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SPOTLIGHT

IWC Scientific Committee Advances Cetacean Conservation

Since 2000, Dr. Naomi Rose, AWI's marine mammal biology senior scientist, has attended meetings of the International Whaling Commission's Scientific Committee as an invited participant. At this year's meeting—held in Bled, Slovenia, in late April/early May—she will be joined by AWI senior policy advisor Sue Fisher and AWI wildlife biology senior scientist D.J. Schubert.

The IWC Scientific Committee comprises some of the most respected cetacean field researchers and conservation biologists in the world, and the recommendations this body makes influence policy decisions in all member nations. The

AWI team will be working to ensure the committee focuses its attention on key cetacean conservation initiatives, including protecting their habitat from pollution, marine debris, and human-caused noise; reducing bycatch in fisheries; and managing whale watching operations to minimize impact.

The AWI team will present a paper at the meeting on deep-sea mining and its potential impacts on cetaceans, as well as a review of the scientific literature on threats to the marine environment of the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Naomi attended a workshop in February in Madrid on the much-publicized interactions between orcas and yachts in the waters off Spain and Portugal, for which she is preparing a final report to present at the meeting. The team will also be working to strengthen the advice from the committee on the perilous state of at least two small cetacean species: the vaquita in Mexico and the Maui dolphin (a subspecies of Hector's dolphin) in New Zealand.

Starting this year, the Scientific Committee will be switching to biennial meetings, after over seven decades of annual meetings. AWI will work hard to ensure this transition does not diminish the value of the committee's work to cetacean conservation. 🐾

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AWI QUARTERLY SPRING 2024

ANIMALS IN LABORATORIES

- 6 Good Money After Bad: Primate Research Centers Seek Funds to Expand While Failing on Animal Welfare
- 9 Massive Monkey Breeding Facility Planned in Georgia
- 9 AWI's Refinement Database Adds New Search Filter
- 9 EPA Drops Target Date but Expands Scope of Animal Testing Phase-Out

COMPANION ANIMALS

- 28 AWI Awards First "Safe Havens for Pets" Grants

FARMED ANIMALS

- 21 Mistreatment of Birds in Slaughter Plants Goes Unchecked
- 21 Another Devastating Year for Barn Fires
- 22 Long, Hard Road: Interstate Transport of Animals Unfit to Travel

MARINE WILDLIFE

- 2 IWC Scientific Committee Advances Cetacean Conservation
- 16 Right Whale Calf Dies After Apparent Boat Collision
- 16 Bycatch Standards Bypass Foreign Fisheries
- 17 On Orca Captivity, China Chooses Regressive Path

- 18 Caribbean Species Gain Protections at SPAW Protocol Meeting

- 20 Shark Killing Shows No Sign of Slowing Down

TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE

- 10 After the Roundup: The Fate of Wild Horses in Government Holding Facilities
- 12 Protecting Predators on National Wildlife Refuges
- 12 Petition Seeks Regs to Rein in Wildlife Services
- 12 Climate Change Could Trigger Catastrophic Species Loss
- 13 Building the Movement to Ban Commercial Kangaroo Killing

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

- 4 USDA Acquiescence in Cruel Killing Method
- 4 BLM's Bumbling Efforts on Birth Control
- 4 Right Whale Recovery Faces Roadblocks in Congress
- 5 Drawing the Curtain on Cetacean Captivity
- 5 Animal Welfare Measures in State Legislatures

REVIEWS

- 26 *The Age of Deer*
- 27 *The Accidental Ecosystem*
- 27 *The Dolphin Who Saved Me*



ABOUT THE COVER

A red kangaroo hops across an Australian spring meadow. In Australia, kangaroo imagery is everywhere—on national and state coats of arms, police badges, the tourism agency logo, airplane tail fins, and more. Yet, every year in Australia, about 5 million red and other kangaroo species are killed in unsupervised nighttime hunts to supply meat and skins for a global market. An international campaign to protect Australia's most iconic animal, however, is turning the tide against this inhumane and unsustainable practice. See page 13 to learn more. Photograph by John White Photos.

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Members of Congress are seeking answers from the USDA on its efforts to promote more humane methods to kill poultry exposed to bird flu.

USDA ACQUIESCENCE IN CRUEL KILLING METHOD

Thirty members of Congress sent a bipartisan letter to the US Department of Agriculture in February with pointed questions about the department's effort to counter the widespread use of ventilation shutdown plus heat (VSD+) to kill tens of millions of birds during the ongoing bird flu outbreak.

The letter, led by Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA), underscores the fact that, notwithstanding the extreme suffering associated with VSD+, it has seemingly become the default method of convenience for conducting mass killings to "depopulate" exposed flocks, despite USDA policy stating it should be used only as a method of last resort. The lawmakers are seeking clarity from the USDA on what actions the department is taking to ensure implementation of more humane depopulation methods going forward.

