

Animal Welfare versus Conservation Welfare

It is often believed that feeding or being friendly to street dogs, monkeys, or other animals is contributing to their welfare. Animal welfare is all about considering the welfare of an individual or a group of individuals in any given situation. It is giving voice to voiceless animals in a human-dominated world, it is about emotions, and it is about the well-being of that one particular animal. On the other hand, conservation welfare is more focused on the welfare of the species as a whole and not just a single animal. It is based more on science.

We can take the example of the Spotted Deer from a zoo that were released into the wild owing to their overpopulation from poor management at the zoo. This release caused the death of wild spotted deer, gaurs, and elephants due to anthrax spread by the released zoo animals. In such cases, animal welfare is directly at loggerheads with conservation welfare. The zoo people justified this release by saying that due to overpopulation the deer didn't have enough space and keeping them in would be inhuman, when in fact they wanted to release the deer so that they would have fewer mouths

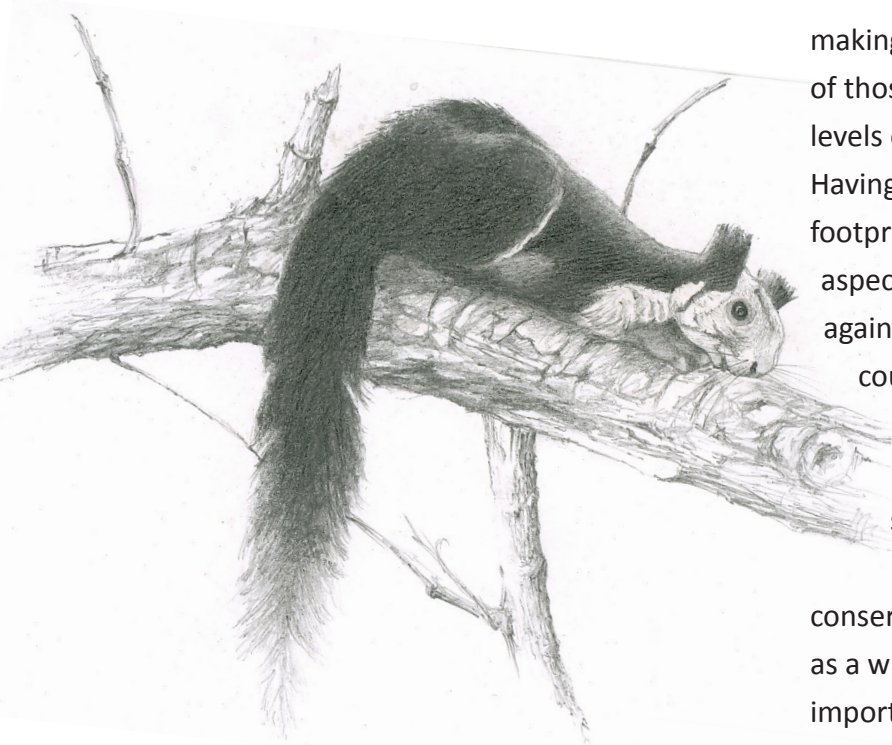


to feed. In such cases, human greed is being masked as animal welfare.

A debate on the differences between animal welfare and conservation welfare was opened up for the RHATC Fellows of the 2022–23 batch taking the problem of feral livestock as an example. The following are the points that came up during the debate.

Sterilization may seem like a less cruel act than straightaway culling of the individual but it defeats the purpose of the immediate call for action, it may work in the long run but conflicts due to the feral population will still be persistent and a menace to society until they meet their ends. Sterilization is also not very cost-effective,

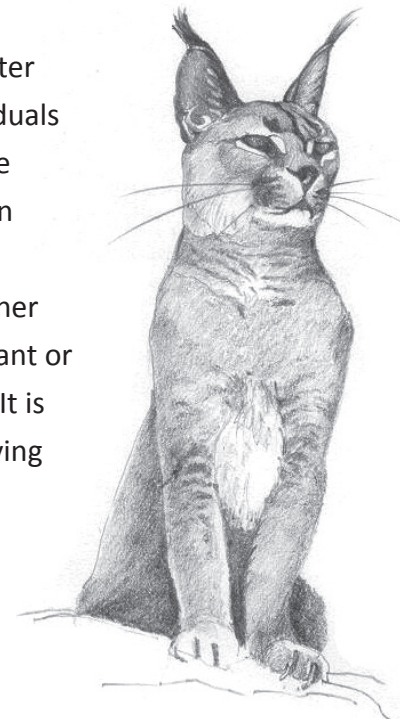




as the feral population is usually much more in number and it's not possible to ensure that each and every individual has been sterilized, because even a few left unsterilized would make the whole effort ineffective. But on the other hand, an immediate solution would be culling the animal which everyone may not agree with but it would be economically effective, but then there is a drawback to the safe disposal of the carcasses of the animals as improper disposals might result in the spread of many diseases to other animals and humans as well. Countering that argument was a point that diseases can be spread from feral to wild animals even when they are alive.

Building an animal shelter for such feral animals can also be proposed but it will be the same as keeping an animal in a zoo and on top of that the cost of maintenance of that shelter will be too much and there will be no timeline to how long this practice can go. One other major problem with keeping the feral livestock population alive either via sterilization or by

making enclosures for them is that neither of those two provide a solution for the high levels of methane produced by this livestock. Having said that, humans leave a bigger carbon footprint which has a negative impact on every aspect of the environment. These arguments against animal welfare and animal conservation could go on and on without an end but the solutions won't prove beneficial to anyone unless it is taken based on science and not on emotions. Though the welfare of an animal is important, conserving the species as a whole is more important. It is better to lose a few individuals for safeguarding the whole species like in the case of Avni or for safeguarding other ecologically important or beneficial species. It is way better than saving a few individuals in the name of animal welfare and ending up with the mass mortality of a greater population.



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