link or common “sponging gene” among the dolphins is highly unlikely.



Amanda Coakes

A small group of related bottlenose dolphins living off the coast of Western Australia may use culture to teach their offspring how to use sea sponges as tools.

“When we looked at all these possible transmission mechanisms on a family and population level and compared it with our actual genetic data, we found it did not agree,” research leader Michael Krutzen told

The Washington Post. This means sponging is the first case of material culture documented in a marine mammal species.

The dolphins do share a maternal gene, indicating they are all descended from an original sponging female. And unlike tool use in apes, sponging is almost exclusively socially transmitted within a matriline that is part of a larger population. Young dolphins, both male and female, spend their first years with their mothers, gaining the essential development of foraging skills—but only one of the 15 adult spongers is male.

Many studies have found dolphins to have complex cognitive ability, and they are known for their imitative skills. Therefore, it is not surprising that they are capable of social learning. While social learning is not always indicative of culture, researchers studying the Shark Bay dolphins believe their unique behavior should fit the definition. These scientists are interested in the parallels between primates and dolphins, and they will continue to challenge our primate-centric views of tool use and culture. 🐾



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