



# AWI Quarterly

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Dear Members and Other Friends of AWI:

It has been nearly a year and a half since our lives were changed in so many ways by the pandemic. Nonetheless, AWI's advocacy has continued in earnest as animals across the nation and around the globe remain in critical need of protection and conservation.

In this issue of our magazine you'll read about our work, including the progress we are making to end brutal and senseless wildlife killing contests in the United States, the assistance we provided in response to the massive oil spill off the coast of Israel, and our successful effort to make thousands of USDA records readily available to the public, thereby identifying instances of inhumane treatment of animals at slaughter operations.

But we can't help animals without you! Thank you so much for your past donations, and we are grateful for any continued support you may be able to provide. However, I also hope you will assist us by responding to our requests for action. Pages 4 and 5 describe much-needed legislation pending in Congress to help primates, sharks, companion animals, and a host of other species, and you can make a difference by reaching out to your members of Congress to request their support for these measures. In addition, farm animals can benefit if you contact Agriculture Secretary Vilsack and urge him to finalize a rule that will mandate animal welfare requirements within USDA's organic standards (see page 10). And while we are making progress to stop wildlife killing contests, we can only succeed by working in partnership with you, our grassroots advocates; on page 16, we offer some actions you can take.

We appreciate your concern for animals and hope you will continue to help them via whatever means you can. 🐾

With warm regards and heartfelt gratitude,

— Cathy Liss

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## ABOUT THE COVER

A pair of Atlantic spotted dolphins hone their synchronized swimming skills in the Bahamas. AWI actively participates in the workings of the SPAW Protocol—a UN agreement to protect wildlife and habitat in the Caribbean. This spring, AWI staff members attended the ninth meeting of the SPAW Protocol Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee. Unfortunately, the meeting—held virtually and hampered by technical difficulties that severely delayed progress on key initiatives—produced underwhelming results. Nonetheless, a few positive outcomes emerged. To learn more, see page 20. Photograph by Chase Dekker/Minden Pictures.



FINS REMOVED FROM SHARKS, ANTONI HALIM

## RINGING UP NO SALE ON SHARK FINS

The Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act (HR 2811), a bill that would prohibit the sale of shark fins, was reintroduced in the House of Representatives this past Earth Day with 104 members signing on as original cosponsors (twice the number from last Congress). This bipartisan legislation, led by Representatives Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (I-MP) and Michael McCaul (R-TX), passed the House last Congress but was not taken up by the Senate.

The Senate version of the bill (S 1106) is led by Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Shelly Moore Capito (R-WV). On May 12, the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee voted 22–6 to include that bill as an amendment, offered by Senators Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Capito, to the Endless Frontier Act (now known as the US Innovation and Competition Act). By the same margin, committee members defeated amendments offered by Senator Rick Scott (R-FL) that would have severely weakened the bill by exempting several at-risk shark species.

## IMPROVING ANIMAL WELFARE ENFORCEMENT

The Animal Welfare Enforcement Improvement Act (AWEIA; HR 3277), introduced May 17 by Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL), would end US Department of Agriculture licensing practices that allow chronic violators of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) to escape accountability.

In the past, the USDA routinely rubber-stamped license renewals. Under a new regulatory scheme instituted last year, animal dealers, breeders, and exhibitors—including puppy mills, traveling circuses, roadside zoos, petting farms/zoos, animal acts, animal rides, and marine mammal facilities—are required to obtain a new license only every three years after passing a pre-announced USDA inspection, and they will be given up to three chances to pass. This system allows habitually out-of-compliance licensees to clean up just long enough to pass the scheduled inspection and remain licensed—even if unannounced inspections in between these scheduled inspections reveal violations.

Results from such unannounced inspections will be ignored in license renewal determinations.

Under the AWEIA, dealers and exhibitors would have to renew their licenses *annually* after passing an *unannounced* inspection. Businesses that are noncompliant with the AWA's minimum care standards or ones that have repeatedly violated the AWA or local, state, or other federal laws related to animals, would be denied licenses. Further, the USDA could permanently revoke a license (following a hearing) when a dealer or exhibitor has committed multiple animal welfare violations. The bill would also require animal dealers and exhibitors to improve their veterinary care standards and would empower citizens to file lawsuits to enforce the AWA, similar to what is provided for under some federal environmental laws.

## ENDING ABUSE OF SHOW HORSES

A coalition of 114 representatives and 48 senators recently urged Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to finalize a Horse Protection Act (HPA) rule that would significantly curb the pernicious practice of “soring,” which involves the deliberate infliction of pain on a horse's hooves and legs to create an exaggerated high-stepping gait for certain competitions. The rule was nearly finalized in 2017 during Secretary Vilsack's prior tenure at the USDA, but was subsequently withdrawn by the Trump administration. It would mirror many of the goals of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which passed the House of Representatives during the last Congress but was not taken up by the Senate. AWI continues to meet with USDA staff to urge adoption of this long-overdue rule to protect horses.

## PROHIBITING PRIMATES AS PETS

The cruel and dangerous trade in primates as pets brings misery to thousands of animals in the United States. To combat this problem, Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) have introduced the Captive Primate Safety Act (CPSA; HR 3135/S 1588). Nonhuman primates are highly intelligent wild animals with complex social structures whose basic needs cannot be met when kept as pets. They can also injure or spread disease to the people around them.

This legislation would ban private possession of nonhuman primates. It is narrowly focused on primates kept as pets and exempts zoos, research labs, and sanctuaries. Current owners would be grandfathered in and would need to register their animals to ensure that first responders and animal control officers are aware of the presence of wild animals in their communities. The bill also restricts direct contact between the public and primates.

## PROTECTING PETS FROM SHADY DEALERS

The Pet Safety and Protection Act (HR 3187), introduced May 13 by Representatives Mike Doyle (D-PA) and Chris Smith (R-NJ), would prevent companion dogs and cats from being acquired from random sources and sold for laboratory experiments by unscrupulous dealers. Historically, such “random source” dealers were notorious for obtaining dogs and cats through fraud, deception, and outright theft and for keeping animals in horrendous conditions.

Thanks to the persistence of Representatives Doyle and Smith—as well as that of Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), who has requested that language be added to spending bills each year to prevent the licensing of random source dealers—they have effectively been shut down. Nonetheless, the Pet Safety and Protection Act is very much needed to make this ban permanent and ensure that this abuse-ridden pipeline is closed for good.

## GET ACTIVE FOR ANIMALS!

A big *thank you* to all our members and constituents who have been sending messages to Congress, the administration, and state officials throughout the pandemic! As difficult as the last year has been, you have taken time to speak up for animals—and you have been heard! From a new law in Ohio requiring cross reporting by social service professionals, veterinarians, and animal control, to the large number of wins for animals included in the current federal spending law (see *AWI Quarterly*, spring 2021), you have made the difference in the success of our efforts on behalf of animals. This year we held our first virtual meeting of dedicated activists to bring everyone up to date on the outlook for the new Congress and administration.

Not part of this dynamic group yet? It's easy! You can sign up for our action alerts at [awionline.org/compassion-index](http://awionline.org/compassion-index). Through these alerts you will learn when help is needed on federal or state legislation or administrative actions.

You can also contact your legislators and urge them to cosponsor the animal welfare bills mentioned in these pages by calling the Capitol Switchboard (202-225-3121) and asking to be connected to your legislator, or by writing letters to them at the following addresses: The Honorable [full name] / US House of Representatives / Washington, DC 20515; The Honorable [full name] / US Senate / Washington, DC 20510

*Nonhuman primates naturally fascinate us, but they fare poorly in private homes. The Captive Primate Safety Act would outlaw the keeping of primates as pets.*



HOLLENDERXZ

# AWI Welcomes New SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE MEMBERS

This year, AWI welcomes four esteemed individuals to its Scientific Committee: Drs. Frank Cipriano, Cristina Eisenberg, David Fraser, and Richard Reading. They will join three long-standing members on the committee: Drs. Roger Fouts, Viktor Reinhardt, and Robert Schmidt. The deep knowledge, experience, perspective, ethics, and commitment of these scientists help AWI work toward our objectives on behalf of animals. We are grateful for their support.

