

Landmark legal ruling

In recent years, a series of high-level legal challenges have been heard in courts around the world, aimed at establishing 'personhood' rights for oppressed animals. A recent significant advance occurred in Argentina. It concerned a person named Sandra. She was born in Germany but had been held captive in Buenos Aires for two decades. Sandra is an orangutan. In a landmark ruling in December 2014, that could pave the way for more cases, lawyers successfully argued that Sandra had complex cognitive functions and should be treated as a person, not an object. The lawyer who led the case concluded: 'This opens the way, not only for other Great Apes, but also for other sentient beings who are unfairly and arbitrarily deprived of their liberty in zoos, circuses, water parks and scientific laboratories.'

Human rights and animal rights

Similar excuses to those given for treating animals badly were once used to defend the exploitation of vulnerable people. Children were forced to work in mines and as chimney sweeps until society decided that it was unacceptable. Women were not allowed to vote in elections until, after years of campaigning, their rights were recognised. Slaves suffered abuse, humiliation and cruelty and were worked to the point of collapse, even death. Their 'owners' argued that the slaves didn't deserve justice or equality because they were of an 'inferior' race. It is not far-fetched to compare their fate with that of animals today. Alice Walker, the Pulitzer Prize-winning African-American writer, said: 'Animals of the world exist for their own reason. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for whites or women for men.'

A favourite theme of those who oppose extending rights to non-humans is that animals are not part of a 'moral community'. They are undeserving of rights, it is said, because they have no duties or responsibilities.



Those who make such arguments clearly have much to learn about the richness of animal culture – of animals' powerful social bonds, their capacity for grief and pleasure, their ability to think strategically and work co-operatively. The magpie feels no duty towards a gamekeeper, but then why should he? The gamekeeper wants him dead.

What rights do animals need?

Animals do not need the same rights as people. The right to vote in elections would be useless to a parrot! The rights that should be accorded non-human animals are the rights not to be killed by people – except in their self-defence or to end

severe suffering that would otherwise continue. Freedom from torture and exploitation are other basic rights that should be extended to all those species, which on the balance of the evidence, are sentient. We do not believe it is the job of humans to judge and police other species as to their dealings with one another or their interactions with the natural world. Our attempts to do so (e.g. by the mass culling of 'invasive' or 'alien' species) have, in any case, invariably ended up a bloody failure. Furthermore, while some animals kill others in order to survive, we don't need to. And there is no other species that has our capacity for grandly choreographed, industrialised destruction.



ABOUT ANIMAL AID

Animal Aid is the UK's largest animal rights group and one of the longest established in the world, having been founded in 1977.

We campaign peacefully against all forms of animal abuse and promote cruelty-free living. We investigate and expose animal cruelty, and our undercover investigations and other evidence

are often used by the media, bringing these issues to public attention.

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Why Animal Rights?



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front cover



Animals and us

Defending animals does not mean caring about them more than about people. It's about protecting other species from cruelty and unfair treatment, and not causing them any harm.

The movement for animal rights is another chapter in the history of social progress movements that

has included the abolition of human slavery and the enfranchisement of women and the 'lower orders'.

Practical steps everyone can take include cutting out animal products from your diet; buying clothing and footwear that use non-animal alternatives to leather and wool; avoiding products that have been tested on animals; boycotting zoos and circuses with animals; as well as rejecting exploitative 'sports' such as horse and dog racing.

Animals as property

Even though they are deserving of them, non-human animals have precious few rights. In law, they are property. There are certain rules about how we may exploit, kill and consume animals. But protection stops at the point where we, the exploiting species, are seriously inconvenienced or deprived of profit or pleasure. More than a billion animals every year in Britain alone, and that's not including fish, are unwarranted victims of human commerce and culture.



The modern animal rights movement is determined to address this situation and demonstrate that, just as commercial, cultural and intellectual life thrived in Britain after we gave up trading in human slaves, so there is a positive future without exploiting animals.

Animal Aid promotes ways of living that reject using or consuming the flesh, milk, eggs and skins of animals. We oppose the trade in 'pets' (please give a home to a sanctuary animal instead!) and oppose leisure pursuits that depend on chasing, bullying,



demeaning and killing other species. While it is impossible in this imperfect world to live a perfect life, we believe that the first principle should be: do as little harm as possible.

Today, it is recognised that animals, just like people, experience happiness, sadness, fear, physical pain,

anger and boredom. We know that they usually enjoy the company of their own kind; that there is a close bond between mothers and their young; that young animals enjoy and learn from play; and that they develop friendships. In short, they have needs, just like people.

The Cambridge Declaration

Even animals who are believed to have developed along very different evolutionary paths from humans and other primates are 'conscious' in the same way as we are. This is the view of an international group of prominent scientists who, in August 2012, signed The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness. Included in their list of animals who can be said to be very much aware of their surroundings and who make their own decisions, are all mammals and birds, as well as cephalopods such as octopuses. Animals, according to the Declaration, are conscious beings, capable of forming abstract thoughts, understanding cause and effect, exhibiting long term memory and, critically, are capable of feeling anxiety, pain and fear, just as humans do.

Yelp and cower

Have you ever heard of an animal who could be cut by a knife or burnt by a flame and not feel it? If you kick dogs, they will yelp and cower. If you tread on cats' tails, they'll meow and run off. Whether in your home, on a farm, in a laboratory, or in the wild, animals

experience pain and fear and will try to protect themselves from being hurt. This is as true of fish as it is of people. Even where we cannot be certain that animals experience pain – for example, in the case of worms or insects – we should give them the benefit of the doubt and



not cause deliberate harm.

Intelligence is a separate matter. When it comes to measuring animal intelligence, human bias invariably comes into play. Species are more highly rated when they can perform mental and physical tasks that our own species regards as impressive. When they excel at feats that we cannot possibly match – for instance, an orangutan swinging through the trees, or a dog sniffing out a bone 100 yards away – we dismiss this as mere instinct.

Capacity to feel

Besides, deciding how to treat other creatures on the grounds of their intelligence

has to be wrong. It is their capacity to feel that is paramount. The same applies to people: the right of human beings to be protected from cruel treatment shouldn't depend on their intellectual abilities – or else that would leave babies and mentally impaired adults open to authorised abuse.

Rights and welfare

Supporters of animal welfare believe that it is OK to use animals, as long as their suffering is kept to a minimum. The difference between this position and that of animal rights has been summed up like this: animal welfare people are campaigning for bigger cages; animal rights people are campaigning for an end to cages and all exploitation.

