



Wild Animal Ethics

- Recognition that wild animals also have moral standing
- Investigates how we should interact with wild animals
- A central problem: Wild Animal Suffering (WAS)

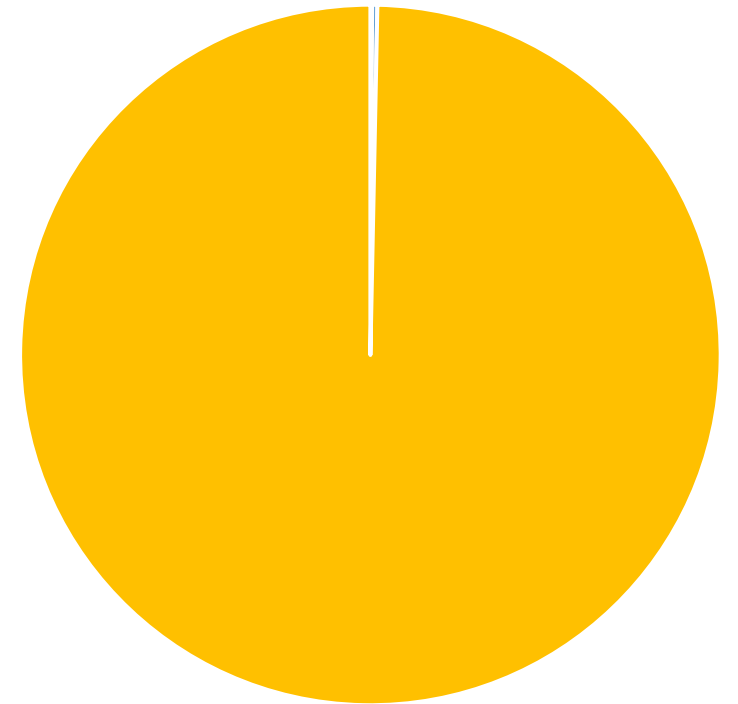
The image shows the silhouettes of a lion and a buffalo against a bright orange and yellow sunset sky. The lion is on the left, facing right, and the buffalo is on the right, facing left. The background is a gradient of warm colors, transitioning from dark at the top to bright at the bottom.

Lecture Plan

- (1) The situation of wild animals
- (2) A basic case for intervening in nature
- (3) Some objections to intervention
- (4) Proposals for intervention
- (5) Implications of WAS for spreading life

How many wild animals are there?

- There are 8 billion humans alive today...
- and 24 billion farmed land animals...
- and at least 10 trillion wild vertebrates
- Tomasik (2019) 'How many wild animals are there?'



■ Humans ■ Livestock ■ Wild Animals

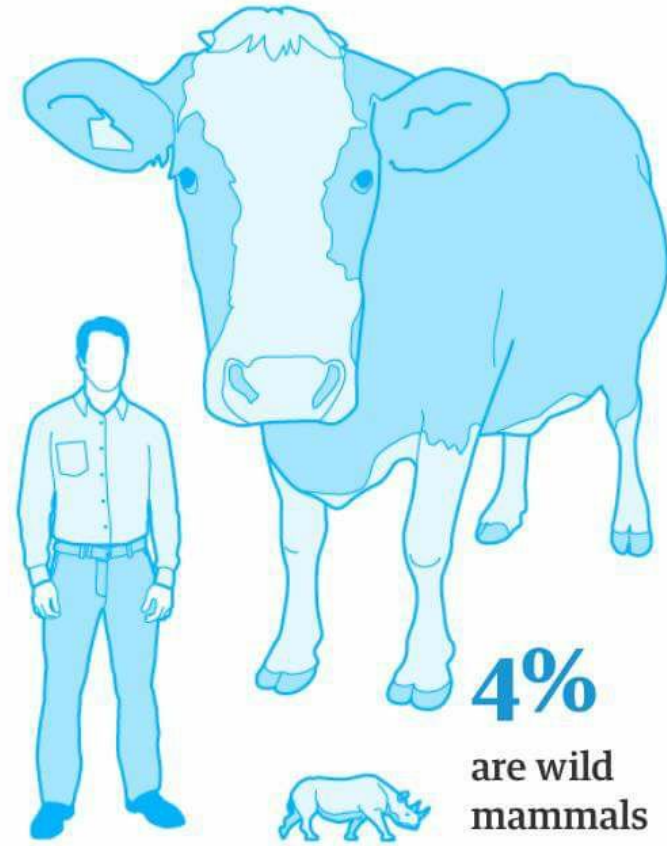
A common misconception

- Figures for the biomass (weight) of mammals, not the numbers of individuals.