## **FRANK CIPRIANO, PhD**

An evolutionary biologist and ecologist, Frank has served on the International Whaling Commission's Scientific Committee since 1997. In the 1990s, he developed a portable DNA testing method that he has used to identify commercial products containing endangered and threatened whale and dolphin species. Frank has been a field and laboratory course instructor, Earthwatch project leader, National Science Foundation marine biotechnology post-doc at the University of Hawaii, and conservation genetics post-doc at Harvard University. For 18 years, he was director of the Genomics/ Transcriptomics Analysis Core and a molecular techniques instructor at San Francisco State University. He currently serves on the River Otter Ecology Project's Scientific Advisory Board, is a research associate and academy fellow at the California Academy of Sciences, a research associate with Fundación Cethus in Argentina, and a member of the IUCN's Cetacean Specialist Group.

## **CRISTINA EISENBERG, PhD**

Cristina is a Native American community ecologist who, over the past two decades, has studied the effects of fire, large herbivore grazing, and predator-prey relationships within forest and grassland ecosystems. Cristina works to integrate the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Indigenous communities into ecological restoration projects and is the principal investigator on major restoration projects within Alberta's Waterton Lakes National Park and Montana's Fort Belknap Reservation. She is a Smithsonian Research Associate and the former chief scientist at Earthwatch Institute, where she oversaw a global research program focusing on ecological restoration, wildlife conservation, social justice for Indigenous peoples, and sustainable natural resources production. She is a member of the graduate faculty at Oregon State University in the College of Forestry and serves on several boards.

## **DAVID FRASER, PhD**

David is a professor in the University of British Columbia's Animal Welfare Program. Over the course of a distinguished career spanning five decades, he has studied the welfare of farm, wild, and companion animals and worked with many organizations and international committees to find practical ways to improve the lives of animals. He was one of the original members of the Animal Welfare Working Group of the World Organisation for Animal Health and chaired the expert consultation on animal welfare of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. David was one of the original members of Canada's National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council and led the development of the council's national strategy for farm animal welfare. In 2005, he was appointed Member of the Order of Canada for his work as "a pioneer in the field of animal welfare science."

## **RICHARD READING, PhD**

Richard is director for research and conservation at the Butterfly Pavilion and serves as the executive director of the Coalition for International Conservation. He has conducted or overseen projects in dozens of countries in six continents, working primarily on grassland and arid ecosystems—in particular the Great Plains of North America, the steppes and deserts of Mongolia, the savannahs and deserts of Botswana, and the Altiplano of Peru. His work focuses on developing pragmatic, effective, and interdisciplinary approaches to the conservation of wildlife and protected areas through research, capacity development, and working with local people and governments. Richard serves as an associate editor for five scientific journals and holds affiliations with the University of Denver, Colorado State University, and the University of Nebraska.



*Frank Cipriano*



*Cristina Eisenberg*



*David Fraser*



*Richard Reading*

### **ROGER FOUTS, PhD**

Roger, along with his wife and collaborator, Deborah Fouts, may be most well-known for his communication research conducted with the famed Washoe and other chimpanzees using sign language. Roger secured an enriched environment for the chimpanzees while ensuring that they would never be used in biomedical research. His book, *Next of Kin*, chronicles his lifelong relationship with Washoe and tells the story of how the chimpanzees signed to humans and each other. He was the co-founder and co-director of the Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute and co-founder of Friends of Washoe. Roger has been among the strongest and most vocal of advocates for chimpanzees used in experiments, but his compassion extends broadly to all animals. Roger served on AWI's board of directors from fall 2000 until spring 2007, when he transitioned onto the scientific committee.

### **VIKTOR REINHARDT, DVM, PhD**

Viktor, an ethologist and veterinarian, worked for many years at the Primate Research Center in Wisconsin, where he pioneered methods of handling, housing, and caring for primates to better meet their behavioral needs and promote the animals' psychological well-being. In 1995, he joined the staff at AWI, continuing his groundbreaking efforts to promote better conditions for animals in research. In 2002, he established the Laboratory Animal Refinement and Enrichment Forum (LAREF), a global online discussion forum for laboratory animal care personnel seeking to improve conditions for the animals in their care. Viktor has written, co-authored, and edited numerous AWI books addressing behavior and refinement. Viktor "retired" from AWI in 2013 and joined the Scientific Committee. He continues to moderate LAREF and is working on the sixth in a series of books based on LAREF discussions.

### **ROBERT SCHMIDT, PhD**

Robert's long-standing interest is in "human dimensions" (humanity's relationship with nature and natural resources), and the focus of much of his research is the relationships between people and wildlife, including hunting and trapping ethics, gray wolves and humans, coyotes and livestock, and urban predators. Robert is an emeritus associate professor in the Department of Environment and Society at Utah State University, where he has taught and conducted research since 1991. He teaches a popular course, *Living with Wildlife*, to get students thinking about issues such as overexploitation, the impacts on biodiversity of habitat loss and fragmentation, and invasive species. Robert is past president of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society, has served on the USDA National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee, and is currently a member of the National Feline Research Council. He has served on AWI's Scientific Committee since 2007.

## COURT PULLS BREAK ON USDA'S SPEEDUP OF PIG SLAUGHTER LINES

In April, a federal court ruled against an element of a 2019 US Department of Agriculture rule that removed limits on line speeds at pig slaughter facilities. Judge Joan Ericksen of the US District Court for the District of Minnesota ruled that the department failed to consider the effect increased speeds would have on worker health and safety. While the court vacated this element of the rule, other aspects of the 2019 rule remain in place. It is unclear whether the USDA will continue to seek this line speed increase, given that it recently revoked a similar rule allowing poultry line speeds of up to 175 birds per minute.

Increased line speeds have the potential to negatively affect not only worker safety, but also the welfare of pigs at slaughter, as workers have less time to perform each task, including moving live animals and rendering them insensible to pain before slaughter. Faster line speeds can also make it difficult for plant workers to identify animals who haven't been successfully stunned—meaning some animals might make

it to processing while still conscious. Because of this, AWI opposes any plans to increase line speeds.

## EGG ASSOCIATION PROMOTES EMERGENCY PLANNING

Recently, the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association teamed up with the National Association of SARA Title III Program Officials—an organization that represents emergency response and planning officials across all levels of government—to produce and disseminate a series of informational videos focused on emergency planning. The goal of the videos is to provide producers with guidance on developing emergency action plans and encourage them to coordinate with local emergency planning personnel and first responders throughout the process to give them a better understanding of the operation and potential hazards.

Given the rise in barn fires, adverse weather events, and other emergency scenarios that livestock operations face, developing an emergency action plan will undoubtedly help reduce

animal suffering that results from such events. In response to the first video released, AWI sent a letter to the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association commending this effort, while also requesting that the organization produce an additional video focused primarily on barn fire causes and mitigation strategies, particularly with respect to commercial egg and broiler operations, in light of 2020's tragically high death toll of chickens in such fires.

