

Animal Angle news for website:

### **The curious urge to kill rare animals**

I came across an old cutting about a white stag that had been glimpsed in Scotland several years ago. This was an exceedingly rare animal, perhaps even unique, and people were curious and excited. So were hunters, mainly from America. Requests poured in for permission to shoot this beautiful animal. The response in Scotland was to move the stag to a remote mountainous area, one hopes not where it would have been alone.

What is this dark urge in humanity that makes people desire to kill rare animals, as though this adds somehow to their own reputations? *National Geographic* recently published a detailed research article by Dina Fine Maron entitled “A rare animal is being killed to make \$20,000 dollar scarves”.

These scarves are made from the wool of the beautiful Tibetan antelope. Four antelopes are killed to make a single scarf called a shahtoosh, meaning “king of wools” in Persian. The wool is particularly soft and a whole shahtoosh can be pulled through a ring for the finger. It is internationally illegal to import or trade in the wool of the Tibetan antelope. This makes shahtooshes even more desirable, of course.

The species lives almost exclusively in the Changtang area of Tibet. China has imposed strict protective laws, and CITES has enforced strict protection measures from 1979. Nonetheless, smugglers send raw wool into India where skilled artisans in Kashmir weave the shahtooshes. Demand wiped out 90% of the antelopes during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From an estimated one million Tibetan antelopes the previous century, about 75,000 were left by the 1990s.

Weaving shahtooshes was made illegal in India in the 1970s, but the wool continues to be smuggled into the country. Demand comes mainly from Westerners.

Here in South Africa, we have canned lion hunting and the cruel breeding of lions on ‘lion farms’, where females are bred to exhaustion and then murdered, along with adult males, by hunters, mainly visitors, for fun. Lion bones are legally exported to the East because tigers have largely been killed off for their bones. Superstition rules.

**Note that the NSPCA is doing its utmost to get canned lion hunting and the export of lion bones banned.** Elephants, rhino and other large wild beasts are also victims of canned hunting.

### **WORLD OCEANS DAY – 8 JUNE**

The idea of a World Oceans Day was proposed by Canada in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and was celebrated unofficially. Then, in December 2008, the United Nations passed a resolution officially recognising World Oceans Day as a day that, all over the world, would focus on the environment of our oceans.

Last year, the day focused on raising global awareness of the damage being done to the oceans and to marine creatures by in the inflow of plastic to the oceans. During recent heavy rains in our province, exceptionally large amounts of plastic were carried into the sea from drains and rivers, much more than we would have thought possible and lethal for countless sea creatures. It is not only that larger creatures swallow plastic, mistaking it for food, but minutely small pieces of plastic

are swallowed by even small marine animals, ultimately leading to a high death rate. The bodies of baby turtles cast ashore by currents have been found to contain lethal amounts of plastic. It is now also known that fish we consume can contain bits of plastic so small that we cannot see them.

People have become much more aware of the amount of plastic threatening our oceans, and consequently us, but this does not mean that their behaviour has changed. Plastic is still carelessly thrown away, often without even bothering to place it in a container so that it ends up in a dump. But, even in a dump, it will endure for up to centuries. The only solution is very strong control of plastic, especially 'once-used' plastic.

This year, World Oceans Day has the theme "The Oceans and Gender". Exactly what is visualised by this title is not clear on the many sites giving news of World Oceans Day 2019. Durban, however, has planned many celebratory events. Google the details. Among the activities are various beach clean-ups (with gloves and trash bags provided); screenings of the film, A Plastic Ocean, at several venues, including some beach cafes; and even surfing lessons at a reduced fee.

We have to become aware of every piece of plastic we use, especially plastic bags and wrappings. We have to equip ourselves with cloth bags instead of purchasing plastic bags for our groceries and use glass containers in our fridges rather than plastic wrapping.

### **Choose free-range eggs**

Animals are sentient creatures. The SPCA supports farming processes that treat them humanely and encourages people to purchase free-range eggs and chicken.

