

Connections between conservation and animal welfare: an international interdisciplinary approach

Kate Littin, Senior Adviser Animal Welfare, NZ Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, kate.littin@maf.govt.nz (co-authors Fiona Mathews, School of Biosciences, University of Exeter, United Kingdom and Cheryl O'Connor, NZ Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry)

Rehabilitation of injured wildlife. Captive breeding. Translocation. Invasive species management. Urban wildlife control. Habitat management. Controlled burning. Disease control. Culling. Reproductive control. These procedures, and more, are conducted in the name of conservation around the world. They all have some impact on animal welfare. Has this impact been adequately considered? Or has it been intentionally ignored? Can conservation goals be met while still paying regard to animal welfare?

It may seem that animal welfarists and conservationists have different agendas and little in common. For conservationists, the welfare of an animal population might be seen as more important than the welfare of the individual - which is what concerns animal welfarists. For conservationists, some animals are valued more highly than others - whereas for welfarists, if an animal can suffer it warrants concern regardless. But both share a general concern for animals. And both are concerned about the impacts of humans on animals. Can this act as a starting point for an agreed way forward?

A range of animal welfare, conservation, animal ethics and animal law experts discussed several areas of conflict at an international meeting in 2007. They came to this conclusion and developed a set of principles as a way of laying out the common ground :

- The welfare of all individual sentient wild animals is of equal moral concern. This does not necessarily mean that all sentient wild animals must be treated equally, but that their interests should be given equal consideration.
- Actions that affect animal welfare indirectly, as well as directly, are of moral concern.
- Actions that might adversely affect the welfare or conservation status of wild animals should not be undertaken without careful consideration of the necessity of the action.
- The severity and scale (in terms of the number of animals affected, and the duration of the harm with consideration for the lifespan of the animal) should be minimised.
- Actions with irreversible effects should be considered more serious than those with transient impacts.

In other words, good conservation can mean good animal welfare. People working in the field could do a lot worse than setting thoughts of differences aside and adapting principles like these for their own use. Even better, if scientists, regulators, conservationists and animal welfarists can somehow move forward together, divergence of goals need never be an impediment to progress in animal welfare or conservation.