## FEDS URGED NOT TO UPEND FDA OVERSIGHT OF GE FARM ANIMALS

For years, the animal agriculture industry has pressured the federal government to facilitate production of genetically engineered (GE) farm animals as a way to increase production and profits. Just prior to leaving office, the Trump administration published a proposal to transfer the oversight of genetic engineering from the Food and Drug Administration to the US Department of Agriculture, a move that could significantly expedite the process for gaining approval of food products from GE animals. AWI has urged the new administration to maintain oversight of the process under the FDA, arguing that the USDA's proposed regulatory framework does not address possible negative impacts of the GE process. Given the potential for unintended consequences of altering the genome, and the fact that not all problems will necessarily be evident within the first few generations, a deregulated approach to transgenic animals poses a risk to animal welfare, the environment, and American consumers.



DEWALD KIRSTEN

*A federal court struck down a USDA rule allowing unlimited line speeds at pig slaughter facilities because the department failed to consider the potential harm to workers.*





## Suez Canal Blockage Highlights Plight of Farm Animals at Sea

At least 20 ships carrying hundreds of thousands of animals were stalled in and around the Suez Canal for several days this March when the *Ever Given* (one of the world's largest cargo ships) ran aground and wedged itself diagonally across the canal, blocking all traffic. Transport of live animals can be precarious—especially when they are being transported great distances on ships, which must carry all necessary supplies and food to support them. When it became clear that the *Ever Given* would be stuck in the canal for some time, concerns quickly grew about the welfare of the animals on vessels unable to pass through.

Although many countries have enacted regulations to establish minimum welfare criteria for animals on sea vessels, myriad conditions remain that can negatively affect the animals' welfare. Livestock on board vessels face extreme confinement, heat and cold stress, lack of fresh air, and prolonged journeys, all of which increase rates of disease, suffering, and death.

A reported 13 of the livestock-carrying ships—carrying some 130,000 sheep—departed from Romania. While EU regulations require carriers transporting animals to hold 25 percent more food than necessary for a voyage in case of delay, supplies can be depleted quickly. One of the Romanian ships, for example, reportedly departed on March 16 with a scheduled arrival in Jordan on March 23. The blockage delayed the ship's arrival to April 1 or later. With 25 percent additional supplies, the sheep would have been subject to food shortages on day two of this minimum nine-day delay.

In another recent incident, Spanish officials in late February ordered the euthanasia of more than 850 calves who were

suffering in poor conditions after spending two months adrift in the Mediterranean Sea due to suspected disease.

Calls for the ban of live animal transport overseas have been made for many years, especially after major disasters like these. Proponents of banning live animals on cargo ships argue that scientific advancements in artificial insemination, refrigeration, and air transport render sending animals via sea vessel an unnecessary risk.

Heeding cries to end this cruel practice, New Zealand recently announced a ban—effective 2023—on the export of live cattle by sea due to animal welfare considerations. Last year, the country temporarily suspended such exports after a massive accident resulted in the death of 5,800 cattle and 40 crew members. The United Kingdom says it will soon ban live animal exports for slaughter and fattening. In Australia (the world's largest exporter of live animals for slaughter), reforms have been instituted to improve the welfare of animals at sea (including a ban on shipments to the Middle East during northern summer months), but no permanent ban has been enacted.

It is unknown exactly how many animals suffered and died due to the Suez Canal disaster, but it seems that despite the danger, live animal export is likely to continue at a high volume so long as it remains profitable. In recognition of this sad reality, AWI monitors animal exports from the United States and seeks reforms to improve the welfare of animals condemned to this fate—even as we continue to advocate a total ban on the practice. 🐾

# New Push to Include Animal Welfare Standards to Organic Program

Since the Biden administration took the reins in January, animal welfare and organic farming advocates have resumed their push to reinstate the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices (OLPP) rule under the US Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program. In April, 40 former members of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB)—the federal advisory board established to provide recommendations to the USDA regarding organic production—sent a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack expressing concern about the integrity of the National Organic Standards and urging the department to move forward with a number of NOSB recommendations that have been proposed but not implemented, including the OLPP rule.

The OLPP rule—based on decades of work involving a wide range of stakeholders—would set minimum welfare standards for farm animals raised under the National Organic Program. Specifically, the OLPP rule would establish indoor and outdoor space and enrichment requirements for birds, prohibit certain physical alterations such as debeaking of birds and tail docking of cattle, and require group housing for pigs in most circumstances and for dairy calves

after they are weaned, among other noteworthy improvements. While not perfect, this rule represents the first set of comprehensive federal standards for the raising of farm animals in the United States. It would improve the lives of millions of animals and set standards for animal welfare that would better align the organic label with consumer expectations.

The OLPP rule was formally proposed in April 2016 and finalized in January of 2017, just days before the end of the Obama administration. After delaying the rule's implementation multiple times, the USDA under the Trump administration announced in March 2018 that it would scrap the OLPP rule altogether, despite receiving thousands of public comments opposing the withdrawal. In doing so, the USDA argued the rule would create too much of a financial burden for producers and that the department does not have authority under the Organic Food Productions Act to regulate animal welfare, only animal *care*—an argument AWI finds to be groundless.

Beyond the fact that the USDA has already determined on more than one occasion that it has the authority to regulate animal welfare, the department's argument disclaiming

this authority failed to acknowledge the connection between animal health and welfare that has been well documented in dozens of scientific studies, including those conducted by the USDA's own research arm, the Agricultural Research Service. This research tells us the health of farm animals cannot be fully addressed without also accounting for the conditions that impact their welfare.

As the 40 former NOSB members state in their letter, this rule received broad support from the vast majority of organic farmers, businesses, consumers, and advocacy organizations—an arguably rare occurrence when it comes to crafting regulations. With Secretary Vilsack back at the helm of the USDA, there is hope that the OLPP rule will finally be implemented. 🐾

**You can help:** Visit AWI's website at [awionline.org/OLPP](http://awionline.org/OLPP) to send a letter urging Secretary Vilsack to restore the OLPP rule. Or write to this address: The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary / US Department of Agriculture / 1400 Independence Ave., SW / Washington, DC 20250





Playpens consisted of two Animal Care Systems Optirat Plus cages connected by a tunnel. One side contained burrowing substrate and the other a running wheel, tunnels, and climbable structures. Photo by Anna Ratuski

## Playpen Time Beneficial to Mice in Laboratories

by Lucía Améndola Saavedra

Mounting scientific evidence indicates that environmental enrichment improves the welfare of laboratory mice, but most facilities worldwide still use standard housing (i.e., mostly barren “shoebox” cages). The provision of regular access to enriched environments such as playpens, even when mice are otherwise housed in standard cages, could provide an immediate method to improve welfare. Studies have shown that mice reared in enriched environments show lower anxiety. The first aim of this study—which was funded by an AWI Refinement Grant—was to determine if early-life provision of regular playpen access would decrease anxiety. It is also important to allow mice to experience positive emotional states, so the second study aim was to assess if mice perceived access to the playpen as rewarding.

Forty-two female mice of three strains (C57BL/6J, DBA/2J, and BALB/cJ) were housed in trios in 14 cages; each trio was randomly assigned to one of two treatments: playpen access (3 days/week for 30 minutes) or control (no playpen).

After three months, emotional reactivity was assessed in all mice using two common tests of anxiety: an elevated plus maze (EPM), in which mice can explore a raised pathway with two open and two enclosed arms arranged in a plus (+) shape, and an open field (OF) test, where mice can explore a large, entirely open area. In such tests, bolder individuals produce fewer fecal boli (individual droppings) and venture more freely into the open arms of the EPM and the center of the OF. Following this, the playpen group was assessed in a choice test: From a starting position, mice could make their way directly to the playpen (treatment condition) or their home-cage (control condition), or stop along the way to eat food rewards, which would reduce their time in the playpen or home cage.

