

The inner lives of animals

Most of us have been told at some time or other that we should not anthropomorphise about animals and talk of them as though they had human qualities. But it is now pretty widely recognised that animals do have complex inner lives. It is at last accepted that animals can become extremely traumatised by stressful and harsh conditions. But when are we going to behave as though we really do accept this? The point is that thoughtless and callous human behaviour towards animals will change only when we accept responsibility for its infliction.

How will that come about? It will come about when parents and teachers and everyone involved with children teaches them that animals are feeling creatures and that treating them carelessly or cruelly is not only totally unacceptable, but is often also a forerunner of abusive behaviour towards human beings. Animals are almost always powerless compared with human beings. There is nothing admirable in behaving badly towards any living creature that is vulnerable.

A recent story in the online *The Conversation* tells how a piglet, Rosie, ran away from an organic piggery when she was only a few days old. She was found in a car park and rescued by a family who made her their pet, but then found they were unable to keep her. She was taken in by the Sugarshine Animal Sanctuary in New South Wales, where she was found to be “highly strung” and “needy”. The sanctuary was founded by Kelly Nelder, a mental health nurse. The writer of *The Conversation* article, David John Roland of the University of Sydney, spent twenty years as a clinical and forensic psychologist, but had also studied zoology as an undergraduate.

Rosie has fallen into good hands. Sugarshine gives traumatised animals the freedom to find company, and inter-species relationships are encouraged. Rosie found her friends among young calves and likes to lie with her body touching theirs for warmth and security. She will wedge herself between them as they lie asleep.

Pets need more than food and shelter and the odd pat. They need to feel cherished. A ‘language’ will develop between a pet and a loving owner.

Understanding trauma in animals

David Roland says he realised the connection between human and animal trauma when he visited Possumwood Wildlife Centre outside Canberra. The Centre rehabilitates injured kangaroos and abandoned joeys, wallabies and wombats. Its founders are economics professor Steve Garlick and Dr Rosemary Austen, who is a medical doctor.

He was told that when baby kangaroos were brought into their care, they were often inconsolable, even if physically unharmed. Steve and Rosemary recognised the similarity with post-traumatic stress disorder and had the animals treated accordingly for “intrusive symptoms, avoidant behaviour, disturbed emotional states, heightened anxiety and hypervigilance”. Researchers at the University of Western Australia have developed non-

invasive means for measuring stress and mood in animals and are now working with sheep farmers to improve the well-being of their animals.

In order to recover from trauma, both humans and animals need to feel safe and cared for, just as humans do. They also need to develop a secure relationship with at least one other accepting and caring animal or human being.

We often hear someone say: “What can one person do in the world?” And the answer is: *Be kind; be caring*. It is increasingly dawning on people that all living creatures have much the same basic needs. Children and animals particularly rely on us. We need to teach kindness at home and in our schools. Certainly our SPCA Humane Education Project tries to do this. All creatures feel. All creatures hurt.

Towards saving South Africa’s bees

Bees are considered to be responsible for the pollination of up to seventy per cent of the world’s major food crops. Worldwide diminishing numbers of these vital little creatures is therefore cause for alarm.

Portia Morudi is owner and beekeeper at The Village Market in the Winterveld. Her grandfather taught her to love bees, and she has been passionate about them since childhood.

She recalls that the ceiling of their home actually caved in more than once owing to bees having settled there. Then her grandfather decided that the family should learn about beekeeping instead of having to smoke the bees out on a regular basis.

What happened was that, in learning about bees, they also learnt how valuable they were and came to realise that keeping beehives and collecting honey could make a positive difference to their lives.

Portia and her partner founded The Village Market in 2014. It is a marketplace for many of the farmers in the Winterveld and helps to turn their subsistence farming activities into something that produces earnings, in addition to helping to conserve bees.

Story of a freerange chicken farm

I was reading up about Felicity Vermoos and the freerange chicken farm, Sunshine Farm, in Drummond and thinking how good it would be were more people to refuse to support the heinous practice of battery birds condemned to live in tiny cages under conditions that should make us feel complicit if we purchase them or their eggs. Browsing on, I came across a story about a freerange chicken farm on the outskirts of Simon’s Town. There is nothing like a story about real people achieving real advances, and the fact that the freerange chicken farmer’s name is Einstein makes it all the more captivating.

Einstein Sibanda has a two-hectare free-range chicken enterprise on Rocklands Farm. He began his chicken business in December 2016. The farm also has a Christian campsite and guesthouse.

Paul Rowe, one of the two owners of the farm, says Rocklands Farm is about two hundred years old, and that they are happy to have found Einstein and to have the old farm productive again. It last supplied vegetables and dairy products to the local

community in 1975, as no one was available after that to work the land. It was decided that Einstein would not be required to pay rental until his business was running well. The Rowe family helped with infrastructure and with creating a market. What an example there is here for owners who have unused land which has potential and is near to possible customers.

Einstein has been passionate about farming since his schooldays and took agriculture as a practical subject at Neshaya Secondary School near Hwange National Park. In 2013. He joined an organisation called Living Hope that runs agricultural business courses and trained there for four years. Surely there is an example in this story. People starting from nothing, but filled with interest and a longing to make their way, need training and support.

Einstein's chickens roam freely. A bird of prey living on the nearby mountain targets the chickens, and mongoose and snakes are also a concern, but these chickens are living a free and natural life. Einstein's chicken farm is fenced, and there is a large chicken shed into which the chickens move when it rains, or there is heavy wind. Wood chips provide comfort.

Sibanda believes in the value of what he is doing. Feeding freerange chickens costs more. He works very long hours seven days a week. He employs two assistants. One deals with the compost and its worms, which the chickens like to eat, and the other keeps the area clean, feeds the birds and collects the eggs. Einstein is now also incubating eggs to provide free-range chickens for sale. And his future plans include training others to raise chickens humanely.

Read up on Sunshine Farm in Drummond, KZN, and on Einstein Sibanda's enterprise on Rockwell Farm in the Western Cape. See the online article originally published by *GroundUp*. It is really important that we, the public, press for more humane methods of factory farming.

Much attention is being focused on Yuval Noah Harari's books, *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*. He says that the way we have permitted animals for meat production to be treated is, in his opinion, the very vilest of the many cruelties of which man has been guilty. Cruelty to animals matters. It matters hugely. If we can stop it, or even drastically reduce it, why do we largely choose to turn and look the other way?