

Humane Natural Area Management in Hawai`i

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Animal welfare and animals rights have long been human concerns. Animal *welfare* relates to the care of animals, often in laboratory situations, in terms of adequate food, water, space, etc., for the species of interest; prevention of "suffering" is an important goal. Animal *rights* more often address the status of the animal *vis á vis* human interests and demands. Anthropocentric interests are often judged *no more* important than the rights of non-humans to existence by animal rightists, who avoid and sometimes criticize consumption of meat, wearing of fur coats, sport hunting and fishing, and so forth. Not all animal rights advocates believe *all* non-human life is of equal value with human life.

Most people would probably agree that the life force is to be respected, but that *some* non-human lives are more valuable than others. Killing a disease organism doesn't seem nearly as serious as killing a bald eagle. Society seems to support this idea by actively encouraging disease cures and penalizing heavily those who do kill endangered species. That a range of choices exists whenever humans and other species conflict, is axiomatic. The problem is making reasonable choices in different situations and trying to justify choices to a wide variety of individuals. The cumulative effects of choices on societal values must also be considered. Piecemeal fragmentation of natural areas through approval of one individual development project

after another over time is an example of this. Eventually the pieces may be so small as to have little or no value as natural areas.

In Hawai'i, as elsewhere, ignorance, apathy, and greed have resulted in the loss of tremendous numbers of native species found nowhere else, and in loss or degradation of most of the "natural areas" in the state. A large part of what is left is threatened by introduced, or *alien*, species, many of them feral barnyard animals found around the world. From the standpoint of human responsibility or concern for non-human species, arguments for favoring native *species* over introduced species when conflicts arise in natural areas are: (1) more options for future human use are preserved; (2) native species are unique, aliens are not; (3) more people "use" native species than aliens over time; (4) benefits from tourism to see unique species should eventually exceed those derived from consumptive use of game species; (5) consumptive use of introduced species can be accomplished in areas of Hawai'i that are not designated for natural area production; (6) extinction of native species is unacceptable when caused by human actions or inactions.

From the standpoint of saving *individual* non-human lives in natural areas, it can be argued that native species are more important than those of introduced species because removal of proportionately *few* individuals of a *few* alien species allows *many* individuals of *numerous* native species to flourish (birds, invertebrates, and plants, especially) over time in natural areas. The lives lost by alien species are few in comparison, especially if aliens are eliminated from an area or continually managed for very low numbers. Society apparently values the lives of birds, invertebrates, and plants more highly than in the past, with increasing concerns about biodiversity, ecological problems, and so forth.

The lives of non-human mammals are no longer the only lives of concern.

If one accepts the general argument that some non-human lives are more important than others, and the particular arguments that mammals are no more important than birds, invertebrates, and at least some plants, and that aliens *in natural areas* are less important than natives, the next question relates to *humane* removal of aliens where conflicts between alien and native exist. In addressing the question of humane removal, one might first ask the awkward question, "How would you like to die?" Americans don't like to think about this sort of thing, but if the question of "humaneness" is raised, the question is unavoidable because, to most people, to be humane seems to mean to treat as humans wish to be treated. Choices of death could include strangulation, asphyxiation, internal bleeding, exposure, poisons that affect the nervous system, poisons that stop cell oxygen exchange, electrocution, and shock. To more fully answer the question, you might want to know, "Which is the most painful?" And "Which is the quickest?" Humans can and do have different ideas and feelings about the easiest death, as seen in their choices of suicide methods and in experiences they relate about near-death events.

But the question of humane death becomes more complicated when applied to non-humans because they cannot tell us either their preferences nor their experiences as they die. What should humans measure for non-humans to provide an index to pain, suffering, and, by inference, humaneness? Stress hormones, nervousness, tremors, perceived discomfort, gasping responses, contorted features, and other measures have been proposed. Brain scans would perhaps be most conclusive, but this is difficult in non-laboratory situations, and we

know surprisingly little about pain even under controlled conditions. Again, judgments of humans about these indicators are various, and a general definition of humaneness is difficult. An animal that goes into shock or becomes lethargic or extremely weak from loss of blood, exposure, or heat stress over time may actually feel much less pain than an animal that is shot, stabbed, electrocuted, clubbed, or poisoned. Suffering is also probably a function of how treatments are *applied* to and *received* by the animal.

