

**30 June 2020**

### **A WORLDWIDE WILDLIFE MEAT BAN WOULD GREATLY REDUCE CRUELTY TO WILD ANIMALS**

The World Health Organisation declared a global health emergency as fears about the coronavirus spread.

National Geographic reported that several of the early Chinese cases have been traced to a fish and wildlife market in the city of Wuhan. Wild meat is eaten around the world. Will fear cause eaters of wild meat, like that of our threatened pangolins, to give up what many see as a status symbol?

On the other hand, some people in rural and isolated areas around the world eat wild meat because it is virtually the only protein available to them. The risks are obvious. Zoonotic diseases jump from animals to humans, and the wild animal trade facilitates this. In the 2002 SARS outbreak, many patients had been involved in preparing wild meat or had handled, sold or killed wild animals.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organisation, is concerned that the coronavirus will jump to societies that do not have China's resources. The Chinese government put a moratorium on the wildlife trade on 26 January, but this ban could possibly result in an underground movement.

Natasha Daly of National Geographic has reported that there is growing pressure to make the ban permanent. Wild meat is actually not popular throughout China. In some areas, less than 5% of people have recently eaten wild meat. However, the eating of wild birds is popular, including songbirds that are on the verge of extinction. The National Geographic article reminds us that fear of a new pathogen is a powerful motivator for a permanent ban.

We cannot deny that eating meat involves processes that most of us would rather not know about, but opting for ignorance does not make us less complicit. The National SPCA is fighting the unacceptable trade in lion bones. The SPCA deplores the cowardly, cruel practice of canned hunting.

Pangolins are the most heavily trafficked mammal in the world. There is much horrible, blatant cruelty in the handling of wild animals for their meat. Many people still refuse to recognise the consciousness of animals and the sensitivity of their feelings.

The end of the wildlife meat trade would at least be something worthwhile coming out of a tragic situation. It seems that most Chinese people would support a permanent ban.

### **Pelorus Jack, New Zealand's famous dolphin steamer pilot**

I have a photograph of the most famous dolphin who ever lived (pictured below): New Zealand's Pelorus Jack. He appeared on day in Pelorus Sound and for twenty years he guided steamers through the rocky channels of Cook Strait and French Pass.

Many ships had been wrecked in this dangerous area, but skippers found that Pelorus Jack chose safe channels with astonishing accuracy. The skippers had learnt from experience which were the safest channels, but most did not know at that time that dolphins have their own 'sonar', an eco-location ability that warns them of obstacles ahead and helps them to find food.

Pelorus Jack was a Riosso's dolphin, a beakless species. He would appear as soon as a steamer's skipper sounded the siren. He ignored sailing ships. He seemed to be attracted by the sound of a steamer's motors. He would swim to the bow of the ship and lead the way to the entrance of the Pass.

Passengers would look forward eagerly to his appearance, and a cheer of welcome would always greet him. He would make for the bow and play in the waves it made. One day he was struck by a propeller and injured. Nine months passed before he was seen again. Many thought he had died of his injury. His return made headlines in the New Zealand press. He no longer swam directly in the bow waves and kept well ahead of the vessel he was leading.

The wild free beauty of the animals of land and sea means nothing to some people. Show them a beautiful creature, and they will itch for a gun. Inevitably the day came when some perverted individual decided to shoot Pelorus Jack for 'sport'. There was a burst of rifle fire. Pelorus Jack avoided the steamer from that time on... and so did many of her former passengers, deeming her 'unlucky' because of the attempted killing of Pelorus Jack. She was wrecked a few years later, and seventy-five people drowned.

In 1911 the New Zealand government made any kind of interference with Pelorus Jack an offence. The years passed, and Pelorus Jack lived on. He had first begun his piloting between 1888 and 1889 and was still joyfully greeting steamers when World War I broke out in 1914. Then he disappeared. Anxious eyes searched for him for many months. He had brought a rare kind of pleasure to many thousands of people.

### **BEER CAN PHOTOGRAPH RESTORES DOG FOUND 600 KMS FROM HOME**

Animal lover, Joan Ashworth, sent me a heart-warming story about an American dog that had been lost for almost three years and was restored to its owner thanks to a beer can.

