

**UFAW** UFAW Animal Welfare Series

# Wildlife Ethics

The Ethics of Wildlife Management  
and Conservation

**Clare Palmer, Bob Fischer, Christian Gamborg,  
Jordan Hampton and Peter Sandøe**



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# **Wildlife Ethics**

## **The Ethics of Wildlife Management and Conservation**

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## Foreword

We are delighted to publish this important book by some of the foremost thinkers in animal ethics. It fills a significant gap both in the UFAW/Wiley-Blackwell Animal Welfare book series and in the animal welfare and ethics literature as a whole. There are numerous books covering the ethics of veterinary practice, the use of animals for food, scientific research, and animals as companions or for entertainment, but comparatively little has been written about the ethics of managing and conserving animals in the wild.

At first glance the ethical issues associated with wild animals may seem rather simple compared with those concerning the animals we keep in captivity. Many of us treasure the natural world and would hope that human impacts on wild animals can be minimized. As an animal welfare charity, UFAW was established to protect the welfare of animals through a scientific understanding of their needs and how to meet them. Therefore, as an organization, when we consider wild animals, our concern is for the welfare of each individual with the aim of maximizing the welfare of as many animals as possible. As an example, we support research to establish the welfare consequences of practices that impact wild animals and advocate for the elimination of those that are detrimental to welfare. For instance, we recently funded research to assess which methods of controlling rats when they come into conflict with humans were least humane. When this research confirmed, unsurprisingly, that glue traps are extremely inhumane, we campaigned for their use to be restricted. UFAW has the luxury of being concerned only about the welfare of animals. Conservation of species, the impact of animals on humankind, and many other issues lie

outside our purview. However, in the world at large all these concerns and more are just as valid as animal welfare when we consider how we interact with wild animals. Many laudable human aims for animals in the wild are contradictory, raising complex questions. For instance, how can we simultaneously protect animals in the wild from anthropogenic impacts upon their welfare, protect humans from wild animals which spread zoonotic disease and threaten food supplies, preserve natural habitats, and conserve species? The simple answer is that we cannot achieve all these highly desirable outcomes, which raises complex questions about where we should make compromises when there is no single “right thing to do.”

How and where we make these compromises is an issue of ethics, and this excellent book is one of the first to consider these ethical issues in relation to wild animals. Careful ethical consideration is needed to allow us to come to conclusions about whether the benefits of our actions toward animals in the wild outweigh the harms. These are rarely simple or obvious judgments. Indeed, some of the proposed solutions to wildlife issues are counter-intuitive and profoundly controversial such as the idea that licensed trade in wildlife products or organized trophy hunting can contribute to species conservation and minimize illegal hunting. It is with complex issues such as these that thoughtful ethical debate is vital if we are to avoid kneejerk reactions before we have considered whether less obvious approaches might be more beneficial.

In this book the authors take real-world scenarios such as those mentioned above to illustrate ethical issues and approaches, some of them longstanding such as the conflict between humans and animals when wild animals threaten human health or food security, and others that have recently risen to prominence such as re-wilding and the impacts of wind turbines on welfare.

This book will be invaluable to all those with an interest in the welfare of wild animals, and the authors have done an excellent job of keeping the material accessible to a general audience whilst tackling complex ethical concepts. This is crucial since those who can use the concepts in the book to bring about positive change for wildlife and the natural world will not, largely, be trained in ethics or philosophy.

I congratulate the authors for producing this important book that I hope will become required reading for those studying wildlife biology or animal welfare as well as those who make policy and guidance about our interactions with animals in the wild.

Huw Golledge  
Chief Executive and Scientific Director, Universities  
Federation for Animal Welfare

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**PART 1**  
**THE THEORY OF WILDLIFE**  
**ETHICS**

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The Amazon rainforests of South America are famously home to some of the most beautiful parrots in the world. Not surprisingly, there's demand, both locally and globally, to keep these birds as pets. This has led to a market in which parrots are trapped and traded even as, in many cases, wild populations decline. In Peru, for instance, although the parrot trade was banned in 1973, even in the year 2000 roughly 80 000–90 000 parrots were illegally captured annually (Gastañaga et al. [2011](#)). Declining populations lead to rising prices, creating a positive feedback loop where parrot trapping is further incentivized. Indeed, researchers have found a significant positive correlation between the most profitable species in the wildlife markets of Amazonian Peru and those that are becoming increasingly rare (D'Cruze et al. [2021](#)). Similar practices occur in other parts of South America ([Figure 1.1](#)).

Given the serious impact that the pet trade has had on parrot populations, there's been much discussion about how to discourage such practices (Ribeiro et al. [2019](#)). Such discussion raises complex ethical questions. At the most fundamental level, the question is why, exactly, such practices *should* be discouraged. Aren't parrots just another resource, like oil or timber? Why shouldn't humans capture and sell them? Granted, some populations and whole species of parrot are becoming scarce. But why does it matter whether parrot species decline or disappear? What's so concerning about the loss of species?

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