

WHY WE *MUST* CONTROL WILDLIFE POPULATIONS



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OPPOSITION TO CONTROL OF WILDLIFE POPULATIONS IS GROWING



Mute Swan population control has been controversial

- Public attitudes about wildlife and wildlife population control are changing.
- People are becoming increasingly urbanized and "divorced" from nature.
- There is growing concern about the humane treatment of animals.
- Compassionate and sentimental views of animals and nature abound in the popular media.
- The number of recreational hunters and fishers continues to decline.

GOALS:



Mexican wolf

- To summarize some of the ethical concepts influencing public discourse on wildlife population control today.
- To provide examples of where population control is necessary and justified from a conservation perspective.
- To discuss implications for conservation policy and practice.

REASONS FOR CONTROLLING WILDLIFE POPULATIONS



Feral cat, Australia

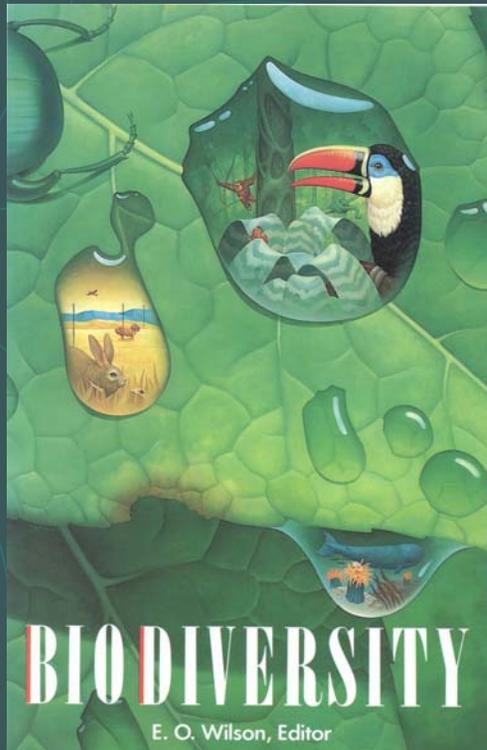
- There are numerous reasons for the control of wildlife populations today:
 - to mitigate significant economic loss.
 - to control the spread of transmittable diseases.
 - to minimize or prevent severe habitat alteration.
 - to prevent human injury or death.
 - to protect or sustain endangered, threatened or native species.

ETHICAL CONCEPTS INFLUENCING PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON WILDLIFE POPULATION CONTROL



- Conservation
 - Animal Rights
 - Animal Welfare
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- People are confused about the differences between and policy implications of these three perspectives.
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- A clash of values.