'Escape artist' Hazel, who had been on her leash, vanished from the yard of her home in Iowa, USA, in May 2017. Her owner, Monica Mathis, searched frantically for her. She was shortly to move to St Paul, Minnesota, with her children.

In March 2019 Hazel was found by Manatee County Animal Services some 600 kms down south in Bradenton, a town in Manatee County, Florida. One day, Monica Mathis found herself looking at the Facebook picture of a dog on a beer can. Motorworks Brewery in Florida had decided to help the animal agency by putting photographs of dogs awaiting adoption on its beer cans. Monica felt sure that the picture of the dog she was looking at was her long-lost crossbred Golden terrier, Hazel.

Hazel had been named Day Day by the animal shelter. No one has been able to discover how she got from Minnesota to distant Florida, or where she had been in the years between. She did have a micro-chip, but it had Monica Mathis's old address.

The beer cans with their canine photographs made headlines and were featured on the popular Ellen DeGeneris show on television and also on CNN, and in HuffPost and the New York Post. Far away in Minnesota, stories about the 'beer dogs' appeared on Facebook. On 24 January this year, Monica Mathis wrote to Motorworks Brewery saying: "This is my dog." She had absolutely no doubts.

She was asked to produce Hazel's veterinary records. She was nervous that someone else would adopt Hazel before she could fulfil demands for her proof of ownership. She obtained Hazel's records from her former veterinarian, and the shelter announced that the dog was going home owing to their having featured her photograph on its beer cans. The brewery has a history of partnering with animal charities, and this time it recorded a phenomenal success.

A non-profit organisation, the Friends of Manatee County Animal Services, helped send Hazel home in time to celebrate her seventh birthday. She had waited ten months to be adopted.

### **"The Revenge of the Pangolin"?**

Our shy little pangolin is one of the world's most endangered animals, and probably the most trafficked. This little mammal is threatened by extinction because its meat is highly desired by many well-off people in China and has become a status symbol. Pangolin scales are merely keratin, as is rhino horn, and is used to treat skin problems, despite having no medical value.

It has been reported that Chinese university researchers discovered a 99% match between the coronavirus found in pangolins and the virus causing the current pandemic. This finding has resulted in a temporary ban on catching or eating wild animals. It is hoped that China will impose a final ban on the iniquitous wildlife trade and on the sale of meat from wild animals illicitly captured and often inhumanely handled before being slaughtered.

Two separate studies of the present dangerous virus were reported on almost simultaneously by Daily Maverick in South Africa (by Don Pinnock and Tiara Walters) and Xinhau News Agency in China. One study was by researchers at Baylor College of Medicine in Texas, and the other at the South China Agricultural University.

It is reported that the viral outbreak can be traced back originally to bats, and that the pangolin is actually the vector. It is ironic that the pandemic might help save the endangered little pangolin from extinction, since the threat to its continued existence comes mainly from the East, as does the threat to our rhino. Eastern partiality for certain wild animal products is not only for food and for claimed medicinal reasons, but for the status wild animal products bring to users. Among the most desired products are rhino horn, lion bones and claws, elephant tusks, abalone and bear bile, the latter being procured by a particularly cruel process.

Writer Tony Weaver reports that it takes about 1,900 pangolins to produce one ton of scales and that, in 2018, "48 tons of scales were seized, the equivalent of 91,200 pangolins". However, most trafficked pangolins get through undetected.

China, the biggest consumer in the world of illegally procured wild animals and products from them, was quick to update its wildlife laws on trafficking of wild animals and ban wildlife markets. It could be that this frightening global pandemic will begin to save our harmless little pangolins. Tony Weaver calls it "the revenge of the pangolin"!

### **Dogs love 'dog beaches'**

There are innumerable advantages in having a dog: boundless love and loyalty, companionship, someone who never tires of your company, someone to talk to, an uncritical and endlessly appreciative friend.

The Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, has confirmed that that 'Lockdown' will not prevent people from walking their dogs, although hours for all walking are stipulated. Dog-walking not only provides healthy exercise and gets you out of your abode, but allows you to escape those interminable cellphone messages (you are not obliged to read every sms until you get back home). On a beach where dogs are allowed, you can enjoy the sheer delight that dogs express when they are free to run at their top speed in a safe space.