BLM'S BUMBLING EFFORTS ON BIRTH CONTROL

AWI worked with Reps. Dina Titus (D-NV) and Steve Cohen (D-TN)—two stalwart champions for equine welfare—to denounce the Bureau of Land Management's reckless plan to round up approximately 20,000 wild horses during fiscal year 2024. In a January letter to the head of the BLM, the lawmakers called attention to the agency's plan to treat fewer wild horses with humane fertility control vaccines (critical to keeping horses on the range) than in fiscal year 2023 and



WE ANIMALS MEDIA

underscored the "serious disconnect between Congressional direction and BLM's actions." (See page 10 for more on the fate of wild horses in captivity under BLM management.)

RIGHT WHALE RECOVERY FACES ROADBLOCKS IN CONGRESS

North Atlantic right whales face grave danger in both the choppy waters off the coast and within the storm-tossed chambers of Congress. As vessel strikes and entanglements continue to take a heavy toll on this critically endangered species, factions in Congress are attempting to sink urgently needed conservation measures. The most recent assault came through the appropriations process.

Early in February, amid ongoing negotiations over fiscal year 2024 federal budget legislation, AWI and 40+ environmental and animal welfare organizations sent a letter to leaders in Congress imploring them to reject egregious policy riders that sought to prevent the National Marine Fisheries

Service from implementing a rule to extend current large-vessel speed restrictions to smaller vessels in right whale habitat. The letter emphasized that these riders would set a dangerous precedent—using the increasingly harried, chaotic appropriations process to circumvent science-based conservation mechanisms established under the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Fortunately, in the end, the spending bills were stripped of these riders.

In February, it was determined that gear entangling a young North Atlantic right whale found dead on Martha's Vineyard originated from trap/pot buoy lines placed in Maine waters. And in March, the first newborn calf of the season was found dead after an apparent vessel strike—a tragedy that might have been avoided under the proposed speed restrictions. See page 16 for more on this latest death and how you can join AWI and allies in urging the National Marine Fisheries Service to swiftly finalize a more comprehensive speed restriction rule.

DRAWING THE CURTAIN ON CETACEAN CAPTIVITY

Science increasingly supports the conclusion that, due to their size and their physiological and social needs, certain cetaceans cannot cope in captivity, where they are kept in small, impoverished environments and often die prematurely. AWI continues to work closely with Congress to update outdated federal regulations and advance legislation that reflects the latest scientific evidence.

In January, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Reps. Adam Schiff (D-CA), Jared Huffman (D-CA), and Suzan DelBene (D-WA) reintroduced the Strengthening Welfare in Marine Settings (SWIMS) Act (S 3694/HR 7145). This legislation would phase out the captive display of the four larger cetacean species held by US marine theme parks and aquariums: orcas (also known as killer whales), beluga whales, pilot whales, and false killer whales. Specifically, it would prohibit the breeding, wild capture, and import and export of these species for the purpose of public display. The bill would not

prohibit the continued holding of animals currently in captivity, thus providing the facilities time to transition to a more humane future.

ANIMAL WELFARE MEASURES IN STATE LEGISLATURES

AWI led efforts to get a bill introduced in the Illinois Senate to ban mink farming in the state. Sponsored by Assistant Majority Leader Linda Holmes, the Mink Facility Disease Prevention Act (SB 3262) recognizes that mink on fur farms incubate diseases such as COVID-19 and avian influenza, creating the perfect conditions for new variants to jump to humans—with potentially devastating results. The handful of mink farms in Illinois would be required to cease operations by January 1, 2025. AWI also joined with other organizations to urge the governor of Oregon to phase out commercial mink fur farming in that state.

AWI is supporting bills in Massachusetts and Washington to ban

the sale of nonvintage fur products. The fashion world is still transitioning away from this cruel product, and in 2019, California became the first state to ban fur sales. Nevertheless, millions of animals continue to suffer and die needlessly each year to produce luxury garments made with fur. Between 10 and 24 foxes, or 36 to 65 mink, may be killed to make a single fur coat.

AWI is supporting bills in Maryland and Massachusetts prohibiting the use of many exotic animals in traveling shows. In Ohio, we are fighting an attempt to make the use of “traditional methods” to “hunt, fish, and harvest wildlife” a constitutional right. This would enshrine methods such as the use of steel-jaw leghold traps and running down animals with hounds as “rights,” making it much harder to regulate these cruel practices.

As a member of the Keystone Link Coalition, AWI supported SB 55, a Pennsylvania bill addressing the connection between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence. It establishes a set of factors, including convictions for certain animal abuse crimes, that a judge may consider in making child custody and visitation decisions. The bill passed the Pennsylvania Senate in December and the House in late March, and now goes before the governor to be signed into law. Another AWI-backed bill, HB 1210, would authorize the inclusion of pets on personal protection orders in Pennsylvania. At press time, the bill is awaiting action in the Senate after passing the House last year.