We found evidence that mice from the playpen treatment had lower anxiety compared to mice from the control treatment: Playpen mice produced fewer fecal boli (49 percent and 40 percent fewer in the EPM and OF test, respectively) and tended to spend about twice as much time in the center of the OF. We also noted differences in anxiety responses between strains: In both tests, C57BL/6J mice produced the fewest and BALB/cJ produced the most fecal boli; C57BL/6J mice also spent three and four times more time in the open arms of the EPM and in the center of the OF, respectively, compared to BALB/cJ and DBA/2J mice. Overall, in the choice test, mice spent 58 percent less time eating rewards when on their way to the playpen than when headed to their home cage.

Enriched housing is known to decrease anxiety responses in most of the variables measured in this study. Our results indicate that regular playpen access also decreased some measures of anxiety in mice. Additionally, we found that mice were more likely to forgo food rewards when this meant spending less time in the playpen—thus, mice find access to playpens rewarding. Consistent with previous research, we found that the beneficial effects of environmental interventions on anxiety may be greatest in C57BL/6J mice. Providing mice with regular access to a playpen can improve their welfare, and future research should focus on the way different strains uniquely benefit from playpen access. 🐾

*Dr. Améndola Saavedra is a postdoctoral research fellow in the University of British Columbia’s Animal Welfare Program.*

## BLM DROPS SURGICAL STERILIZATION PLAN FOR UTAH WILD HORSES

The Bureau of Land Management recently indicated that it will withdraw a proposal to conduct sterilization surgeries on wild horses in Utah's Confusion Herd Management Area. (See *AWI Quarterly*, spring 2021.) The Utah plan, finalized last October, would have set a dangerous precedent for how the government manages herds by subjecting horses to risky, inhumane ovariectomies that involve the blind insertion of a metal rod through an incision in the vaginal wall to sever a mare's ovaries while the animal remains conscious. AWI rallied support among a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers to urge the Interior Department to abandon this approach, led a coalition effort with wild horse advocacy groups urging Secretary Haaland to withdraw the plan, and pushed for language in the 2021 fiscal year spending package directing the BLM to use humane and safe fertility control methods.

## WILDLIFE SERVICES KILLS LESS (BUT A LOT) IN 2020

The US Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program trapped, shot, and poisoned more than 430,000 native animals last year, including hundreds of wolves, bears, and mountain lions, thousands of foxes, more than 25,000 beavers, and more than 62,000 coyotes. Shocking as these numbers are, the total is actually significantly lower than the more than 1 million killed in each of the previous several years.

*Hundreds of thousands of animals—including 25,000 beavers—fell victim to the federal Wildlife Services program last year. Too often, the program resorts to lethal methods to resolve human-wildlife conflicts.*

Wildlife Services is tasked with responding to human-wildlife conflicts. This includes important work such as keeping birds away from airport runways and reducing the transmission of rabies. But all too often, Wildlife Services needlessly resorts to ineffective lethal measures rather than proven nonlethal techniques to address wildlife challenges. Such go-to Wildlife Services devices as steel-jaw leghold traps and neck snares are not only cruel, but also inherently indiscriminate. Last year alone, traps and snares unintentionally killed hundreds of river otters, raccoons, turtles, and foxes, among numerous other species. Many of these deaths could have been avoided if the program had relied instead on electric fencing to protect livestock, flow devices to prevent flooding by beaver dams, and other such measures.

## TRAPS AND POISONS PROHIBITED ON NEW MEXICO PUBLIC LANDS

In a major victory, New Mexico has enacted the Wildlife Conservation and Public Safety Act—also known as “Roxy’s Law”—which bans the

use of traps, snares, and poisons on New Mexico's public lands. The legislation was prompted by the tragic story of Roxy, a senior dog killed by a trap while hiking a trail with her family near a public recreation area in northern New Mexico.

AWI supported Roxy's Law and helped organize and present a widely attended webinar on trapping. The event helped inform the public about the barbaric use of poisons, traps, and snares on public lands.

Progress secured by the passage of Roxy's Law, unfortunately, contrasted sharply with trapping-related setbacks in other states. Following the removal of Endangered Species Act protections from gray wolves across the country, hunters and trappers in Wisconsin killed more than 200 wolves in less than three days in February—far exceeding the limit established by the state's wildlife agency. Meanwhile, Montana and Idaho lawmakers approved multiple bills that greatly expanded opportunities to hunt, trap, and snare wolves in those states.



LAYNE VR

## USFWS RECOMMENDS CONTINUED PROTECTIONS FOR GRIZZLY BEARS

Following a recent review of the conservation status of grizzly bears in the continental United States, the US Fish and Wildlife Service recommended in March that the bears continue to be listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The USFWS evaluated current conditions in the six ecosystems designated as grizzly bear recovery zones in Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming. It determined that while grizzlies are not currently in danger of extinction (which would warrant an “endangered” designation under the ESA), there is enough uncertainty around future conservation efforts that the bears remain likely to become in danger of extinction within the foreseeable future (and thus warrant a designation of “threatened”).

The recommendation applies to the grizzly bear population of the contiguous United States as a whole, not to individual ecosystems. Practically, this means that the agency could still attempt to *remove* ESA protections from bears in one or more of the individual recovery areas (as it has twice tried to do with the Yellowstone population), even as the rest of the population remains protected.

## RED WOLVES RELEASED INTO WILD IN NORTH CAROLINA

In late April and early May, four adult captive red wolves were released into the Red Wolf Recovery Area in eastern North Carolina, and four red wolf pups born in captivity were fostered to a wild female red wolf in the recovery area. This marks the first time since 1998 that adult red wolves were



BLUEBARONPHOTO

released directly into the recovery area from captive breeding facilities and the first time since 2014 that red wolf pups from the facilities have been fostered into the wild. This remarkable news is a direct result of a federal court ruling won by AWI and its allies in January that required the US Fish and Wildlife Service to prepare a plan to release captive red wolves into the wild to avoid irreversible harm to the highly endangered population during ongoing litigation. This release is pursuant to that plan. This infusion of wolves more than doubles the known wild population, and we hope it marks the beginning of a recommitment by the USFWS (after prolonged neglect) to recover the world’s most endangered canid.

## IUCN OFFERS GRIM ASSESSMENT OF AFRICAN ELEPHANTS

Based on genetic research and the latest status assessment of African elephants, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has formally split the species into forest

and savanna elephants and designated them as critically endangered and endangered, respectively. Prior to this, all African elephants were classified by IUCN as a single species and were designated as vulnerable.

The status designations are the result of decades of population declines due to poaching for ivory and habitat loss. Forest elephant numbers have plummeted by more than 86 percent over the past 31 years, and these elephants currently occupy only one quarter of their historic range. Savanna elephant populations declined by at least 60 percent over the past 50 years, largely due to poaching for ivory. It is currently estimated that 415,000 African elephants (in total) remain, compared to approximately 1.3 million in the early 1970s.

Considering the immense ecological and economic importance of elephants, these new designations indicate that more must be done to protect elephant habitat and to end elephant poaching by shutting down the ivory trade.

# AIMING TO END WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

**AS DUSK FALLS**, two men, assault-style weapons in hand, crouch in an open field. One sets up a device that begins to play recorded sounds of a coyote pup in distress, amplified through speakers. Then they settle in and wait. Soon, a coyote appears in the distance. Similar to humans, coyotes have a strong bond to other members of their species, and when they detect cries for help, they are drawn to the sound to investigate. When the coyote comes within range, one of the men aims his gun—equipped with a thermal night vision scope—and fires. The animal collapses, and the man jogs out to collect the mangled body. This happens again, and again, with each new body swung into a growing pile of bloody carcasses. By the end of the evening, the pile has grown to 10 animals. The question, for these men, is whether it is enough—enough for them to secure the cash and prizes that led them on this killing spree in the first place. For these men are one of many teams competing in a wildlife killing contest, and they don't want to walk away empty-handed.