If you are fortunate enough to be able to walk a dog, immerse yourself in the experience and forget the rigours of lockdown for a little while. Dogs are usually ecstatic if they can run on a beach without a lead. All their senses are involved. They have an endless capacity for being joyful. Owners should, however, take paper towels and a bag with them to pick up any faeces left by their pets. When I was in Australia recently, I noticed that some dedicated 'dog' beaches actually provided bags and receptacles for dog faeces, but most owners arrived with bags tied to their dogs' leads.

We congratulate those complexes for retired people that are allowing people who have ground-floor apartments to have dogs. Having a pet makes a remarkable difference to the health of many people, and owners are finding that other dog lovers will often offer to help walk their pets. Dogs are gradually becoming welcomed in places where they were not allowed before. It is not unusual to see dogs on leads in the outdoor area of some coffee shops.

A noticeable feature of the 'dog beaches' I visited on Australia's Gold Coast is that the dogs get along really well. On your first visit to a beach, keep your dog on the lead for a few minutes until he relaxes and wants to join the fun. The beach is no particular dog's territory, so there is therefore no impulse to defend it. Groups will play together and run with glorious freedom. Many human (and doggy) friendships are formed when people regularly take their dogs to a dedicated dog beach.

### **Only two northern white rhino left**

The last two northern white rhino left in the world are in the Ol Petr's Conservancy in Kenya. They are mother and daughter, Najin, who is 40, and Fatu, who is 19. Father and grandfather, Sudan, died last year.

African News Agency has reported that science and technology company, Merck, has offered reproductive technologies to help save this magnificent species from extinction. Merck has been a leader in assisted reproduction technologies for the past sixty years. The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research has donated R66.5 million rands to the BioRescue project which has a global team of scientists from Germany, Japan, Italy, the Czech Republic and America.

Sudan's semen was harvested during his lifetime and is being stored at an extremely low temperature. It is felt that Najin and Fatu would not be physically able to carry a pregnancy to term, so their eggs will be harvested and later used in in vitro fertilisation. The embryo will be transplanted into the uterus of a surrogate southern white rhino.

It is hoped that this will be successful and will give rise to a new population of northern white rhino that would live in the wild.

The African News Agency reports that, owing to the small number of eggs and amount of semen available, the stem cell technique will “increase the genetic variability of the population”.

This project to save the northern white rhino as a species is the first to use in vitro fertilisation in an attempt to save a species from disappearing. If this daring, greatly cutting-edge technology will be explored by Merck to save other species from extinction. It is possible that as many as 2,000 threatened species could be saved from extinction every year.

### **The wonderful strength of the human-animal bond**

Since Covid 19 took over our lives, the role that pets play has become even more important, especially if one lives alone.

The Centre for Human-Animal Interaction at Virginia Commonwealth University in the USA has shown that pet owners’ health is usually impressively better than that of people without pets. Mental health also improves owing to the unconditional love given by animals to their owners. Pets are very quick to pick up an owner’s emotions, and a quite sophisticated form of ‘language’ quickly develops between a loving owner and a pet.

A few months ago, Tanya Fleischer of the Durban & Coast SPCA let me know that she had found a dog that she thought would be perfect for me. I had lost my adored cross-Papillon, Bonnie, to kidney failure a few months earlier. She was my shadow. She was not only beautiful, but wonderfully intelligent, loving and communicative... and with me day and night. She died at seventeen of kidney failure, active and happy until her last day when she lay all day on my bed on a special soft blanket sent her by my Australian grandson, Dean. Her blanket carried a large picture of her. I sat next to her all day stroking her and telling her how much I loved her. She never took her beautiful eyes off me and quietly drew her last breath at a quarter past five in the afternoon. I will love her forever.

Fifteen years had passed since the blessed day when we had set eyes on each other at the SPCA. On that same day, Richard, the SPCA ‘dog whisperer’, found me a sweet-natured two-year-old Labrador, whom I named Gaby. He lived a long, happy life with Bonnie and me and died quietly at home of organ failure at fourteen. Now I have Misty, a happy-natured, communicative, bright little girl who is about the same size as Bonnie, who weighed just eight kg before kidney failure caused her weight to drop, but she remained as spirited and adventurous as ever, checking on the vervet monkeys and the hadedas and always loving to go out with me to wherever dogs are welcome. If I had to go out without her, she perched on a window ledge in my bedroom waiting for the sound of my car until I returned.