MARC SCHARPING

On mink fur farms, animals suffer and deadly diseases take on new forms. AWI is campaigning to end mink farming in Illinois and other states.

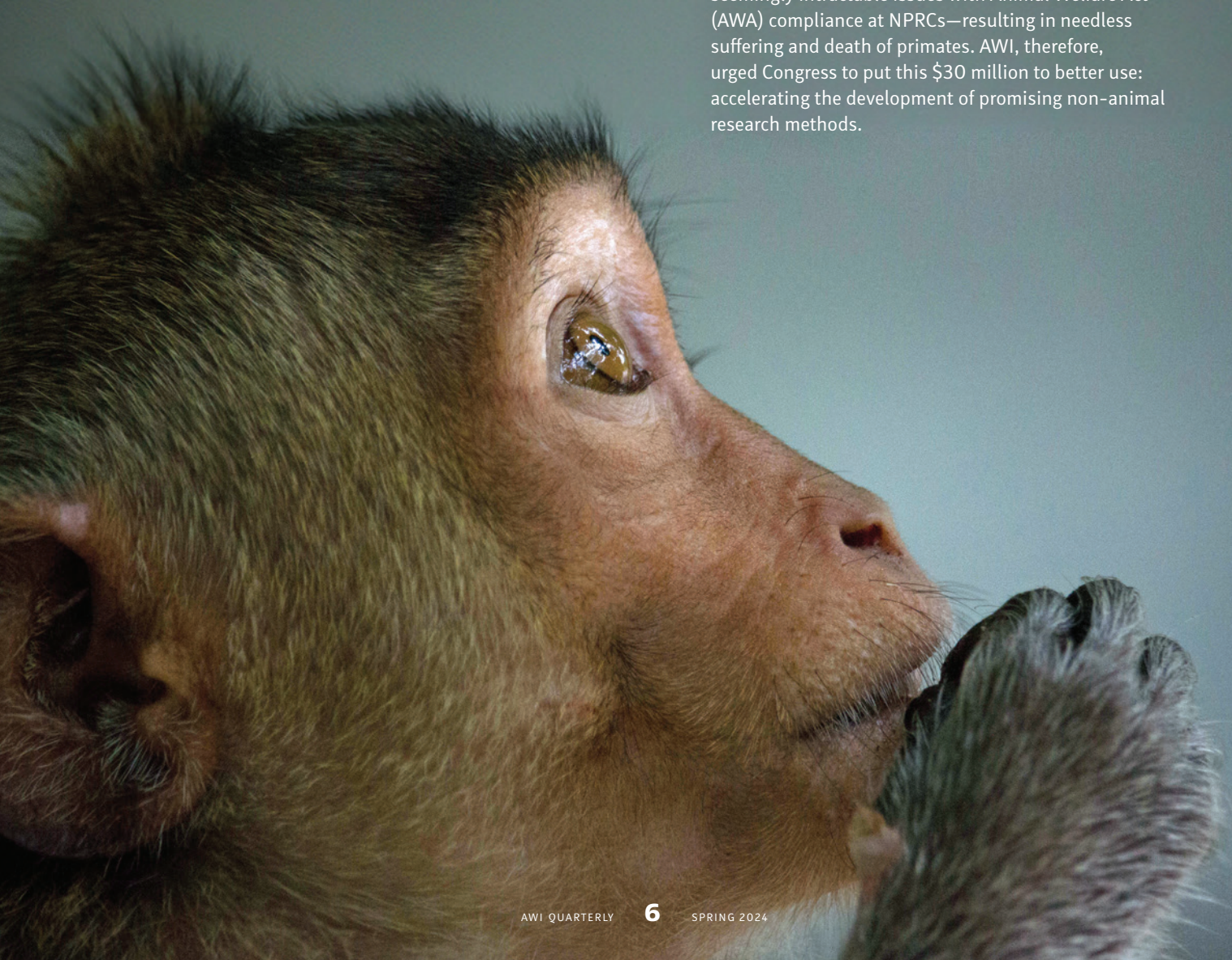
GOOD MONEY AFTER BAD:

Primate Research Centers Seek Funds to Expand While Failing on Animal Welfare

In the early 1960s, the federal government established a network of National Primate Research Centers (NPRCs) to promote biomedical research on primates. Funded through the National Institutes of Health, seven such centers now exist, at Emory University, Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU), the Texas Biomedical Research Institute (TBRI), Tulane University, the University of Washington (UW), the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and the University of California, Davis.

In fiscal year 2024 spending bills, the NIH requested \$30 million for NPRCs to “expand, remodel, renovate, or alter existing research facilities or construct new research facilities for nonhuman primate resource infrastructure.” Given the animal welfare record at NPRCs, this expansion plan is troubling.