Wildlife killing contests are organized events in which participants kill animals for money, prizes, entertainment, and other inducements, with “winners” recognized in categories such as the number, weight, and size of animals killed. The contests predominantly target native carnivores, including coyotes, foxes, bobcats, and even wolves and mountain lions, as well as other species such as raccoons, squirrels, and rabbits. Each year, over a thousand of these contests are held in over 40 states, with little or no regulation. Just one contest can result in hundreds of animals being wiped off a landscape in a single weekend.

There are many reasons to oppose these events. First, the mass killing of animals during contests is cruel, barbaric, and wasteful. Principles of fair chase are frequently disregarded, with participants using bait and electronic distress calls of wounded young to draw animals in. The events themselves leave an untold number of young in severe distress: After their parents are killed, the orphaned juveniles are left to die from thirst, starvation, predation, or exposure. Investigative video footage has shown contest participants joking about the methods used to lure and kill the animals, and laughing and posing for photos in front of piles of dead animals. Afterwards, away from public view, the carcasses of the animals are usually dumped. The entire undertaking demonstrates a complete lack of respect for wildlife, promotes gratuitous violence, and sends the irresponsible and disturbing message that wanton killing is both acceptable and fun. Numerous state agencies and officials have expressed concern that killing contests undermine the reputation of sportsmen and sportswomen and damage the tradition of hunting.

Second, the indiscriminate killing promoted by wildlife killing contests is counterproductive to effective, science-based wildlife management. Studies have shown that many wildlife populations depleted by unnatural means simply reproduce more quickly due to the sudden drop in competition for resources and changes to social structure from the loss of individuals. This effect is well documented, in particular, for populations of coyotes, the species most commonly targeted in contests. State wildlife management agencies across the country recognize that killing contests do not effectively control coyote population size.



Wildlife killing contests celebrate senseless slaughter and serve no legitimate wildlife management purpose. Clockwise from top: Foxes slain in a Maryland contest last year; bobcats killed during the 2020 West Texas Big Bobcat Contest in San Angelo; coyotes killed during a contest last year in Sullivan County, New York.



Furthermore, removing large numbers of coyotes from the landscape should not be a desired goal. Doing so negatively impacts the environment because coyotes are an integral part of healthy ecosystems. They consume carrion, remove sick animals from the gene pool, disperse seeds, protect ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores, help control disease transmission by keeping rodent populations in check, and increase the biological diversity of plant and wildlife communities.

Third, while contest proponents claim they are necessary to reduce human-wildlife conflicts, such contests may actually

increase conflicts with humans, pets, and livestock. Effective management of depredation requires targeting the offending individual and intervening in a timely manner close to the site where the depredations occurred. Killing contests do not represent the kind of targeted effort required for successful management of livestock depredations because they are not effective in removing individual, problem-causing animals. Moreover, indiscriminate killing of predators likely exacerbates risks to livestock because killing social carnivores disrupts their social groups and foraging strategies in ways that increase the number of transient individuals, who may be more likely to kill livestock. Additionally, as noted above, targeted coyote packs

# HELP US END WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS!

Please take action to help end wildlife killing contests. Here are some steps you can take:

- Call, send letters, and meet with your state legislators to encourage them to ban wildlife killing contests. Find their contact information here: [bit.ly/CIDirectory](http://bit.ly/CIDirectory)
- Call, send letters, and meet with your state's wildlife agency staff and wildlife commissioners to encourage them to ban wildlife killing contests. Find their contact information here: [bit.ly/CISStateAg](http://bit.ly/CISStateAg)
- Advocate bans on wildlife killing contests, including by politely urging event hosts and sponsors to stop supporting these events. Use this guide: [bit.ly/EndWK](http://bit.ly/EndWK)

- Encourage your city or county council to pass a resolution or an ordinance against wildlife killing contests. Use this guide: [bit.ly/WKCRresolution](http://bit.ly/WKCRresolution)
- Write a letter to the editor of your newspaper to raise awareness about killing contests and to encourage readers to express their opposition to the contests to their lawmakers. You can write your letter directly from this website: [bit.ly/CIndexLte](http://bit.ly/CIndexLte) (For letter-writing tips visit [bit.ly/LtEtips](http://bit.ly/LtEtips))
- Educate your family, neighbors, and friends about wildlife killing contests and what they can do to help end them. Post on social media and send them this informational postcard: [bit.ly/WKCinfo](http://bit.ly/WKCinfo)
- Host a virtual screening of the documentary *KILLING GAMES—Wildlife in the Crosshairs* and invite stakeholders to attend: [bit.ly/KGWCFilm](http://bit.ly/KGWCFilm)

often respond by producing more pups, and the need to feed a large litter has been found to be a significant motivation for coyotes to switch from killing small and medium-sized prey to killing sheep. Killing coyotes can also create ecological voids that may be filled by smaller predators with higher population numbers that may prey on farm animals.

Fourth, the best available science indicates that indiscriminately killing native carnivores is not an effective method for increasing game species abundance. In recognition of this science, many state commissions and agencies, including those in New York, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming, have concluded that reducing predator numbers will not enhance populations of ungulates, small game animals, and game birds. Rather, the most important management tool to increase most game species is to decrease the harvest of females, followed by protection of habitat.

Fortunately, these contests are in the crosshairs. AWI and other groups have joined forces to ban these horrific events at state and federal levels. AWI is a member of the steering committee of the National Coalition to End Wildlife Killing Contests, which advocates for humane wildlife management while raising public awareness about how contests disrupt ecosystems and promote animal cruelty. The coalition initiates and supports action to ban contests through legislation, litigation, and regulatory reform. Our ultimate goal is to end all such contests across the country.

To date, eight states have enacted bans on certain types of wildlife killing contests: California banned the awarding of prizes for killing furbearing and nongame mammals in 2014;

Vermont and New Mexico outlawed coyote killing contests in 2018 and 2019, respectively; Arizona and Massachusetts prohibited killing contests that target predator and furbearer species in late 2019; Colorado and Washington banned killing contests that target certain furbearers, predators, and small game animals in 2020; and Maryland outlawed killing contests targeting particular predators and other species without bag limits in 2021.

AWI has been actively engaged in many of these successful state efforts. We led the campaign to ban killing contests in Colorado by coauthoring a citizens' petition to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission proposing a ban, organizing a coalition of animal and environmental protection groups in the state, testifying before and submitting memoranda to the commission, and writing a coalition letter backing a ban. AWI supported successful efforts in Arizona, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Washington as well by submitting written testimony, creating educational materials, and engaging our members to take a stand against these contests. We continue to collaborate with other organizations on efforts currently underway to ban contests in Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, and Virginia. At the federal level, AWI is working with other groups to develop legislation that would ban contests that fall under federal jurisdiction.

It is abundantly clear that wildlife killing contests have no place in a civil society or in modern, science-based wildlife management. They turn wanton slaughter into sport and serve no legitimate wildlife management purpose—indeed, they are antithetical to the conservation ethic that is necessary to ensure the long-term protection of wildlife populations. It is time for such contests to be sidelined for good. 🐾

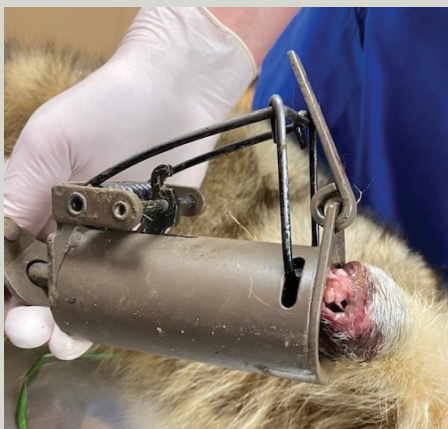


# “Dog-Proof” Traps Don’t Shield Animals from Suffering



How far had the raccoon traveled and how much suffering had the animal endured along the way? These questions were posed by those who came to the aid of a raccoon captured in a box trap in Williamson County, Tennessee, in March. Such an animal might normally have been released unharmed from this trap, but for *another*, far less benign trap firmly affixed to the raccoon’s right front leg. Evidently, this “dog-proof” trap had been pulled from the ground after it slammed shut on the raccoon’s leg, and the animal had dragged it along—potentially for days—before ending up in the box trap.

