

# A Call to Compassionate Arms

**I would like to propose something a little different: that a sensible and coherent theory of animal rights should focus on just one right for animals. That is the right not to be treated as the property of humans.**

— Gary Francione, professor of law,  
Rutgers University School of Law, New Jersey<sup>1</sup>

This world doesn't belong to us, nor do its 1.5 million animal species. We are newcomers here, just another species in the 4.5 billion year history of this spectacular Earth. In fact, 99% of all organisms that ever lived on Earth were extinct before we ever arrived. If we spin up our planet's illustrious history into a 24-hour day, the first multicellular organisms would appear at around 8 PM, and humans wouldn't check in until less than a minute before midnight.<sup>2</sup>

Had the early humans brought with them a little Sold sign, tapping it into the earth with a blunt stone, they might have been promptly stampeded by a herd of irate rhinos. Yet somehow

over the millennia, our fleshy, relatively defenseless species has done most of the stampeding. With a hunger for "progress," we have altered the landscape immensely, causing loss of life at an unprecedented rate. In less than 100 years — a mere blip on history's radar — we have caused the pollution of our atmosphere, contamination of our oceans, wasting of our grasslands, destruction of our forests and the extinction of animal and plant life at 137 species per day.<sup>3</sup>

### **Give Your Head a Shake**

It's like staring into the sun. How could you and I be contributing to the loss of 137 species a



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day? How can we lose 50,000 species every year and still survive? Actually, we can't. We won't be able to. We've created an imbalance of colossal proportions, but we've been smart enough to figure out everything so far, so we must be smart enough to find solutions for this. So take a deep breath and stay loose. This is important work we're up to.

### **Out of Compassion**

We are capable of vast love and empathy, able to move mountains with the strength of our compassionate arms. Yet along the way, something happened. Animals became our "property." We dominated their lives and applied designations. Some wild animals became our pets. Some became laboratory animals. Pigs became pork, cows became beef and elk became game. From zoos and aquariums to circuses and rodeos, every animal fell into some category for human use. Taken from the wild, becoming our expendable "resources," animals have been stripped of their autonomy. Around the world every day, animals are subjected to suffering in ways that are insensitive at best and horrific at worst.

Have we run out of compassion? We think not. Nor do the people who helped bring this book together, or the 200 partner organizations and individuals whose dedication to animal welfare have contributed to the project.

### **The First Few Steps**

The choices we make as consumers, parents, community leaders, elected representatives,

farmers, fishers, teachers and students all affect the world around us. It doesn't matter if we can't see the results of our choices — they happen anyway. They're creating our future right now.

The vast majority of animal suffering results from a lack of understanding on the part of humans who are simply going about their daily lives. Most of us would never choose to cause suffering to an animal if we really understood.

So, how do we create compassion and respect in an apparent void? The first step may be motivation. With greater understanding, an individual or a community may realize that if they treat life around them with compassion and respect, their world will thrive instead of suffering. That's pretty good motivation, and we want people to act out of love, not fear.

We're appealing for animal messengers because the voiceless among us can't be heard. Swallows, sheep, geckos and guinea pigs can't speak our languages. Their inability to speak English or French or Swahili makes them no less worthy of our respect and compassion. They are living beings on this planet, sharing the same air, breathing the same cool wind and basking in the same warm sun. They thrive on life the same way we do.

This is a call to compassionate arms. A call for each of us to reach inside our hearts and find the love and compassion that pulses to the beat of universal life. That same pulse is felt by every animal on Earth. Now is the time to work together for a compassionate, sustainable future.