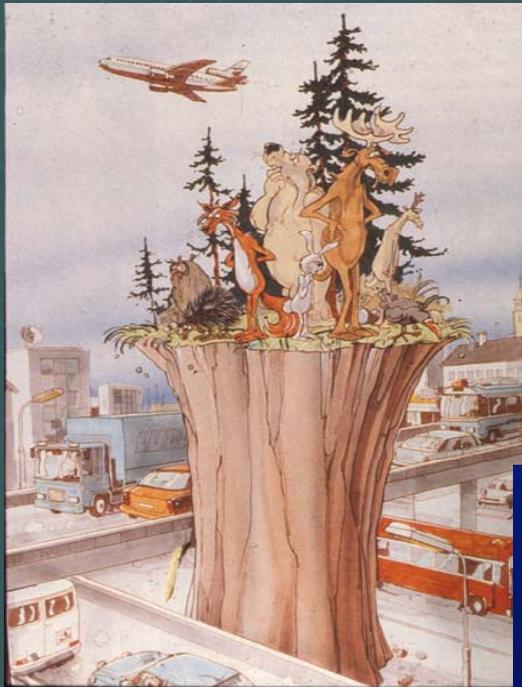
CONSERVATION PERSPECTIVE



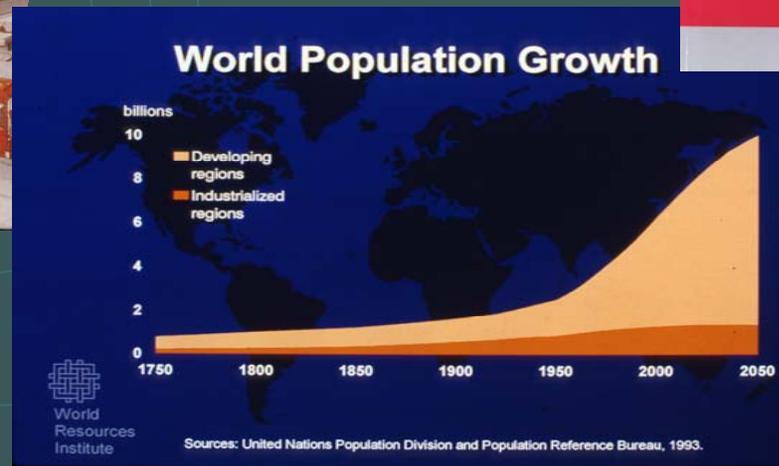
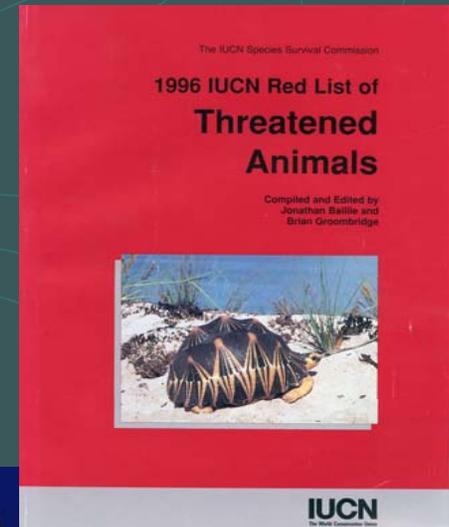
- Focus is on populations, species and ecosystems.
- Believes that other species have a “right” to exist.
- Recognizes dependency of wildlife on their habitats.
- Recognizes that complex interdependencies exist in ecosystems.
- Believes naturally occurring biological diversity is intrinsically “good”.
- Believes loss of natural diversity is “bad.”
- Recognizes that human intervention is sometimes necessary to sustain species or habitats.

CONTEXT AND ETHICS

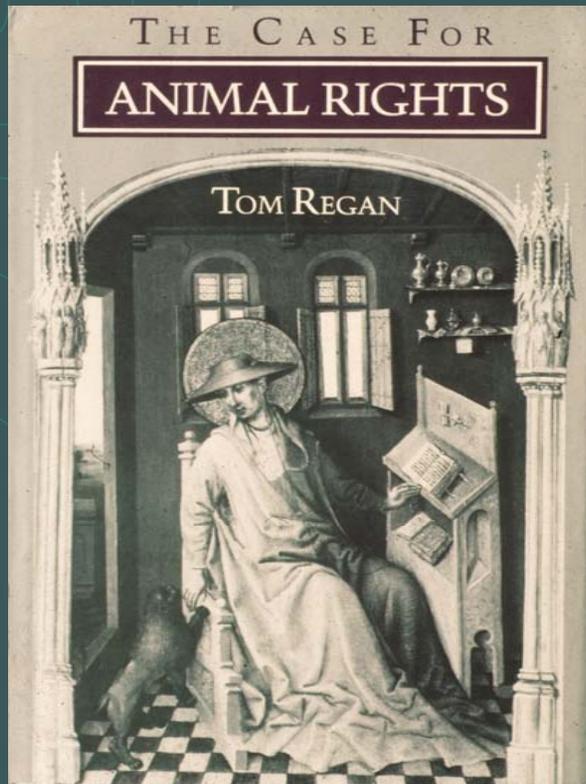
The current context in which conservation must take place...



Human population growth and over-consumption have pushed many species to the brink of extinction.