Mark Sandison, former Durbanite now living in Fishhoek, first drew our attention to Felicity Vanmoos's Sunshine Farm in Drummond a couple of years ago. Then an article In Farmer's Weekly by Lloyd Phillips described Felicity's free-range chicken farm where birds are raised under caring conditions so that we can use their eggs knowing that production has been kind.

When Felicity sits down in any of her spacious chicken houses, chickens cluster around her. Some perch on her lap and shoulders, and even on her head. It is immediately apparent that these birds feel safe and contented.

Felicity and her husband, Pieter, bought Sunshine Farm in 1996. It was once a more conventional chicken farm, but Felicity found the recurring process of beautiful baby chicks growing quickly to the six-week stage and then being slaughtered too distressing. She felt an urgent need for a different approach and began a trial during which free-range eggs were produced by 25 layers.

The former broiler shed was converted into two large chicken houses for 6500 Hyline layers. They had free access during the day to both the inside area and the fenced outside area. These were unstressed birds, living in natural light, moving actively and freely, protected from predators, and cared for by farm manager, Nick Joubert, and eight farm workers.

A high level of cleanliness is maintained, and the birds receive a comprehensive range of essential vaccinations. They have a carefully nutritious diet, and on hot days vitamins and electrolytes are added to drinking water to keep them hydrated. Precautions are taken against Newcastle disease and infectious bronchitis.

Sunshine Farm is inspected regularly by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries inspection services based in Durban and has always earned good reports.

The free-range eggs, free from any residue from antibiotics, are laid by healthy, free-roaming, contented birds who lead comfortable lives. Felicity's comment in Farmers' Weekly was: "They're such lovely creatures. They ask for so little but give so much in return."

Things don't change for the better unless people care. If you are buying battery chickens and eggs, find out what an inhumane process you are supporting.

**Pictured:** Felicity Vonmoos from Sunshine Farm

Credit: <https://wandahennig.com/2017/07/sunshines-felicity-vonmoos-good-egg/>

## **ANIMAL ANGLE by Shirley Bell**

### **Here is a great rehabilitation story**

Yoshi is a loggerhead turtle. In July 1997, when she was between three and five years old, and no bigger than a dinner plate, she was handed over to the Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town by the captain of a Japanese fishing vessel that had docked in Table Bay harbour. She had an injury to her shell and was very stressed.

Two Oceans was delighted to have Yoshi and began nurturing her back to health. Looking after her inspired them to formalise their marine turtle rescue, rehabilitation and release programme, which includes rescuing and rehabilitating stranded hatchlings. Hundreds of rescued, rehabilitated turtles have now been released back into the ocean.

Yoshi grew to weigh 180 kg and, when 25 years old, was approaching maturity, which meant that her breeding instincts were beginning to manifest. It was decided – not without tears - to release her. Careful training ensured that she was in peak condition, because she would have to swim thousands of kilometres once she was back in the ocean. She began a strict exercise routine.

She was released on 16 December 2017, along with twenty-seven loggerhead hatchlings that had been recovering in the rehab and release facility.

Yoshi set off towards Namibia and Angola before turning round in June 2018 and heading back down the west coast. She averaged about 24 kms a day, which is a remarkable pace. She managed to avoid ghost fishing gear, which is the biggest threat to marine turtles. She headed for the tip of Africa until she was about 3,500 kilometres from the northern KZN coast, her likely birthplace. Marine turtles return to the beaches where they hatched in order to build their nests. It is hoped that Yoshi will find a mate and head back to her birthplace. Female marine turtles leave the ocean only to lay their eggs. Male marine turtles, on the other hand, never leave the ocean.

Where is Yoshi now?

We can track Yoshi's journey from the time she returned to the ocean. Go to the Two Oceans Aquarium website. Read the reports, along with the maps, descriptions and photographs, and watch the awe-inspiring and deeply moving videos.

Yoshi's journeying has established that turtle rehabilitation and release are abundantly worth the enormous effort... and worth the tears of the carers as the turtles disappear into the ocean and swim away.