A local animal advocate immediately transported the raccoon to a veterinarian. An examination revealed that the leg had been nearly amputated by the dog-proof trap (shown below). There was also significant soft tissue damage to the animal’s head and neck,



weight loss, and an overall decline in physical condition. Due to the severity of the injuries, the raccoon was euthanized.

According to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), at least 647,400 raccoons were killed during the 2018–19 trapping season throughout the United States. (The data do not include statistics from 12 states, however, including Tennessee.) The vast majority were likely captured with conventional leghold traps, which are notoriously cruel—causing severe lacerations, broken bones, tendon and ligament injuries, and digit and limb amputations. Many of the others were likely captured in dog-proof traps, intended primarily to capture raccoons. Trapping raccoons with such devices is particularly cruel given their hypersensitive front paws.

Conventional leghold traps have a plate in the middle surrounded by spring-loaded jaws. A dog-proof trap often features a metal tube. When an animal tries to retrieve bait from inside the tube, their paw inadvertently pulls up on a lever, triggering a spring-loaded bar to slam against the limb, pinning it inside the tube. While such traps reduce the risk of capturing some nontarget species (e.g., ungulates, raptors, larger mammals), any animal with a dexterous

paw that is small enough to access the tube can fall victim to these traps. Indeed, images on the internet show raccoons, opossums, skunks, and foxes caught in these traps. Feral and domestic house cats are also vulnerable.

A recently published study in the journal *Wildlife Monographs* concluded that six of nine dog-proof traps tested met the criteria used to assess the traps’ humaneness. This criteria and the underlying testing program is intended to satisfy international “humane” trapping standards, so US, Canadian, and Russian trappers can send pelts and fur products to Europe. However, the testing involves questionable methodologies and woefully inadequate animal welfare criteria. Plus, there is no actual requirement that states mandate use of traps that satisfy the criteria.

The AFWA, trappers, and state and provincial fish and wildlife agencies may rely on self-serving criteria to assert that dog-proof traps are humane. But it is clear that the raccoon in Tennessee suffered immensely after encountering one—suffering that ended only through the compassionate actions of individuals involved in the animal’s rescue and euthanasia. 🐾

# An Island of Misfit Tortoises: Providing Sanctuary for Waif Gopher Tortoises While Recovering Wild Populations

by Tracey Tuberville and Rebecca McKee, University of Georgia

Due to many anthropogenic threats, the gopher tortoise is declining throughout its range in the southeastern United States. Translocation—the movement of animals from one location to another—has become an increasingly important tool for mitigating impacts of development and augmenting depleted populations. Although there are risks associated with translocation, waif tortoises (animals that have been injured, collected illegally, or have unknown origins) are generally excluded from translocations due to heightened concerns of introducing diseases into recipient populations. If risks associated with waif translocation to wild habitats could be managed, translocation could provide a preferable alternative to the current fate of many waif tortoises: euthanasia or a lifetime (which can exceed 60 years) in captivity, while also helping to stabilize wild populations in severe decline. In collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and through support from an AWI Christine Stevens Wildlife Award, we evaluated the survivorship, health, and site fidelity (the tendency to remain in the same area) of released waifs to better understand their role in tortoise conservation and the extent to which formerly captive tortoises are suitable for release into the wild.

Over 280 gopher tortoises had been released on a South Carolina preserve between 2006 and 2018 using soft-release (acclimation) pens to encourage site fidelity (by restricting their movements as they become familiar with the release site). Based on individuals documented in 2017 and 2018, adult annual survivorship of released waif tortoises was 90–96 percent, which is within the range of values reported for wild translocated tortoises and wild tortoises in natural populations. As expected based on the ecology of the species, annual

survival of juveniles was lower, but there are few estimates from wild populations with which to compare our data.

Based on the locations where individuals were detected in 2017 and 2018 in comparison to their original release location, we were able to calculate dispersal distances as a measure of site fidelity. We found that waif tortoises, including some released more than a decade prior to our monitoring effort, exhibited remarkable fidelity to their release location. Most individuals detected across the preserve were found within 200–400 meters ( $\frac{1}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{4}$  mile) of their original release location.

In regard to disease transmission, after screening for a suite of pathogens common in either captive or free-ranging populations of turtles, we only detected two closely related bacterial pathogens (*Mycoplasma agassizii* and *M. testudineum*), which occurred in approximately 10 percent of tortoises. Both pathogens have been documented in wild populations of gopher tortoises throughout the species' range, with wide variation of prevalence among populations. We did not detect any pathogens typically associated with non-native tortoise species.

Collectively, the survivorship, site fidelity, and health data obtained from 2017–2018 monitoring data reveal that waif gopher tortoises fare well after release into the wild, offering a humane alternative to life-long captivity or euthanasia, while also contributing to meaningful species conservation efforts.

However, because of the potential inherent risks for pathogen transfer, we recommend exercising caution by only using waifs to rebuild small populations that are spatially isolated from other naturally occurring populations. 🐢





## AWI PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL TAR CLEANUP

In February, in what is being described as one of the worst ecological disasters in Israel's history, a massive oil spill in the Mediterranean Sea caused hundreds of tons of tar to wash ashore along approximately 118 miles of the Israeli coastline and into southern Lebanon. The culprit is believed to be an as-yet-unidentified ship carrying oil from Iran to Syria.

The tar has had a devastating impact on the fragile marine ecosystem, covering the beaches and rocky shoreline, coating turtles and birds, and killing fish and other marine life. Immediate efforts were undertaken to stem the damage, with thousands of local volunteers participating in beach cleanups and rescuing thousands of turtles, birds, and other affected animals.

The Israel Nature and Heritage Foundation of America (INHFA) stepped up to provide support and established a dedicated website to

provide information and seek help with the disaster and remediation ([inhfa.org/joining-forces-to-save-israels-coastline](http://inhfa.org/joining-forces-to-save-israels-coastline)). In response to the plea from INHFA, AWI provided an emergency grant to the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. Our contribution was used for essentials, including cleaning equipment for volunteers (e.g., coveralls, rakes, and shovels) and supplies to aid in the rehabilitation of rescued sea turtles.

The rapid and organized response helped alleviate some of the devastation. By the end of March, most Israeli beaches had reopened, though residue remained in the water, and significant quantities of oil and tar are believed to remain in rocky areas and less accessible parts of the coastline. The ultimate environmental cost of the incident will only be known over time. Monitoring, evaluation, and research throughout the coast and affected marine ecosystems continue. It is hoped that measures will be taken to help ensure such an environmental catastrophe doesn't happen again.

*In February, an oil spill in the Mediterranean resulted in the tarring of over a hundred miles of Israeli and Lebanese coastline. The catastrophe had severe impacts on turtles and other marine life.*

## SHIP STRIKE FELS MOTHER AND CALF FIN WHALES

In May, two dead fin whales, believed to be a mother and calf, were discovered after they dislodged from the hull of a Royal Australian Navy vessel. The destroyer, HMAS *Sydney*, had been conducting exercises with the US Navy and was berthing in San Diego when the 65-foot-long larger whale floated to the surface. The smaller animal, measuring 25 feet, was found shortly after. Both navies and the US National Marine Fisheries Service are investigating the incident as a ship strike. Fin whales—especially a mother-calf pair—are relatively slow moving, and it is hard for them to avoid a large, fast moving ship.