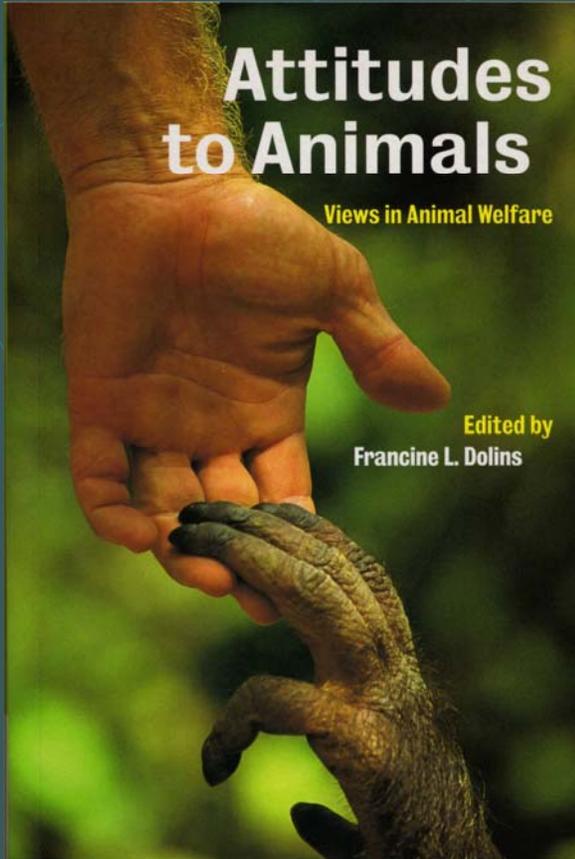


ANIMAL RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE



- Focused on individual sentient animals.
- Believes individuals have intrinsic and inviolate rights to life, liberty and bodily integrity.
- Species and ecosystems are not morally considerable, but can be said to have “inherent value.”
- Any attempt to sacrifice an individual for “the good of the population, species, or ecosystem” is viewed as “environmental fascism.”
- All sentient animals are to be given the same moral consideration, regardless of conservation status or rarity.
- Believes that wild animals and ecosystems will survive if we simply “let them be.”

ANIMAL WELFARE PERSPECTIVE



- Focus is on individual, sentient animals.
- Aimed at preventing cruelty.
- Believes sentient animals are morally considerable.
- Human use of animals is permitted, but principle of “gentle use” applies.
- Believes pain, suffering, and loss of life should be minimized.

POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT BETWEEN ANIMAL RIGHTS AND CONSERVATION

Disagreements will occur when the “rights” of individual sentient animals come into conflict with efforts to conserve populations, species and ecosystems.



Examples:

- Population Regulation
- Captive Breeding for Reintroduction
- Conservation Research
- Economic Incentives for Wildlife Conservation

POPULATION REGULATION (INDIGENOUS SPECIES)

Conservationists have recommended that populations of native species be regulated when:

A species becomes so overabundant that it:

- threatens endangered populations or species.
- threatens its own habitat or ecosystem.

Animal rights advocates oppose all actions that undermine the rights of individuals to advance the "greater good."

EXAMPLE: WHITE-TAILED DEER VS. ECOSYSTEM (NORTH AMERICA)



- Habitat fragmentation, “edge effects” and agriculture have created ideal conditions for deer.
- More white-tailed deer in eastern United States than before the arrival of Europeans.
- Eating the forest under story, preventing normal plant succession, reducing populations of insects-food for migratory birds and small mammals.
- Lyme disease.
- 1.5 million deer vehicle collisions annually.
- *Defacto* culling operation—however, it is Fords and Toyotas doing the killing, not guns.

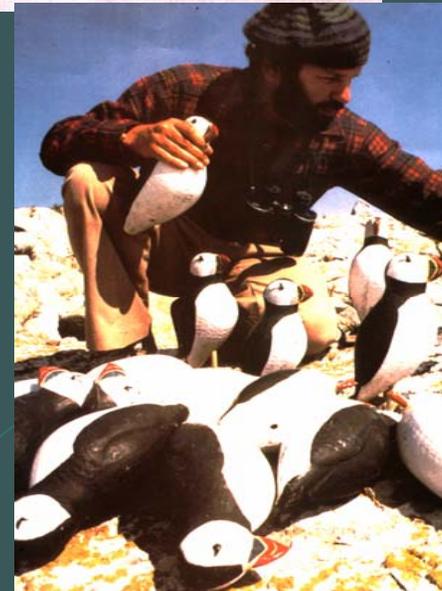
EXAMPLE: SEAGULLS, PUFFINS AND TERNS (NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES AND CANADA)



Gull populations have exploded due to land fills and dumping of fishing by-catch

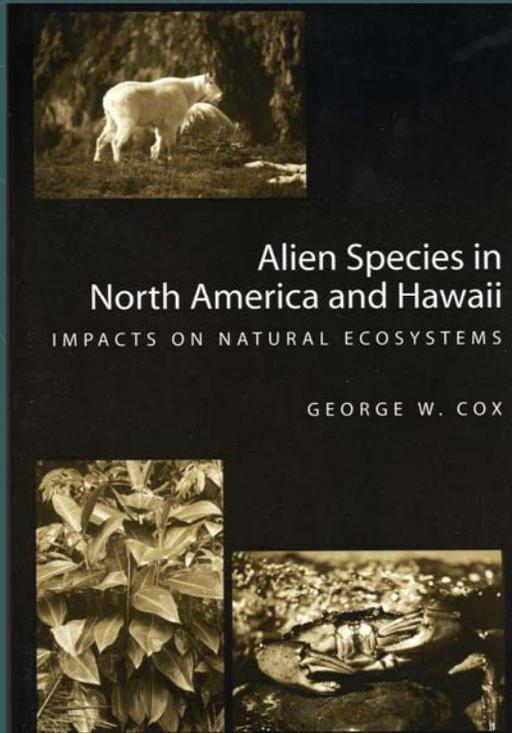


Atlantic puffin



Puffin decoys used to attract birds to abandoned nesting sites

POPULATION REGULATION (INTRODUCED SPECIES)



Conservationists have argued that populations of selected introduced or “alien” species be regulated when they:

- threaten native populations or species.
- threaten native habitats or ecosystems.

