

## J. SCOTT CHRISTIANSON

### Animal rights activists don't work for the environment



One common misperception about people who are concerned about the environment is that they are also animal rights activists. This is not necessarily true. In fact, the goals of animal rights activists are very different from goals of most environmentalists and conservationists.

Animal rights supporters believe that animals have the same rights as humans. Ingrid Newkirk, co-founder of the animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), explained the movement's basic philosophy: "A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy. They're all mammals." With all mammals being equal, humans do not have the "right" to use animals in any way: not for pets, food, research, clothing, etc. The main goal of the animal rights movement is to eliminate the killing and use of animals by humans.

The movement's zealous belief that individual animals have rights has hurt serious conservation efforts and hindered the recovery of endangered species.

For example, goats that were introduced to San Clemente Island, Calif., have wreaked havoc on the ecosystem; 48 species of flora have been eliminated from the island, and several others are now endangered. Professional biologist and Sierra Club member William Mautz has proposed shooting the goats for the good of the ecosystem. However, the Fund for Animals has responded by conducting protests and filing lawsuits against such action. Meanwhile, the goats are eating rare plants into extinction!

This situation illustrates a basic difference between environmentalists and animal rightists. Environmentalists and conservationists are concerned with the health of entire ecosystems, whereas animal rightists are concerned with the rights of individual animals.

In a related situation, scientists at the University of California at Davis used turkey vultures to study the effects of dioxins in order to help the recovery of the endangered California condor. This laboratory was vandalized, and the turkey vultures were stolen. A note left by the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) — the only domestic organization on the FBI's terrorist list — declared "No more sacrifices!"

Animal research is not only critical to developing methods to treat animals exposed to deadly chemicals, but also to document the effects of toxins so that legislators will enact laws and regulations to prevent the release of harmful chemicals into the environment.

Both PETA and ALF claim that they are saving endangered chimpanzees by opposing medical research that uses chimps. Animal rights literature implies that medical researchers are one of the main threats to chimpanzees' existence in the wild. In reality, the biggest danger to chimpanzees is loss of habitat. (All animals, chimps included, that are used in biomedical research are raised in colonies and cared for according to strict guidelines.)

Unfortunately, an emotional plea from PETA with pictures of dead animals and misinformation about their use is more likely to get donations than is an explanation of habitat destruction and the loss of biodiversity from the World Wildlife Fund.

Animal rights is simply not an environmental issue. Doug Inkley, a lobbyist for the National Wildlife Federations, points out that "the animal rights movement is trying to ride on the coattails of the conservation movement, which is well supported

by the American public."

The goals of the animal rights movement and those of the conservation movement are often confused because both groups sometimes encourage the same practices, but for different reasons.

Environmentalists might promote vegetarianism because of the ecological damage done by cattle raising (soil erosion, desertification, stream pollution), while animal rightists seek to prevent cattle from being killed and used by people.

Because of this confusion, much of the money that would go to conservation efforts is diverted to the animal rights movement. Environmental writer Margaret Knox notes that "the money going to animal rights is being diverted from those groups whose goals are most easily confused with animal rights: the environmentalists ... In their scramble for hearts, minds and solvency, animal rights groups are borrowing both the issue and the respectability of classic environmentalism."

The premise of the animal rights movement is wrong. Animals do not have rights. Humans have rights and have the responsibility to treat animals in a humane and ethical manner.

Animal welfare organizations work for the responsible use of animals. These organizations, which include the National Foundation for Biomedical Research and the local Coalition For Animals and Animal Research (CFAAR), lobby for the humane treatment of animals used for food, clothing, medical research and teaching. For more information on the animal welfare movement, write to Richard Fish, CFAAR, M144 Medical Science Building, Columbia, Mo., 65212.

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