Sadly, this was not an isolated incident. Strikes by ships—particularly large cargo ships—are one of the main human causes of death for large whales. In April, four gray whales washed ashore over an eight-day period in the San Francisco Bay area. Two were determined to be victims of ship strikes; the cause of the remaining two deaths are under investigation. And in Chile in April, ship strikes caused the deaths of a Brydes, humpback, and blue whale, prompting scientists there to raise the alarm.

This global problem has the attention of several international bodies, including the International Whaling Commission, which has an active ship-strike working group that is quantifying incidents and working with the International Maritime Organization and other entities to reduce them.

# “VIRTUAL” STANDSTILL AT CARIBBEAN CONSERVATION MEETING


**I**n March and April, AWI marine animal program director Susan Millward and consultant Courtney Vail participated in the ninth meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee to the United Nations Environment Programme’s Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean (SPAW). COVID precautions meant the normally three-day meeting was held virtually and spread out over five days. The inability to meet face to face at this usually harmonious meeting, along with technical difficulties and connectivity issues (including for the meeting chair during the March sessions), led to a series of rather disjointed and unusually contentious sessions. Despite a heavy agenda, relatively little ended up being achieved even after several preparatory meetings were held. The parties were forced to extend the meeting into April, mainly because so much time was taken up discussing process, resolving connectivity issues, and ensuring that all participants could hear the appropriate interpreters.

AWI has been to many of these meetings over the years; typically, they involve presentations on topics and proposals, discussions, negotiations, and ultimately agreement, sometimes after long encounters outside the scheduled proceedings—during coffee breaks, lunch gatherings, evening events, and in the corridors outside meeting rooms. This meeting—dysfunctional, argumentative, confusing, and inefficient—clearly showed how important those informal face-to-face encounters are for civil and productive debate.

With no consensus, the committee postponed key agenda items—such as decisions regarding the listing of several species of shark and parrotfish on SPAW appendices (denoting protection status). Preparation for these discussions had gone on for months, so it was very disheartening when the meeting did not even get to the crux of the issues at hand. The United States, unfortunately, was instrumental in preventing consensus on whether to even discuss the species listing proposals. It argued that the correct procedures had not been followed, and even after a UNEP lawyer was called in to help move things along by providing legal advice, the difference of opinion regarding treaty interpretation was not resolved. Eventually, the listing proposals were tabled for a later meeting. In advocating the deferment, the United States argued that individual parties should simply implement their own domestic protections for the affected species in the interim, but this stance clearly undermines the treaty, in addition to wasting a great deal of time.

Nevertheless, there were positive notes: A marine protected area proposed by and located in the Dominican Republic received support. And one of AWI’s main goals for the meeting—to garner support for the creation of the first marine mammal Regional Activity Network in the Wider Caribbean—was also successful. Proposed by the Netherlands Antilles and supported by a technical paper co-authored by Courtney, this network would provide for better communication and collaboration among those working on marine mammal protection across the Caribbean. It would also ensure proper resourcing for vital research into the status of the dozens of marine mammal species in the region, as well as mitigate the many threats they face, ranging from directed hunts to entanglement and ocean noise. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee meeting’s recommendations will be put forward at the meeting of the SPAW contracting parties, scheduled (again, virtually) for July. 🐾





# Dubious Ocean Noise Study Seeks to Corral Wild Whales

AWI has been collaborating with Norway's largest animal welfare group, NOAH, and Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) to oppose a dangerous experiment on wild minke whales that was to begin in late spring, last several weeks, and continue next year. The plan calls for researchers from the United States and Norway to capture up to 12 whales off Vestvågøy in the Lofoten area of northern Norway in order to study how their brains respond to ocean noise.

AWI requested information from the Norwegian government and learned that the researchers planned to set nets extending almost a mile across a passageway between islands to herd migrating juvenile minke whales into an enclosure, trapping them inside. The researchers would then attempt to move these whales into a modified aquaculture cage, which would be secured between two rafts. Once a whale is in the cage, the researchers would engage in "auditory evoked potential" testing, whereby electrodes are attached to the neck of the whale. Sounds would be introduced to test if the electrodes pick up the signals, which the researchers claim

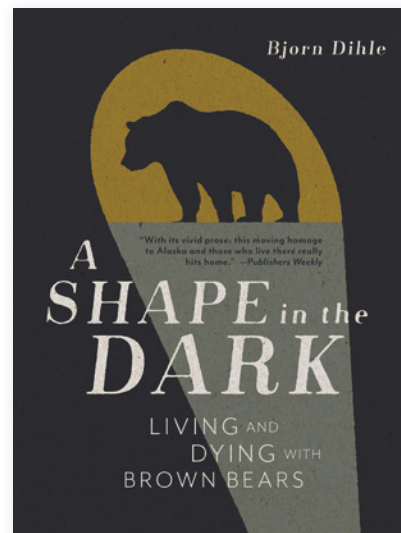
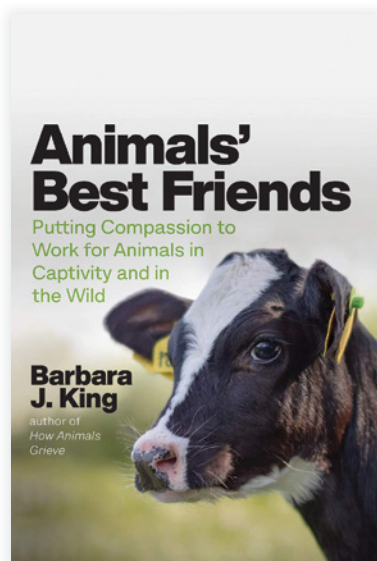
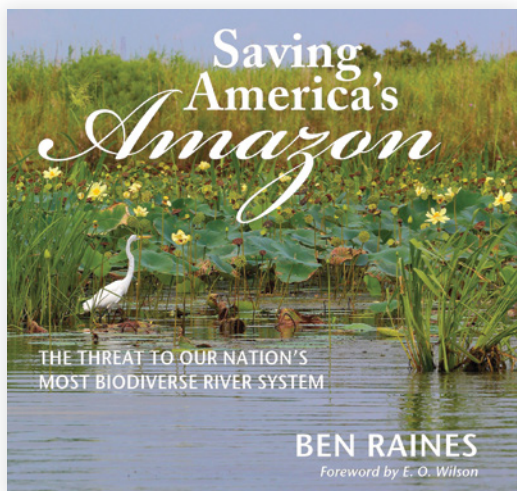
will indicate if the whale's ear has detected the sound. The whales' brain waves would be measured in order to determine how they might react to naval sonar and noise from oil and gas exploration. Whales could be held captive for as long as four days before being released.

This experiment is disturbing because of the stress likely to be inflicted on the whales. If a minke whale, even a juvenile, were to respond with great force in a panicked attempt to flee, it could injure not only the whale but also the human researchers, particularly those in the water.

The researchers have proposed using sedatives to calm whales who display signs of stress and even stunning them in an emergency. Little is known about sedating or stunning wild cetaceans, but available data show that sedation of baleen whales could put their lives at risk. (Presumably, sedation would also add an unwanted variable to the study.) There have been incidents in which minke whales became trapped in aquaculture pens and had to be euthanized. In 2009, for example, a small minke whale broke through a cod

pen in Karivika, Norway. The trapped animal was characterized by witnesses as "raging wild" and was eventually shot before being removed from the pen by crane. The methodology of the Lofoten experiments will involve tagging the whales in an effort to assess, at least temporarily, the study's effect on the whales' health.