AWI analyzed US Department of Agriculture inspection reports for these facilities covering the past decade. These reports document long-standing, severe, seemingly intractable issues with Animal Welfare Act (AWA) compliance at NPRCs—resulting in needless suffering and death of primates. AWI, therefore, urged Congress to put this \$30 million to better use: accelerating the development of promising non-animal research methods.



NO CONSEQUENCES FOR NONCOMPLIANCE

Facilities regulated under the AWA are subject to USDA inspection. When USDA inspectors uncover an AWA compliance failure grave enough to have “a serious or severe adverse effect on the health and well-being of an animal,” the facility is issued a “critical noncompliance” citation. AWI’s analysis shows that all seven NPRC host institutions have received multiple USDA citations for critical noncompliances over the past decade related to primate injuries and deaths, sometimes for recurring problems. Furthermore, all seven have received citations for primate-related critical noncompliances just within the last year and a half.

These citations have often been related to staff carelessness or inadequate oversight. A 2021 inspection at OHSU, for example, found that the “root cause” of horrific monkey deaths and injuries was “insufficient training and/or supervision,” and USDA inspectors have documented a number of egregious primate-related situations at NPRC host institutions, including monkeys dying from botched medical procedures, being deprived of water and adequate veterinary care, and being strangled by chains attached to improperly installed enrichment devices. Such issues would not be resolved through building renovations or expansion.

Quite often, however, the USDA has failed to follow up with fines or other enforcement action. As AWI has noted numerous times in past issues of the *AWI Quarterly*, the USDA fails to prioritize AWA enforcement. Last year, the department’s allocation for animal welfare enforcement represented less than one-tenth of 1% of its overall \$475 billion budget. Since December 2019, the 14,000+ entities currently regulated by the USDA have been assessed a mere 54 stipulated penalties (discounted penalties used in settlement agreements with violators).

This failure to penalize AWA noncompliance is clearly evident at the NPRCs. Despite a decade’s worth of critical noncompliances at all seven, only four of the host institutions have been fined during this period. In some cases—including incidents in which monkeys died—the USDA took no enforcement action whatsoever, instead sitting idle as the clock ran out on the five-year statute of limitations. (Note: Fine records prior to 2019 are not included in the USDA’s public database. Information on pre-2019 fines was obtained from other sources.)

COST OF DOING BUSINESS

When the USDA does issue fines, they are often too meager to matter. A 2005 audit by the USDA’s Office of Inspector General warned that fines being assessed at the time were

“negligible” for labs “with assets in the billions of dollars” and that labs view them merely as “a cost of doing business.” The audit concluded that larger stipulated penalties were needed.

UW (current annual budget: \$9.4 billion) offers a prime example. Despite earlier fines (\$20,000 in 2008, \$10,893 in 2011), the university continues to collect primate-related citations for critical noncompliances—12 since 2014, the majority of which involved monkey deaths and injuries. In November 2022, UW was fined \$3,750. Ten months later, it received a noncompliance citation after a macaque suffered a brain injury during improper placement of a recording device, and a critical noncompliance citation after a macaque died from being anesthetized with a faulty anesthesia machine—the third anesthesia-related primate death at the university since 2014.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison (\$4.2 billion annual budget) paid a \$35,286 fine in 2014 for primate-related issues. Between the 2014 fine and 2020, the university received four more citations for critical noncompliances that included multiple primate deaths, injuries, amputations, and escapes. In 2020, a \$74,000 fine was levied against the university for these and other incidents. The settlement agreement indicates that three primates suffered from severe dehydration—including one who had to be euthanized—after their water was disconnected for at least four days. In addition, 20 times between 2015 and 2019, primates escaped their enclosures and were injured after personnel failed to properly transport animals or secure the enclosures. Since the 2020 fine, four more citations for primate-related critical noncompliances have been recorded.

Similarly, OHSU (\$4.9 billion annual budget) has received 10 primate-related citations for critical noncompliances since 2014. The university was fined \$37,900 in October 2022 after a young primate got stuck in an enrichment device and had to be euthanized, a juvenile macaque was injured after getting trapped under an improperly secured drain cover, and two macaques died (one by euthanasia) after their cage was placed in a scalding hot cage washer with the monkeys still inside. Yet, nine months after paying its latest fine, the university received another citation for a critical noncompliance after a sliding door fell on an infant macaque during a capture attempt, resulting in a severe spinal injury and euthanasia.

The fact that NPRC host institutions have continued to receive citations for critical noncompliances—sometimes for the same issues that previously resulted in fines—shows that the problem outlined in the 2005 OIG audit has not been resolved nearly 20 years later. For such large institutions with multibillion-dollar budgets, fines of this scale simply



offer no deterrence. (For context, the cost of acquiring a single monkey for biomedical research was recently estimated at \$55,000.)

