

## **8 October 2018: Speak up for animals**

World Farm Animals Day was on 2 October, and World Animal Day is on 4 October. For the SPCA, every day is Animal Day.

World Octopus Day falls on 8 October. It might surprise some that we have a special international day to celebrate octopuses, since many probably don't think about octopuses much, except as calamari on their plates. But this extraordinary animal is highly intelligent and creative.

In 2011, Sy Montgomery wrote an article for *Onion* entitled *Deep Intellect* in which she described her relationship with a sweet-natured octopus called Athena. She also described the intense grief she felt when Athena died. Her article went viral.

Octopuses are entrenched in myth, of course, which is why they cause so many shudders, but they are pretty strange in their own right. Having three hearts and nine brains is weird enough to begin with, but then leeches have 32 brains.

Octopuses can do things like figuring out how to open a jar in order to get to food inside it. They often decorate their lairs. They are famous for being able to squeeze into really small spaces, like beer bottles. In 2016, the *New York Times* recorded the escape of an octopus called Inky from the National Aquarium of New Zealand. Inky, who was the size of a football, got through a tiny gap at the top of his tank, slithered across the floor, squeezed himself into a drainpipe, doggedly continued for fifty metres, and exited into the sea, never to be seen again.

People are increasingly beginning to accept that dogs, wolves, chimpanzees, elephants, parrots and other animals can solve problems, but we still know little about the complexity of animal consciousness. The often brutal use of animals in laboratories for medical and psychological experiments raises crucial questions.

I remember how upset my children were at having to kill rats in biology class in order to dissect them or perform other unacceptable laboratory tasks. Was this necessary? Of course not. The message it sent was that animals don't matter.

Animals feel pain. They can remember pain, and the memory causes stress, just as it does for us. They have distinct personalities. They lead complex social lives. We should long since have begun to feel strongly about the inner lives of animals and their feelings and their rights. So let's begin now to make life much better for them.