Animal rights advocates oppose all actions that undermine the rights of individuals to advance the “greater good.”

GREY SQUIRREL VS. RED SQUIRREL AND ECOSYSTEM (ITALY)

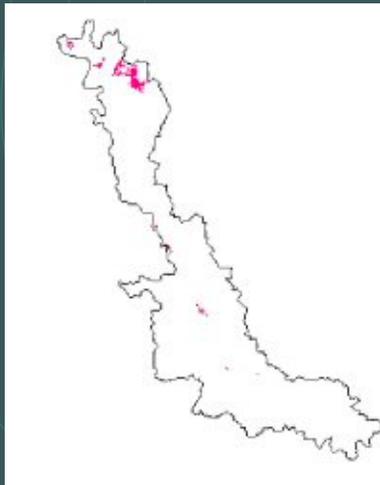


Grey squirrel (introduced)



Grey squirrel damage to tree

Red squirrel (native)



Italian forests occupied by grey squirrels, 2001

POPULATION REGULATION: CONTROLLING THE SPREAD OF DISEASE

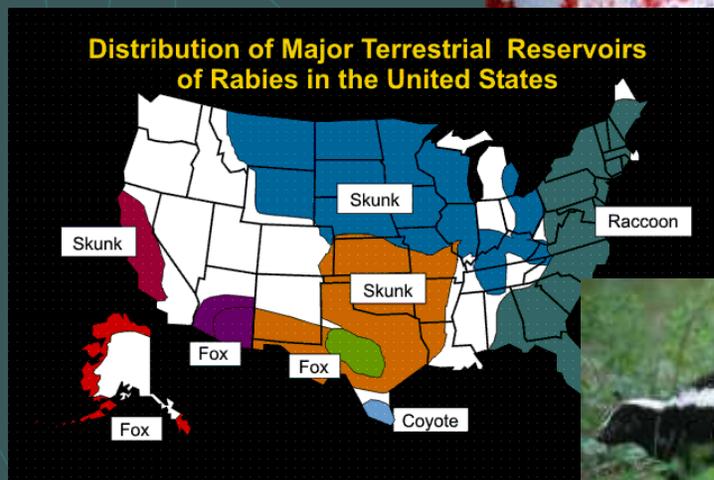
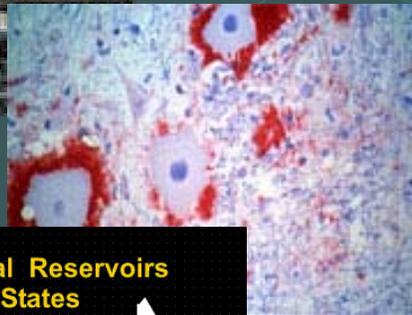


Conservationists have argued that animals should be culled from populations if they are carriers of dangerous, infectious diseases that:

- threaten human health and safety.
- threaten the health or reproduction of domestic livestock.
- could threaten the health or sustainability of an entire population or of other populations, including endangered or threatened species.
- action might also be recommended when there is a risk that local support for parks and wildlife might be diminished.

Animal rights advocates believe that humans and non-humans should be given the same moral consideration at all times.

EXAMPLE: RABIES AND CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE (UNITED STATES)



- Wildlife populations are frequently culled to reduce the incidence of infectious diseases or in an attempt to eliminate these pathogens from certain areas.
- Vaccines or treatment are an option in some cases, but certainly not all.
- Once animals are infected, the only option is culling (e.g., rabies)

POPULATION REGULATION: MEDIATING HUMAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

Conservationists have argued that “problem” animals should be removed or controlled in areas surrounding national parks or reserves when:



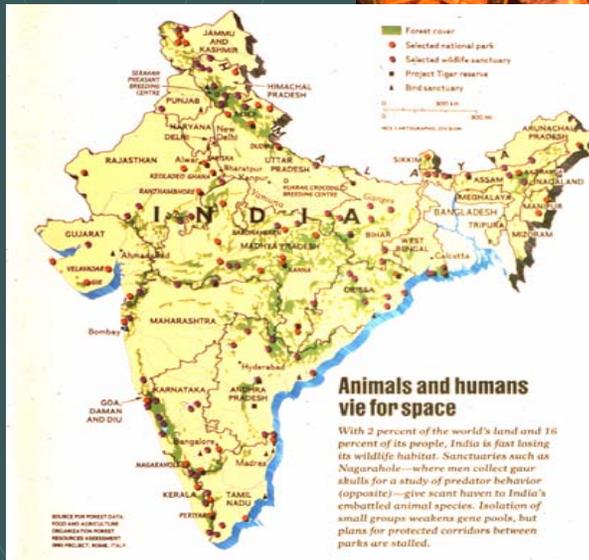
- peoples' lives are in danger.
- there is significant damage to agricultural crops or domestic livestock.
- there is a risk that local support for parks and wildlife will be diminished.

Animal rights advocates believe that humans and non-humans should be given the same moral consideration at all times.

EXAMPLE: CHIMPANZEES (KIBALI NATIONAL PARK, UGANDA)



EXAMPLE: TIGERS (INDIA-BANGLADESH)



Sitarani Biswas, 35, a "tiger widow" who is raising four children alone, says villagers have no choice but to make perilous trips for fish and honey.

Indian Villagers Cope With Sudden Death

Forays Into Forest Often Prove Fatal, Leaving 'Tiger Widows' to Mourn

PREVENTING HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT BEFORE IT OCCURS



- ❖ Lethal methods should not be our first response in all cases.
- ❖ Public education (understanding animal behavior-habituation).
- ❖ Improved land use planning.
- ❖ Deterrents/Exclusion, including regulated hunting to prevent habituation.

METHODS OF CONTROL: A SOURCE OF CONFLICT



- Lethal: Shooting, poisoning, lethal trapping, live-trapping or anesthesia followed by euthanasia, introduction of parasites and diseases.
- Non-lethal: Live-trapping followed by translocation or captivity, contraception, chemical or surgical sterilization, physical barriers (fences, trenches), and behavioral deterrents.
- All methods have benefits and limitations.

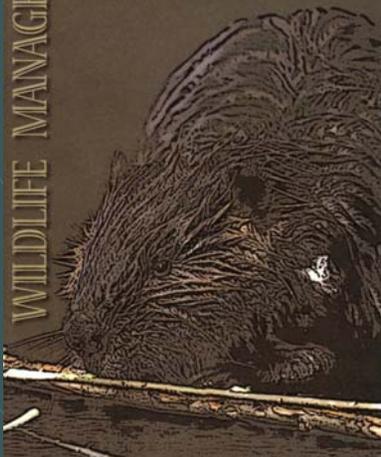
TOWARDS THE HUMANE CONTROL OF WILDLIFE POPULATIONS

What about the welfare of the individual animal?

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's mission is for the long term sustainability of native populations of wildlife. We are also concerned about the welfare of the individual animals.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND TRAPPING

CONTINUING
DOWN THE PATH
TO IMPROVING
AND MODERNIZING
TRAP TECHNOLOGY



- No one wants to harm native wildlife unnecessarily.
- No one wants animals to suffer.
- However, there are good reasons to control wildlife populations.
- Need for increased research on non-lethal methods of control.
- Need for research to increase the humane treatment of animals during lethal control.
- Wildlife managers will need all of the tools in their toolbox to maintain the tenuous balance between wildlife, humans and ecosystems.

COMPATIBILITY WITH ECOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES



- Wildlife population control should be compatible with ecological principles.
- Control should not threaten our ability to sustain native wildlife populations or their habitats—it should enhance it.

The prairie dog ecosystem has been threatened by prairie dog control programs

CONCLUSIONS

- Responsible wildlife management is going to involve some tough decisions. In many cases, wildlife populations will need to be controlled to promote conservation.



- Examples presented here suggest that the animal rights ethic is a poor foundation for the future of life on this planet, especially given the current global context.
- Populations, species and ecosystems are morally considerable as they are essential to sustain life.
- If we truly care about the future of life on this planet we must make conservation, not individual animals, our highest moral imperative.

CONCLUSIONS (CONT.)



- Conservationists should also embrace the animal welfare ethic and seek to develop more humane methods of population control.
- We should also be working to prevent human-wildlife conflict before it occurs through habitat protection, behavioral deterrents, exclusion and improved land use planning.
- Wildlife professionals have an important role to play in educating the public, media and key decision-makers about the differences between animal rights and conservation.



**“Death is one thing—an
end to birth is
something else.”**

Michael Soule and
Brian Wilcox (1980)