In fact, the only “impressive” aspect of the fines paid by these institutions is how they stack up quantitatively against fines paid by all the other regulated entities. Of the stipulated penalties levied by the USDA over the past four years against any regulated entity—research institution, breeder, dealer, exhibitor, transporter—the two highest were levied against NPRC host institutions, largely for primate-related issues: the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s \$74,000 fine in 2020 and OHSU’s \$37,900 fine in 2022. Among research institutions fined over the past four years, two-thirds of the total dollar amount has been assessed against NPRC host institutions. Given the dearth of USDA enforcement overall, this record of fines speaks to the severity of the offenses.

A BETTER USE OF TAX DOLLARS

Because USDA fines have not prevented continued citations for critical noncompliances at NPRCs, the NIH’s proposed use of \$30 million in taxpayer funds to renovate, remodel, and expand these facilities is problematic. The best way to enforce compliance with the law might have been to *withhold* funding instead. There is precedent for such a move: Congress did this with the Agricultural Research Service in the wake of a 2015 *New York Times* exposé regarding conditions at the agency’s Meat Animal Research Center.

Thirty years ago, Congress directed the NIH to support research into non-animal models. More recently, a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine committee—convened in response to a request from Congress—stated in its final report that “continued development and validation of new approach

methodologies” that do not involve animals, such as *in vitro* and *in silico* model systems, “is critically important to support further advances in biomedical research.”

For such alternatives to be developed within a reasonable timeframe, continued support—and pressure—from Congress is paramount. This is because influential industry players stand to profit handsomely from a continued robust trade in primates for biomedical research. Some are even purchasing “futures” in unborn primates from Asia, according to a US government official. These financial incentives, described in the fall 2023 *AWI Quarterly* article “In Lucrative Primate Trade, Enforcing the Law Makes Industry Cry Foul,” render the research industry unlikely to prioritize a rapid shift to non-animal alternatives, no matter the promise such alternatives hold for a brighter future.

When financial incentives to maintain the status quo stifle the development of innovation, allocation of funding is one of the government’s best levers to encourage change. Consequently, AWI wrote to leaders of the US House and Senate Appropriations Committees in November urging Congress to redirect the NIH’s \$30 million request for NPRC facility upgrades toward further development of research technologies that do not rely on animals.

Channeling government funding toward non-animal alternatives and away from renovations and expansions at institutions with profoundly troubling histories of AWA noncompliance would address multiple concerns and signal Congress’s commitment to modern and sustainable research methods that do not rely on animals. Unfortunately, as wrangling over the fiscal year 2024 budget dragged on into March, we saw no evidence that Congress was willing to take this bold step. For now, it appears the NPRCs are set to enhance infrastructure while leaving the welfare of the animals in its current state of disrepair. 🐼

MASSIVE MONKEY BREEDING FACILITY PLANNED IN GEORGIA

A 200-acre breeding “megafacility” is planned in Bainbridge, Georgia, to provide monkeys for biomedical research. At peak capacity, it would hold 30,000 long-tailed macaques—at least triple the number currently housed at any other US breeding facility—and employ up to 263 workers. The first 500–1,000 monkeys would be imported from “several Asian countries.”

The facility is a project of Safer Human Medicine, a new company whose CEO was previously COO at Envigo and whose president and COO previously held executive positions at Charles River Laboratories (CRL). Envigo (now owned by Inotiv) made headlines in 2022 for atrocious conditions documented at a now-shuttered beagle-breeding facility in Virginia. Following the indictment of Cambodian forestry officials and representatives of a foreign supplier over an alleged conspiracy to smuggle wild-caught long-tailed macaques from Cambodia into the United States for experimentation, CRL disclosed last year that the federal

government was also investigating its conduct regarding shipments of nonhuman primates from Cambodia. (See *AWI Quarterly*, spring 2023.)

The planned facility’s leadership, its sheer size, and the availability of a sufficient number of qualified animal care staff amidst an industry shortage all raise serious animal welfare concerns.

AWI’S REFINEMENT DATABASE ADDS NEW SEARCH FILTER

AWI has updated its Refinement Database, which curates published scientific articles and books on improving the welfare of animals in research and testing. Previously, users could filter search results by “animal type” (e.g., rat, zebrafish, macaque) and “topic” (e.g., environmental enrichment, welfare assessment, social housing). AWI has now added a third filter that allows users to search based on the study’s setting—home, laboratory, farm, shelter, veterinary facility, zoo/aquarium/sanctuary, or wild. Visit awionline.org/refinement to access the database.