Of all the mammals on Earth, 96% are livestock and humans, only 4% are wild mammals

60%
are livestock

36%
are humans



4%
are wild
mammals



Disease

Animal-ethics.org 'the situation of animals in the wild'



Parasites and parasitoids



Extreme weather conditions



Natural disasters

BBC News 'Australia's fires 'killed or harmed three billion animals'

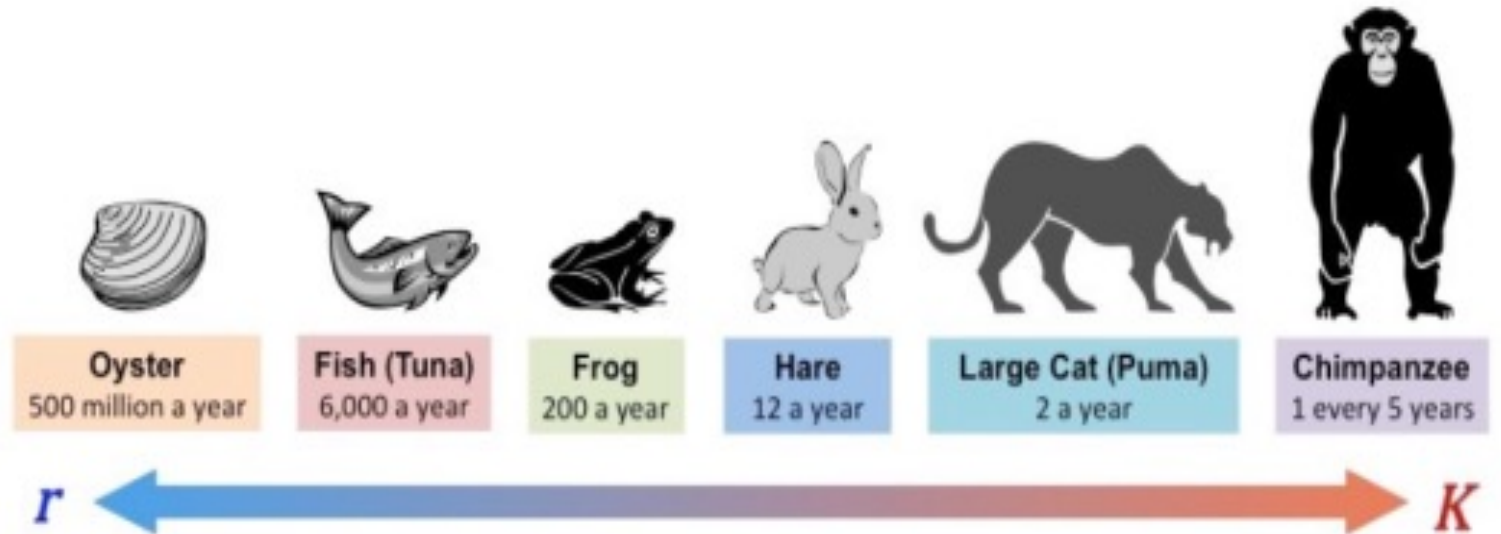


© Mercury Press & Media Ltd

Predation and intra/interspecific conflict

r/K selection strategies

- Most animals have very large numbers of children and invest little energy in them
- The vast majority die before reaching maturity



A basic case for intervention in nature

P1: A life that's filled with suffering and ends shortly after birth is not a flourishing one, and it may not be worth living

P2: Most r-Strategists live lives that are filled with suffering and end shortly after birth

P3: Most sentient individuals born into the world are r-Strategists

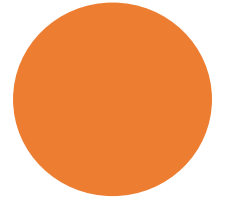
C: Most sentient individuals born into the world do not live flourishing lives, and their lives may not be worth living

Johannsen (2021, chapter 2)



A general duty to help others?