If you are considering basking in the selfless love of a dog or cat, you will surely find your perfect animal waiting for you at the SPCA.

### **Turtle population counted by drone**

It is with absolute clarity and a sense of great privilege that I recall sitting on a beach in Kosi Bay through starlit nights, watching great turtles come ashore, dig their perfect nests at the foot of the

dunes, lay their eggs, and carefully disguise the sites before tiredly making their way back to the ocean. They come to the beaches where they themselves had emerged from eggs many years before.

Our group was led by Jeff Gaisford, then a senior ranger of the Natal Parks Board, now Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. Our group included two young Jacques Cousteau team divers, a German photographer, and Jeff's mother, Joan, who was a leader in the Western Sufi movement in our country, and also my special friend. I have just finished a book that includes elements of that experience, which was enhanced when Joan and I accidentally met up with a group of friendly fish smugglers who had been fishing illegally near the river mouth.

I always eagerly read The Smithsonian magazine online, and a recent illustrated article tells of the turtles that come to nest on the beaches of Raine Island at the northern edge of Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Using drones, the Raine Island Recovery Project provides photographs of an estimated 64,000 turtles gathering off the turtles' largest single breeding ground before coming ashore to lay their eggs.

The Recovery Project has long struggled to obtain an accurate count of the turtles and now mark the shells of turtles that have already laid their eggs with splotches of non-toxic white paint so that they are not counted more than once.

Of great concern is that the death rate of turtles is increasing. Owing to climate change, rising sea levels often flood nesting beaches, destroying eggs that would normally develop into baby turtles. In addition, a considerable number of adult turtles die after they have been flopped over after falling off the island's mini-cliffs. Fencing is being erected to keep adult turtles away from areas that are dangerous to them, and sand is being added to beaches to raise their level above the encroaching tide.

Andrew Dunstan, the head researcher of the Queensland Department of Environment and Science, has said: "In the future, we will be able to automate these counts from video footage, using artificial intelligence – so that the computer does the counting for us."

### **PUBLIC PRESSURE COULD STOP THE SLAUGHTER OF OUR WILDLIFE**

Prominent South African environmental writer, Don Pinnock, draws our attention to Trophy Hunters Exposed, Inside the Big Game Industry, a book by environmental activist Eduardo Goncalves, which gives "an exact tally of their kills, their cruelty and their Facebook boasts". The preamble to Don Pinnock's review strikes at the heart of the issue: "Supported by wealthy and powerful organisations like Safari Club International, the Dallas Safari Club and the National Rifle Association and egged on by countless awards and record book listings, trophy hunters have gunned down 1.7 million wild animals in the past decade. About 250,000 were endangered species."

The animal victims of some of these 'sportsmen' run into thousands. Eduardo Goncalves does not hesitate to name several of them. One is listed as having killed 4044 wild animals, 1317 being elephants. Goncalves also names 500 hunters who have won Safari Club International Big 5 Wards for shooting a lion, an elephant, a leopard, a rhino and a buffalo. "Safari Club International offers about 80 different prizes to hunters who shoot the most animals, who kill them in the greatest number of places and who use novel ways to kill them." The latter category is horribly chilling.

Goncalves is of the opinion that habitual killing of wild animals for so-called sport “is serial killing for gratification and no different from killing innocent people”. He quotes Graham Collier, writing in *Psychology Today*, who says “thrill killing” is a mark of both serial killers and trophy hunters. Further, hunters are taking “the biggest, the best and the strongest” and are |weakening the gene pool of threatened species.

Goncalves says that this kind of killing of sentient creatures is nothing less than murder. “The animals are entirely innocent creatures killed for ego-gratification and fun”. He points out that the general public mainly does not support trophy hunting. In two UK polls, 80% and 86% of those polled favoured banning.

We have to care much more about the merciless treatment of both wild and domestic animals. In the foreword to Goncalves’s book, renowned adventurer and author, Ranulph Fiennes says: “We are told that we face a biodiversity crisis every bit as serious as the climate crisis. Yet the slaughter, inexplicably, continues unabated. The time has come to decide whether or not to close this chapter of our history. The choice is now in our hands.”