

It's not just about dogs and cats and other pets...

The name of the SPCA is respected worldwide as a symbol of animal welfare in the unending and almost always unequal struggle to speak up for animals and try to protect them against abuse wherever possible.

People tend to associate the SPCA with domestic pets, since that is mainly what they read about and what is the focus of our daily responsibilities, but we have *deep concern* for all animal life, and indeed for all life, and this is why the inculcation of greater compassion in society is so important to us. We hope that what is taught in our Humane Education programme will make some difference in the attitudes of the children and will help to make them more sensitive and aware. So rhino, lions, elephants, giraffe, baby ostriches (which we will report on in October) and all other animals, and the various malpractices which are inflicted on them, matter to us.

There is only one way to make the world a better place, and that is really to care and try to do something about wrongs visited on those who have no voice to speak for themselves. In just over a decade, our education project for primary schools has reached a couple of hundred thousand young children. Apart from teaching about animal welfare, it encourages children to look at themselves and how they treat animals and to see that how we treat other living creatures, animal and human, reflects who we are.

Why banning canned hunting matters

Many people, including some conservationists, have understandably drawn attention to the fact that worldwide concern about the callous hunting down of Zimbabwe's famous lion, Cecil, does not extend to caring about the ongoing cruelty perpetrated against animals every day without similar surges of conscience.

There are the iniquities in many 'factory' farming processes: battery birds imprisoned lifelong in cages the size of an A4 page and with wire bases; the maceration of live day-old male chicks; the treatment of farm animals in the abattoir process, including what happens on the journey; sow pens; transport of animals by sea under terrible conditions. There are mass animal sacrifices for old traditional beliefs, and rituals like the torturing to death of the young bull by unarmed young men at the Festival of the First Fruits. The list goes on and on.

It is true that the episode of the Zimbabwean lion, wearing a tracker and lured from the safety of a game reserve, is hardly an isolated incident, and it is perhaps remarkable that indignation and anger rapidly spread worldwide. But we have to look at the killing of Cecil, the Zimbabwean lion, by a trophy hunter in a somewhat different way in order to understand the widespread revulsion about the death of this particular animal... not because it is necessarily worse than the cruel practices we overlook every day, but because people often need an iconic figure in order to focus their minds on something that needs changing.

There is now worldwide repulsion at trophy hunting of wildlife for enormous sums by wealthy hunters. Australia had earlier banned the entry into Australia of wild animal trophies and body parts and was the first country to do so. Delta Airlines has since banned the transport of big game trophies on its planes. So has Emirates. Lion, rhinoceros, leopard, elephant or buffalo remains are all off the transport list. Other

airlines are expected to follow suit quite quickly. We are seeing a growing awareness that is a move in the right direction.

It might not be entirely rational to focus on the death of one beautiful wild creature while ghastly deeds of animal cruelty are perpetrated every day in the name of faster food production and higher profits. But what it does is create awareness. An iconic animal figure is unnecessarily destroyed, and it is just hard for some of us to imagine why any feeling of achievement and pleasure, of added self-worth or satisfaction, can be gained by the unnecessary killing of a beautiful wild animal that cannot escape and, in this case, is actually wearing a tracker collar so that his whereabouts can be pinpointed for a British university research project.

The hunter used a crossbow, a weapon based on a medieval weapon of war. It is neither better nor worse than using a high-powered rifle with a telescopic lens, but it has historical associations of particular brutality. And the fact that the lion suffered for 40 hours before being tracked down and shot makes a statement that trophy hunters cannot deny.

So the Zimbabwean lion has become a symbol far and wide and - although some will see this as an irrational focus on one dastardly act, while even worse dastardly acts are perpetrated against animals every day - there is an important consequence that cannot be denied: the whole appalling issue of canned hunting, now known to be widespread in South Africa, has fallen under a spotlight. It is no longer able to masquerade as a manly sport for the greatly wealthy, but is revealed as a callous ego-stroking activity that can by no stretch of the imagination be called a 'sport'.

The growing anger against canned hunting is therefore important in its own context. It plays a small role in encouraging awareness of animal consciousness, and it is this awareness that is crucially needed in not shutting one's eyes to the often cruel methods of food production from animals and which are far from the minds of purchasers of the sanitised table-ready products.

One can't deny the food chain in which every living creature is involved in some way or another. But if humankind is to grow in sensibility at all, we have to look at the ways in which animals are raised and killed for food and recognise that we are dealing with conscious creatures and need to treat them as mercifully as this dependency is able to achieve.

Religious animal sacrifices halted in Nepal

It has been a five-yearly tradition in southern Nepal to honour the Hindu goddess of power, Gadhimai, by slaughtering animals during what has been the world's largest religious animal sacrifice. In 2009, it was estimated that as many as half a million buffalo, goats, chickens and other animals were killed to celebrate the event.

Care2 animal activists and other organisations have long worked to end animal religious sacrifices, and as a result the Supreme Court of India put a stop to the transport of animals from India to Nepal for the celebration.

Now an announcement by the chairman of the Gadhimai Temple Trust, Ram Chandra Shah, confirms that animals will no longer be sacrificed to the goddess in the hope that this will result in one being awarded "a better life".

The chairman asks for the help of the believers in ensuring that Gadhimai 2019 "is free from bloodshed" and "is a momentous celebration of life".

Animal Welfare Network Nepal and the Humane Society International/India, are hopeful that this will save millions of animals from being killed during other religious ceremonies, although they say much work has yet to be done to persuade people not to sacrifice animals. Old traditions are hard to set aside for those who are devotees. The Temple Trust will spend the time before the 2019 celebrations persuading people to accept that the old tradition must be abandoned for reasons of compassion and greater awareness.

It is felt that bringing a halt to a centuries-old tradition of slaughter has a message for those who point out that millions of animals are killed for food every year in slaughterhouses, a process which does indeed require far greater legal overseeing. But serious revision of the way we think of, and behave towards, animals is triggered by focusing on any animal injustices that will cause members of the public to acquire greater awareness of the many ways in which animals are misused and abused throughout the world.

Such recognition creates more sensitivity and grows compassion. It is not mere sentimentality, nor is it entirely illogical to focus on specific incidents while other equally awful happenings are carried on regardless. A focus on particular incidents causes people to stop and think and perhaps see human behaviour in a different light... and even bring about change, as has happened in Nepal. Gauri Maulekhi, Humane Society International/India trustee, calls it “a tremendous victory for compassion”. And so it is.

Ripples have the ability to fan out far and wide, and the brave Gadhimai decision will cause many people and organisations to reflect and perhaps see animals in a different light.