- Intuitive to think we have a duty to save others from great harm when we can do so at little cost, even if we aren't responsible for that harm
- What difference would it make if a baby animal were drowning?






Putting the argument together

P1 We have a general duty to help others in great need, when we can do so without too high a cost

P2 Most wild animals are in great need

P3 We can help them without too high a cost

C We have a general duty to help wild animals in great need

A lush, misty forest scene with a stream flowing through mossy rocks and tall, thin trees. The atmosphere is serene and natural, with sunlight filtering through the canopy.

Objection 1: Nature is Valuable

- Wild nature might have some special value which we diminish by intervening in natural processes?
- Perhaps we don't have a right to intervene in nature

2 senses of nature

Nature includes literally all phenomena

- Extremely broad definition
- Doesn't seem to give us any meaningful moral direction

Nature refers to that which exists without human agency

- Intuitive sense of nature (natural products, nature reserves etc.)
- Suggests implausibly that humans shouldn't try to do anything

Playing God

- We intervene in nature all the time for our own benefit (agriculture, mining, clearing land etc.). Why condemn only those interventions that are altruistically motivated?
- The deity seems either absent or silent, yet we still have to decide how to act in the face of suffering. “To the extent that these matters are up to anyone, they are up to us alone” McMahan (2010)



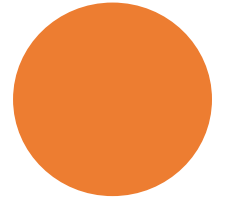
Objection 2: Relational Non- intervention

Positive duties to others arise only in the context of the relationships we have with them. So, though we have negative duties not to harm wild animals, since we have no morally relevant relationships with them, we have no positive duty to assist them. (Palmer, Milburn)



Responses

- Implausible implications for humans (natural disaster case)
- Extensive entanglement in animal lives both in the present and future (climate change etc.) and throughout history/prehistory