EPA DROPS TARGET DATE BUT EXPANDS SCOPE OF ANIMAL TESTING PHASE-OUT

The Environmental Protection Agency has quietly abandoned a 2035 target date to end use of mammals in toxicity testing. This 2035 target date was originally announced in September 2019 (see *AWI Quarterly*, fall 2019) and reiterated in June 2020. However, the target date was missing in a December 2021 *New Approach Methods Work Plan* update that only recently came to light in news media. New approach methods include technologies that don’t require the use of animals, such as organoids (artificially grown masses of cells or tissues) and organs-on-chips (small polymer chips laced with human cells) to mimic the human body’s physiological responses to drugs, toxins, or other chemicals.

As quoted in a January 2024 *Science* article about the change, former EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler—who signed the 2019 memo—expressed his fear that, without the deadline, “the status quo will continue.” The EPA indicated in an internal agency email, however, that it remains committed to the development of non-animal models, and the agency has publicly asserted that removing the target date will shift focus from the deadline to specific objectives.

In the updated work plan, the EPA also broadened its goal of reducing and eliminating testing on mammals to include all vertebrate animals—a welcome revision given the EPA’s extensive use of fish. The EPA currently relies on thousands of mice, rats, rabbits, and fish each year to assess the safety of pesticides and chemicals.

The EPA set aside a timeline to end toxicity testing on mammals but asserts that reducing the use of all vertebrate animals—including fish—for such testing remains a priority.



KAZAKOVMAKSI

After the Roundup:

The Fate of Wild Horses in Government Holding Facilities

Against a backdrop of picturesque mountains, past coils of razor wire, once-wild horses stand in the frozen dirt of the Cañon City Off-Range Corral. The corral—an enormous grid of pipe-paneled paddocks and hay fields that can hold up to 3,000 wild equines—is located within an expansive Colorado Department of Corrections campus. Six (human) prisons lie within a roughly one-mile radius of where the horses stand. Security is strict, and visits to the corral by the public are uncommon and tightly controlled.

For more than 30 years, the corral has operated as a Bureau of Land Management short-term holding facility for wild horses rounded up from the open range. Like other BLM short-term holding facilities, it receives and “prepares” wild equines for sale or adoption. Horses may remain in Cañon City for up to three years. Those not sold or adopted during that time are moved to long-term holding pastures.

The official policy of the BLM, which manages the vast majority of our nation’s wild horses and burros, is to complete processing steps such as Coggins testing (for equine infectious anemia, a potentially fatal disease), freeze marking, and—as of February 2023—vaccinations within the first month. However, consistent lapses in staffing and

the aggressive schedule of roundups can result in horses left in limbo for months, with little oversight. In reference to the Cañon City facility, in particular, a May 2022 *Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program Team Assessment Report* from the BLM concluded that “they simply do not have enough employees on a consistent daily basis to complete all the work required in a timely manner.”

This report came in the wake of a massive mortality event at the facility. The previous year, during a summer studded with controversial roundups, 445 horses were removed from Colorado’s West Douglas Herd Area and sent to Cañon City. Staffing woes and the sheer number of new arrivals resulted in a delay of eight months before any of these horses were vaccinated (a delay that was not, however, a violation of BLM policy at the time).

A vaccination protocol finally got underway in April 2022, only to be halted within a few days when nine of the horses were found dead. Over the next few weeks, equine influenza swept through the herd, killing 146 horses, including 24 foals. West Douglas horses were the only ones at the facility reported to die during this outbreak. The BLM has postulated that exposure to wildfire smoke on the range made them



LIFE IN HOLDING

Life in short-term holding is vastly different from life on the range. While hay and water are provided in each pen, the benefits end there. Families are forever separated, and the ability of these confined wild animals to exhibit their natural behaviors is vastly curtailed. Equines are separated by sex, and paddocks may further isolate young horses. The soft, sometimes muddy footing necessitates hoof trimmings, a novel requirement after a lifetime of hooves being kept even and trim by miles of varied terrain. In inclement weather, the horses' knowledge of natural shelter is useless, as fences generally force them to remain exposed. Left with little stimulation, bored foals may chew off the ends of mares' tails, leaving a pen full of horses without natural fly defense. These facilities undeniably offer a more impoverished existence—replacing autonomy and opportunities to explore with austere, cramped confinement. (Photo by Kimerlee Curyl)



particularly vulnerable to severe respiratory infections, but this has not been confirmed.

As evidenced by this incident, the mass removal of wild horses into holding facilities can lead to overcrowding and rapid spread of disease. At roughly the same time the Cañon City outbreak was occurring, the BLM was contending with a deadly outbreak of strangles—a highly contagious bacterial disease—at the agency's Wheatland facility in Wyoming, which houses up to 3,500 wild horses.

This fiscal year, the BLM plans to round up approximately 20,000 wild horses and burros, most of whom will find themselves in short-term holding facilities. The BLM touts its Adoption Incentive Program as a way to rehome wild horses removed from the range, but a 2021 *New York Times* investigation into the program revealed its many problems—including the fact that horses acquired through the program were being sent to slaughter outside the United States.

