

Can It Be Make-Believe?

Empathy for animals is a natural emotion; strong enough for laws that are created to protect them, but in excess, it can impair judgement necessary to protect people. It manifests in animal rights organizations and individuals with strong conviction, often enough to operate independently. They are typically popular, narcissistic celebrities like movie stars who are very effective in raising awareness of themselves and their issues of interest. Fame causes some to offer opinions unabashedly on subjects they have neither knowledge nor experience, and are completely oblivious to the harm they inflict on other people.

Celebrities' Scientific Knowledge

Brigitte Bardot (BB) was an attractive young French movie starlet whose sex appeal was a factor in her popularity. She was also a very strong animal rights activist who led a personal campaign to stop the harvest of harp seal pups (whitecoats) in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1977. A photo of BB embracing a harp seal pup during the hunt was released to the world, and the negative public reaction it caused was reason enough for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans of Canada, (DFO) to impose regulatory constraints on hunters. Harp seals were not allowed to be taken when white in colour.

BB was a meddlesome ego-inflated foreigner whose intentionally planned protest was to evoke viewer enmity of the hunters. It was the act of killing seals, not over-harvesting them that motivated her. The escapade inflicted hardship on Maritime harp seal hunters and Inuit hunters of ringed and bearded seals in the Canadian high arctic, 3,000 kilometres north of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The harp seal population is at an all-time high of approximately 4.7 million animals (DFO, 2022), and it continues to increase. Maritime fishers believe these and other seal species, mainly hooded and greys in the region, pose a serious threat to the fish stocks they depend on and are calling for a cull.

If sex appeal and stardom worked to prevent the harvest of harp seal whitecoats, it was sure to work for the founders of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) who wanted to ban trapping of fur bearing animals. They enlisted Pamela Anderson a Canadian animal rights activist and popular television star of Bay Watch, aka Babe Watch and her fame as a Playboy Playmate to enhance awareness of their cause. It not only succeeded in PETA's efforts to ban trapping of fur bearers because of its perceived cruelty to animals, it also included banning the use of natural fur in garment making. Possessing a fur coat was almost a crime and anyone caught wearing one was subject to invective. Scorn and derision are powerful negative emotions commonly used by abusers and bullies. Former Queen Elizabeth II was a victim who acceded to their denigration and condemned her beautiful fur garments to their closet, never to be worn again in public. Faux fur is not fur!

The economic impact on Indigenous trappers caused by the collapse of the fur market was devastating but of no consequence to the PETA people; they had "no skin in the game." PETA also demanded better care and treatment of domestic animals. Farmers have

responding accordingly and eggs that are now produced by free-range hens are readily available in supermarkets.

OO7 will tell you about Whales

Reverence for animals too big to hug is possible; even ugly and dangerous ones can qualify. In Herman Melville's famous novel, *Moby-Dick*, whaling ship *Pequod's* Captain Ahab had an intense obsession; revenge for the white sperm whale that had bitten his leg off in a previous encounter. Alas, this vengeance cost him his life, ship, and crew.

Large baleen whales were over-harvested by 1960, and hunting had almost ceased. The International Whaling Commission highly regulates whaling, but Japanese whalers were harassed repeatedly by vessels of the Sea Shepard Society, founded in 1977 by Paul Watson. Presently he is about to face the same whalers whose legal hunting activities were affected by his enmity and dangerous interference.

A traditional hunt for pilot whales continues on the Faroe Islands despite international protest, and Norwegians continue hunting Minke whales because they feed on their important herring stocks.

Whale populations continue to increase, some more quickly than others, though not rapidly enough for whale-huggers and movie star, Pierce Brosnan of the International Fund for Animals Welfare IFAW. His plea to former President Obama in 2010 for a ban on whaling was ignored.

Sharksss? Who yielded Sharks?

Galeophobia, aka selachophobia is an uncontrollable, irrational fear of sharks that may require medical treatment, but a genuine fear of sharks was hyped by Peter Benchley, the author of "*Jaws*," a novel and movie based on an attack caused by a great white shark attack that terrorized swimmers. Locals demanded it be hunted down and destroyed but like Ahab's white sperm whale, *Jaws* aka Bruce, also took revenge like *Moby Dick*, and killed six of the crew that were trying to kill him.

Great white, bull, tiger and other big sharks have always been a real rational fear because of their attacks that have resulted in deaths or lost limbs to surfers, swimmers, and fishers. In Australia, popular swimming areas are fenced off as a safety precaution and menacing sharks are baited to be caught for removal.

Great white sharks, however, have been defined as apex predators by selachophiles who have designated them as an ecosystem necessity; essential to maintaining the mythical balance of nature [sic] eco-sustainability. The designators are mainly foreign meddlers indifferent to the safety of Indigenous surfers, swimmers, and fishers. If they are not seashore inhabitants, they probably lack empathy for surfers, swimmers, and surfers.

Moreover, in 2006 great white sharks were declared an endangered species; not to be killed so their fins will no longer be available like other shark fins in the preparation of an Asian delicacy, “shark fin soup.”

Crowned Celebrities saving Elephants

Elephant populations in Asia and Africa fluctuate in response to habitat loss due to human competition for living space, and exploitation for their tusks, an important source of ivory. A strong demand for ivory led to intensive poaching and despite an international ban on ivory sales, it failed to stop poaching. Elephants were Red Listed by the IUCN in 1986, and upped to Appendix 1 classification at the CITES CoP 7 in 1989.

Although populations were increasing in some areas, elephants were declared Vulnerable in 2004. The African Elephant Coalition’s Montreux Manifesto in 2016 aimed to end the sale of ivory and the poaching that maintained it. An elephant hugging spectacle in Kenya by British Royals was also performed the same year as an impetus to keep the elephant survival campaign alive but these efforts neither slowed nor reversed the trend. In 2021, the IUCN declared African forest elephants Critically Endangered; the savannah and Asian elephants, Endangered. Meanwhile in some SA National Parks where populations have increased, elephants are trashing the environment in search of food and dying of starvation. This destruction also ruins the habitats of other species, also threatening their survival.

Who is going to Save Humans?

Is the knowledge and expertise of managing elephant populations being compromised? Is it a victim of government neglect or are there simply too many competing interests? Whatever the reasons; attempts to include cultural pastoralists whose cattle, goats and sheep compete for the same lands as elephants is proving to be difficult. Alas, ever increasing human populations are reducing the spaces for elephants and other wildlife. The effect is pernicious, like the proverbial waterhole drying up.

Seals, sharks, whales, and elephants are a source of meat for humans based on availability which is usually seasonal and consumed fresh locally if processing or preservation is unavailable. I wonder how many advocates for saving a species have ever tasted one. Did BB ever try “Flipper-pie,” or Pierce Bosnian, elephant “Bush meat”? I wonder how many cultures have been impacted by their behaviour.

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