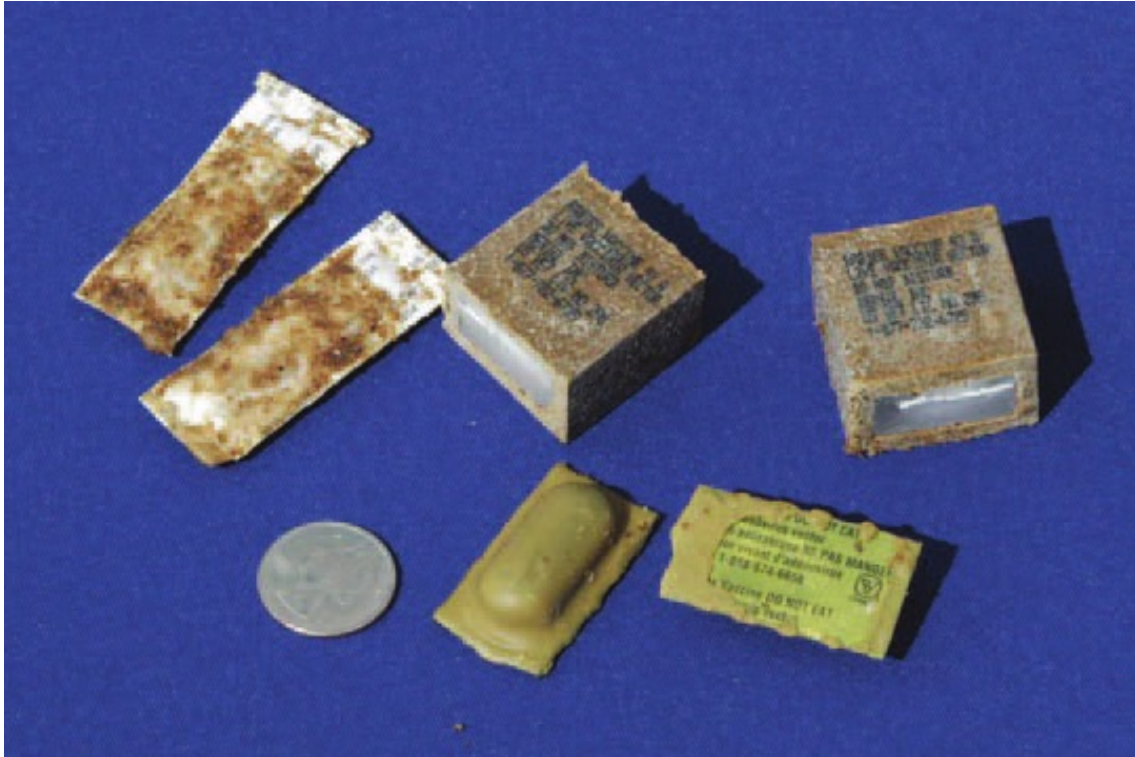




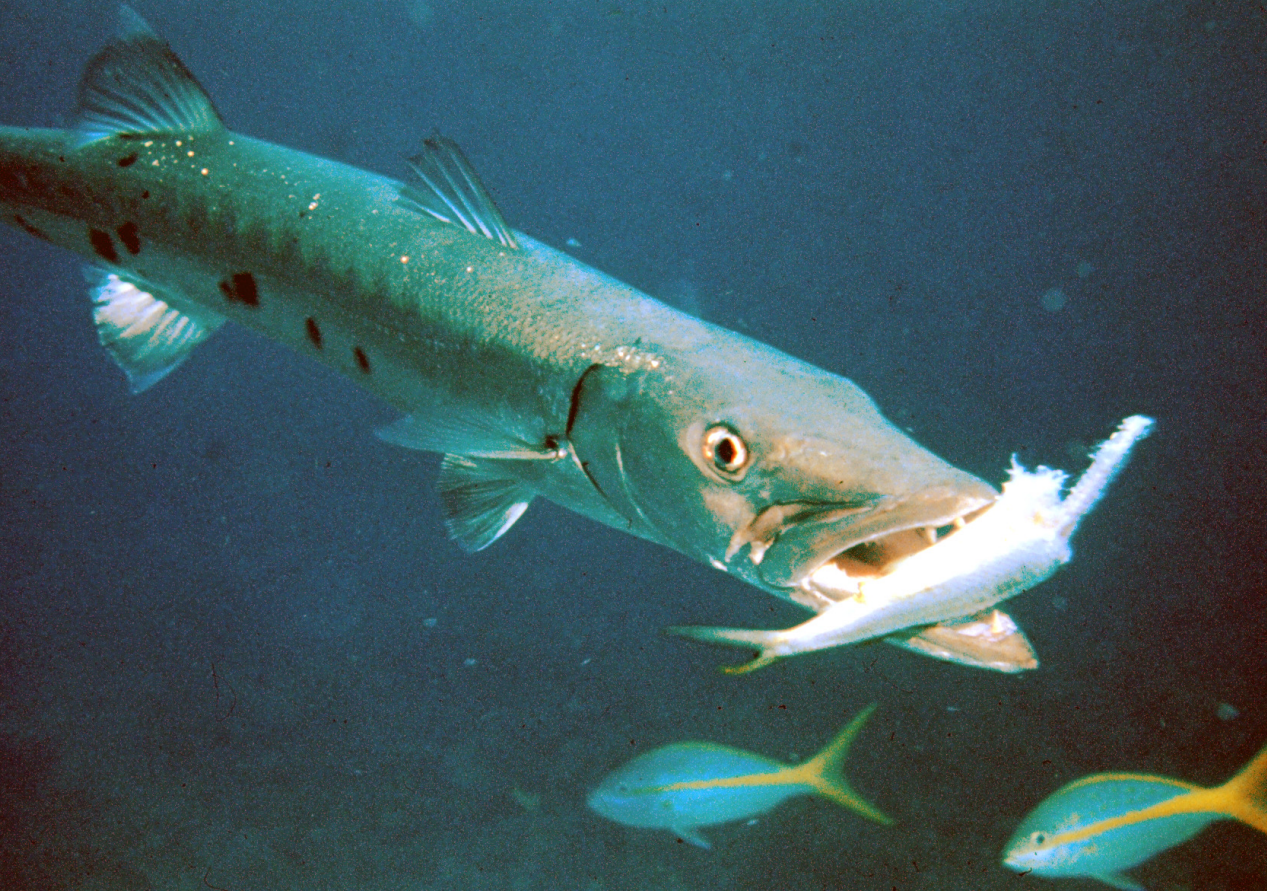
Rescuing animals



Helping the injured and orphaned



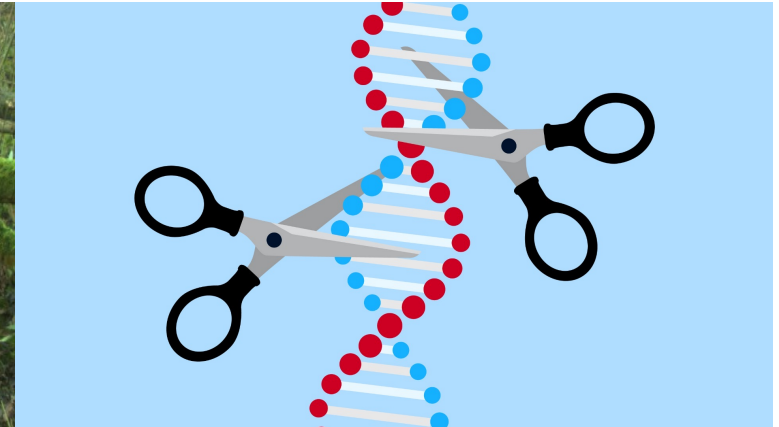
Vaccination programmes



More difficult problems: starvation and predation

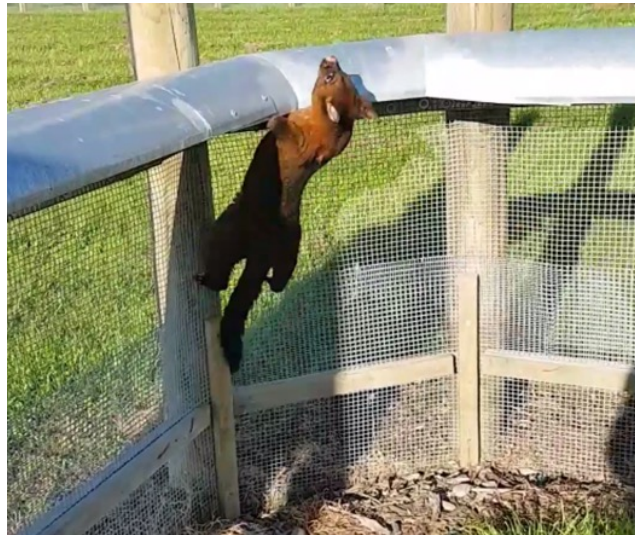
Possible Solutions 1: Starvation

- Food supplementation?
- Contraceptives?
- Gene editing?



Possible Solutions 2: Predation

- Eliminate predators?
- Separate predators from prey?
- Reprogram predators ?





Research welfare biology

Proposed interdisciplinary research field

Studies positive and negative wellbeing of sentient individuals in relation to their environment



Implications for spreading animal life

(1) Reintroducing predators

If we deliberately choose to (re)introduce predators to a new environment, do we thereby become responsible for the harms they inflict on other animals?

(2) Spreading life to other worlds

Directed panspermia is a means of spreading life throughout the galaxy by seeding suitable planets with microbial life, in the hope that the microbes will survive and eventually give rise to a complex biosphere.

Given the problems of WAS, would this be justifiable?

O'Brien (2022) 'Directed Panspermia, Wild Animal Suffering, and the Ethics of World Creation', JAP.