There are better ways to manage wild horses on the range and provide the federal protections they are due under the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. AWI has long supported the use of the porcine zona pellucida (PZP) fertility control vaccine as a safe and effective way to manage wild horse populations. A truly concerted effort to administer immunocontraceptive fertility control within herds would allow wild horses to remain in their natural habitat while reducing the strain on already overburdened holding and adoption systems.

Yet, in 2023, the BLM reported that only 720 fertility control treatments were applied. As of this writing, more than double that number of horses are corralled in Cañon City alone. In recent years, the Cañon City corral has maintained an operating budget of around \$3 million. By contrast, the BLM has historically devoted less than 1 percent of its total Wild Horse and Burro Program budget to implementing fertility control programs nationally. In fiscal year 2021, that amounted to \$0.9 million.

During the past three funding cycles, AWI helped secure language in annual budget legislation directing the BLM to increase expenditures on immunocontraceptive fertility control, and we are pushing for similar language in spending bills currently under consideration. Meanwhile, we continue to fund on-the-ground projects that strengthen the case for fertility control over capture and confinement.

We also strongly advocate an end to brutal helicopter roundups, whereby panicked horses are chased into enclosures, and which often lead to death and serious injury before the horses even reach the holding facilities. Passage of the bipartisan Wild Horse and Burro Protection Act (HR 3656), introduced earlier this Congress, would end such methods. The ceaseless roundups and long-term captivity of so many horses represent a clear failure in the BLM's duty to protect wild equines. The tragic deaths at Cañon City underscore an overlooked but dangerous consequence of this failed management approach. 🐾

ADAM JONES/DANITA DELIMONT



PROTECTING PREDATORS ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed prohibiting most forms of predator control on National Wildlife Refuge System lands, which AWI strongly supports. In comments, we highlighted the critical roles that predators play in maintaining ecosystem health and balance. The removal of carnivores causes profound impacts, altering the dynamics of disease, wildfires, carbon sequestration, invasive species, nutrient cycling, and biodiversity. Killing predators undermines the reason refuges were established: to protect lands where wildlife can thrive, and where Americans can enjoy our great outdoors.

However, the proposal contains exceptions that would allow lethal management in certain circumstances. AWI has urged the USFWS to prohibit the use of neck snares, steel-jaw leghold traps, and body-crushing traps in those circumstances. These devices are cruel and pose a danger to people, companion animals, and nontarget species. **Take action:** Before the May 6 deadline, visit AWI's Action Center at awionline.org/USFWSRule to send comments to the USFWS supporting the proposal

but urging the agency to ban the use of body-gripping traps and snares altogether as a predator management tool on national refuges.

PETITION SEEKS REGS TO REIN IN WILDLIFE SERVICES

AWI and allies submitted a petition for rulemaking to the US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in November urging the agency to adopt regulations governing its Wildlife Services program to improve the welfare of wildlife, promote coexistence, and reduce ecological harm.

Wildlife Services traps, snares, poisons, and shoots millions of animals every year, primarily on behalf of the animal agriculture industry and pro-hunting interests. Between 2010 and 2022, the program killed more than 374 million animals, including coyotes, foxes, mountain lions, beavers, and many species of birds. Wildlife Services also unintentionally kills nontarget animals, including companion animals and imperiled species such as eagles, falcons, condors, wolves, and grizzly bears. The program's lethal

methods cause immense suffering, fundamentally alter ecosystems, and do little to resolve conflicts.

The petition requests that Wildlife Services be required to use nonlethal methods to manage human-wildlife conflicts; phase out particularly inhumane killing methods such as neck snares, steel-jaw leghold traps, M-44 cyanide bombs, and aerial gunning; cease operations in wilderness areas; and discontinue the use of toxic lead ammunition. The petition also requests clear standards to ensure Wildlife Services treats animals humanely and operates with greater transparency and accountability to the public.

CLIMATE CHANGE COULD TRIGGER CATASTROPHIC SPECIES LOSS

In a new study published in *Global Change Biology* (Wiens & Zelinka, 2024), researchers at the University of Arizona examined a comprehensive suite of factors to estimate climate-caused extinction in coming decades.

The conclusions are grim. The authors estimate a 21–37 percent preliminary extinction rate for known species of land vertebrates, marine animals, insects, insect-associated animals (e.g., mites and nematodes), plants, and fungi by 2070 under the worst case scenario—where global emissions continue to rise through the turn of the century. At the upper end of this range, this corresponds to the potential extinction of more than 676,000 of the 1.81 million known species, including over 32,000 known land vertebrate species (44%) and over 163,000 known marine animal species (87%).