Unfortunately, distaste to humans is not really a workable criterion of humaneness, particularly when many humans expressing distaste have neither killed nor witnessed the deaths of wild animals. Although human emotions are very much a part of the issue, second-hand emotions can be misleading. In contrast, people who have to kill animals can become hardened to the task to a varying degree. Some animal welfare and animal rights people would say that *anything* causing "apparent discomfort" or even "boredom" in animals is inhumane. But this seems akin to stating that anything that causes cancer should be banned from use when nearly everything is a carcinogen. The problems in question cannot be realistically addressed by all-or-nothing statements. Other values are at stake. In Hawai'i, few would abandon the protection of natural areas from invading animals by applying a discomfort criterion to animal control methods.

What of native animals that suffer introduced diseases, parasitism, competition, and predation of introduced species? Obviously, ethical considerations of immediate *humaneness* are not involved here, but, ultimately, humans have caused the problem. Ethical considerations of human-caused *extinction*—another kind of human ethical responsibility—are also involved. Which is the

more important responsibility? Many would say that allowing the extinction of populations, subspecies, species, genera, and even families of plants and animals is a far more serious problem for the human race (let alone for the non-human species affected) than the humane treatment of individual animals. The welfare of groups is often more important than the welfare of individuals. We humans make such difficult decisions about our own species in times of war and in countless other situations that call for protection of society from individual humans.

One reason for reducing extinctions and the homogenization of the animal and plant landscapes around the world is to keep future human options open—economic, aesthetic, humane (to other humans through medicine and crop development), and ecological (various services performed for us by the natural world including cleansing water and air, encouraging soil stability, decomposing wastes). Devaluation of native species and natural areas little affected by humans places an immense faith in technology, probably further exacerbating the problem of environmental degradation. Although human benefits realized from increased technology are many, human mismanagement of technology is of serious concern today: witness global warming, ozone depletion, and other problems. Devaluation of natural areas also results in loss of biological and other baseline data that enable us to clearly evaluate effects of our actions elsewhere.

All life is precious and should be highly valued by natural area managers. However, *choices* must be made in the real world. Future generations will certainly ask whether natural area managers and administrators did all they could to reduce species loss and preserve biodiversity and natural areas, as we now ask that question about past de-

cision-makers. Educating the public about the choices that must be made between alien species and the native life of the land is a vital part of the job. Managers who work hard to preserve native ecosystems with tools that are as "humane" as possible will continue to be considered good conservationists by most knowledgeable persons. Responsible media coverage will get the story straight. The search for more animal control tools and more humane methods to control alien species is important, but this does not necessitate public criticism of tools that now work well to protect natural areas and, by inference, those who are "insensitive" enough to use them in protecting native species. Looking for new tools evidences the desire for improvement. But panaceas are no more likely with new methods of control than with old. And control of aliens in designated natural areas should not be further delayed by research and development in search of one final solution, much less by administrative indecision and political arguments. "Humaneness" will always be a *relative* issue and is not likely to be accomplished to the satisfaction of all. Like abortion, it is one ethical consideration sometimes in conflict with others faced by humans.

Perceptions that hunters or "the public" or animal rights activists will be upset enough about "humane" treatment of introduced species to cause severe problems in management of natural areas should

be countered with factual information about the problems of native species losses and alien invasions, the overriding reasons for control programs, and an active *defense* of effective methods used as humanely as possible. Humane treatment of animals cannot be totally decided by emotional reactions in a factual void. The human animal must reason well in the context of real-world conflicts. Concerns about humaneness should be documented by administrators and weighed carefully prior to letting what might be a small minority concerned about a difficult-to-define issue affect the dwindling biological heritage of Hawai'i. Other motives of groups and individuals opposed to responsible control programs in natural areas should also be weighed carefully. Natural area managers should be supported by their organizations in the difficult and important work that they do, especially that involving alien species control. Public criticisms and doubts from within the conservation community are counterproductive unless they are based on fact. *Leadership, encouragement, and adequate program support* to accomplish the best possible management for the benefit of Hawai'i's unique biota and ecosystems will enable those involved in fulfilling mandates for designated natural areas to succeed. Hawai'i's future biological diversity depends upon action programs that effectively counter alien species invasions now.