AWI, NOAH, and WDC have written to Mattilsynet, the Norwegian Food Safety Authority, urging the agency to revoke its approval of this unwarranted experiment. The three groups have rallied supporters in opposition to the project, which has received attention in Norwegian and international media. AWI has also written to the US government, admonishing the US Navy and National Marine Fisheries Service for providing funding for this research. Other branches of the US government, as well as the oil and gas industry, are also funding the project. AWI and the other humane groups contend that existing research already tells us how baleen whales are affected by ocean noise, and this body of science should be enough for humans to understand that we must curtail the levels of sound we introduce into the sea. 🐋



## SAVING AMERICA'S AMAZON

Ben Raines / NewSouth Books / 200 pages

Alabama is known for many things, including beautiful Gulf Coast beaches, the US Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, steel, peanuts, the music of Muscle Shoals, and college football. It is also home to one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world. In *Saving America's Amazon: The Threat to Our Nation's Most Biodiverse River System*, author Ben Raines—who has covered Alabama and the Gulf Coast region for 20 years as an environmental reporter—weaves a story about the geology, history, ecology, and destruction of the Mobile River Basin, a 44,000-square-mile collection of hardwood forest, cypress swamps, wetlands, and grasslands that provide habitat to an abundance of birds, insects, amphibians, mammals, and other reptiles and invertebrates, including new species identified every year.

The ecological complexity of the region provides a foundation for the system's remarkable diversity. The basin's 450 species of freshwater fish represent approximately a third of all species found in the United States. Eighteen turtle species are in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta—a greater number than in any

other delta globally. More oak species adorn a single hillside on the banks of the Alabama River than anywhere else in the world. This diversity, however, has not prevented the basin's ongoing destruction via dams; industrial, agricultural, and residential pollution; insufficient regulation of Alabama's timber industry; and wholly inadequate environmental protection laws. As a result, more species extinctions have been documented in the basin than anywhere else in the continental United States, and hundreds more species are threatened with extinction.

Through eloquent prose and exceptional photography, Raines makes the case for protection of this region “before it falls to ruin, one species, one acre, one stream at a time.” The key, according to Raines, is to “protect the edges”—where the water meets the land and where biodiversity is at its peak—from the toxic runoff, trash, and mud from eroded soil that is devastating the basin and its delta. To do this, Alabama's environmental protection laws must be strengthened and the agencies responsible for the enforcement of those laws must be given the political green light to take on the entities responsible for killing the ecosystem through a thousand cuts. America's Amazon deserves no less.

## ANIMALS' BEST FRIENDS

Barbara J. King / University of Chicago Press / 280 pages

*Animals' Best Friends: Putting Compassion to Work for Animals in Captivity and in the Wild*, by Barbara King, uses the power of storytelling to allow readers to peer into the lives of countless animals humans interact with or impact in one way or another. Through these stories, King challenges the reader to rethink our effect on animals in our homes, in the wild, in captivity, in agriculture, and in research labs, and presents a powerful call for compassionate action in our daily lives.

King chooses to highlight the extraordinary behaviors and capabilities of creatures that don't initially come to mind in various settings. For instance, when discussing animals in the home, she takes us into the world of spiders. She begins her chapter on "animals on our plates" with an enthralling look into the lives of European rabbits.

King does an admirable job of balancing some of the competing arguments for or against different interactions with animals that society often struggles with—whether it is hunting, keeping animals in zoos, or allowing pet cats outdoors. But she isn't afraid to draw the line when it comes to some of the more appalling practices to which animals are all too often subjected.

Notably, this book examines a reaction so many experience when faced with unpleasant emotions, especially in response to animal suffering: We shut down and insist on not knowing, whether it is to spare us the pain of coming to terms with how our actions and the actions of other humans inflict so much suffering, or to relieve us of the guilt we may feel from not being able or willing to intervene. But King's eloquently told stories all lead to the same conclusion: We cannot simply turn away. There is so much that can be done to alleviate animal suffering and it starts with taking compassionate action, whether it is supporting animal welfare organizations, demanding policy change from our elected officials, or simply skipping the breakfast bacon.

## A SHAPE IN THE DARK

Bjorn Dihle / Mountaineers Books / 203 pages

From Lewis and Clark shooting the first ones they encountered, to sport hunters today killing hundreds in Alaska each year, humans have long persecuted North America's brown (a.k.a. grizzly) bears. The bears, often acting in self-defense, have also occasionally attacked humans. *A Shape in the Dark: Living and Dying with Brown Bears* recounts

some of these violent and tragic events, while weaving in the author's own close encounters with, and complex feelings toward, these powerful yet vulnerable animals.

Dihle, a wildlife-viewing guide, grew up in Southeast Alaska, hunting, fishing, and admiring the "mountain men" who were some of the first Europeans to explore the West and encounter (and kill) grizzlies. "I, too," he writes, "wanted to match myself against bears and mountains." Later, Dihle begins exploring remote areas of southeastern and interior Alaska, hiking or paddling for days or weeks on end, frequently encountering brown bears. He develops a fascination with the animals and describes the joy, fear, awe, and wonder he experiences in bear country, while reflecting on the cruel devastation that European explorers, settlers, miners, ranchers, entertainers, market hunters, and trappers—including the heroes of his youth—historically wrought on the species.

Dihle's own views toward brown bears are complicated and unclear—perhaps even to himself. He considers them magnificent beings whose existence and habitat should be conserved; yet, he does not seem to oppose Alaska's bear hunting industry and sometimes wonders what it would be like to shoot a bear himself. While exploring, he often thanks bears for not attacking him and apologizes for intruding into their territory; yet, he returns again and again, and carries a handgun for defense (despite research from Alaska—not mentioned in the book—indicating that bear spray is safer and more effective).

*A Shape in the Dark* is a haunting exploration of the history of human hostility toward brown bears, of the coexistence possible when we leave bears and their habitat alone, and what can happen when we needlessly get too close.

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### Bequests

If you would like to help assure AWI'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, DC, 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.



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PIETERNELLA BUSINK

## USDA TO MAKE SLAUGHTER RECORDS AVAILABLE TO PUBLIC

Due to AWI's efforts, thousands of records about the treatment of animals at slaughter are now publicly available on the US Department of Agriculture's website. The documents include records related to enforcement of the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act that expose inhumane treatment of animals at slaughter facilities across the country.

In the past, AWI and others have had to request such records from government officials, relying on rights granted under the Freedom of Information Act. But responses to requests are not always timely, and the information is not disseminated to the broader public without further publicity by the entity making the request. Now, anyone can access this information at any time.

AWI uses these records to conduct some of our key campaign work about the treatment of animals at slaughter. Through them, we have discerned that much of the suffering experienced by cows and pigs at slaughter could easily be remedied with proper training and practices (e.g., performing

routine maintenance on stunning devices). We have analyzed and publicized the information gleaned from the records in several reports and used it to petition the USDA to update its slaughter regulations.

The records we've obtained have also revealed inhumane handling of birds at slaughter facilities, sometimes resulting in death other than by slaughter, such as by asphyxiation, blunt force trauma, or exposure to extreme heat or cold. Fatalities that result from mishandling can render the carcasses "adulterated" and cause them to be condemned. AWI is currently suing the USDA for denying our petition asking it to create regulations to require humane handling of birds, which would prevent such adulteration.

The public availability of this information is a tremendous boon to AWI's work to end the suffering of farm animals at slaughter. We are encouraged that the USDA has posted these records and provided a clearer window into an often unseen but extremely important aspect of food production. 🐾