Such staggering losses would dramatically diminish global biodiversity, disrupt ecological function, and ultimately harm our own well-being.

BUILDING THE MOVEMENT TO BAN COMMERCIAL KANGAROO KILLING

DENNIS VINK, CAMPAIGN MANAGER, KANGAROOS ALIVE

I don't know what shocked me more when I was offered the chance to become a kangaroo advocate in Europe. Was it that I, a native of the Netherlands, had never heard of the kangaroo industry despite considering myself to be relatively aware of animal welfare issues, or that almost none of the corporate leaders, politicians, or friends I reached out to in Europe were aware of it, either? This was alarming, considering that the commercial killing of kangaroos is the world's largest slaughter of land-based wildlife, with Europe being the main importer of kangaroo products, responsible for 65 percent of the trade. Fortunately, awareness is on the rise in Europe and elsewhere—the global campaign to save kangaroos is building and looking increasingly (*I apologize*) “hopful.”

BACKGROUND

Every year, Australian state governments set quotas authorizing the killing of about 5 million wild kangaroos by the commercial kangaroo industry. Their flesh is sold globally as pet food and exotic game meat, while their skins are used to produce high-end soccer shoes, motorcycle gear, hats, wallets, and key rings. The killing occurs under the cover of darkness in remote areas, and there is no supervision or

government monitoring of the slaughter. Independent studies have revealed that up to 40 percent of kangaroos are mis-shot, often leading to prolonged suffering.

One-third of commercially killed kangaroos are female, and an estimated 400,000 healthy baby kangaroos (joeys) suffer collateral deaths when their mothers are killed. The Australian government's Code of Practice for “humanely” killing kangaroos for profit authorizes shooters to bludgeon the joeys to death. In practice however, hunters rarely make the effort to locate the orphaned joeys and instead leave them to die slowly and alone of starvation or predation.

Meanwhile, nobody knows how many kangaroos are left in the wild. Federal and state governments in Australia claim overabundance, but a New South Wales parliamentary inquiry in 2021 revealed that the methods used to estimate population abundance (on which kill quotas are based) are unreliable and demonstrably lead to biologically impossible outcomes. To cite just one of many examples: Even in a favorable year, the growth rate for these slowly reproducing, nonmigratory marsupials is only about 15 percent, yet the



NSW government claimed an increase of 426 percent in a kangaroo management zone in 2015.

The inquiry also highlighted reports of local extinctions and outlined the threat of climate change to kangaroo populations. Ultimately, however, nearly all of the 23 recommendations that emerged from the inquiry have been ignored by the NSW government, including an urgent request to undertake an independent review into the methods used to count kangaroos. Experts have urged the federal and state governments to apply the precautionary principle and halt the commercial slaughter—pleas that have been in vain.

KANGAROOS ALIVE

Following the 2018 release of Kate Clere and Mick McIntyre's award-winning investigative documentary *Kangaroo: A Love-Hate Story*, they co-founded Kangaroos Alive as a global movement for the ethical treatment of kangaroos. Nationally and internationally, through political, corporate, and public awareness campaigns, Kangaroos Alive is building support for a moratorium on the commercial killing of kangaroos. In 2020, the organization created World Kangaroo Day, observed annually on October 24, as a day to celebrate and promote protection of kangaroos. Kangaroos Alive partners with Back to Country, a Yuin Nation Aboriginal cultural organization. The Yuin Declaration for Kangaroos, issued in 2021 and authored

by the late Yuin Elder Uncle Max Harrison, powerfully affirms the sentience, totemic value, and sovereign rights of kangaroos and underlies the work of Kangaroos Alive.

HOW DO AUSTRALIANS FEEL ABOUT THIS ISSUE?

In 2023, Kangaroos Alive commissioned an independent, nationally representative survey of 2,000 Australians to assess their attitudes about kangaroos and how they are managed in response to questions from members of the European Parliament.

The survey revealed overwhelming support for kangaroo protection among Australians: 69 percent think the commercial killing of kangaroos causes unnecessary cruelty, and 64 percent think Australia should take a stance against it. Three in four Australians find the killing of joeys unacceptable and inhumane. Fully 98 percent of those surveyed indicated it is important to protect these native grazers in order to protect the wider Australian ecosystems of which kangaroos are a crucial part. The survey found 70 percent support for stopping the commercial slaughter at least until reliable population estimates are available, while 67 percent say that the killing should be stopped until the impact of climate change on kangaroos can be fully assessed. In other words, the commercial kangaroo-killing industry does not have a social license to operate.

GLOBAL OUTRAGE, GLOBAL ACTION

These important results only confirm what is evident globally. As more animal protection organizations join the campaign to save kangaroos, we are seeing an exponential increase in worldwide awareness of the cruel slaughter and, in turn, increased pressure on governments to stop fueling this wildlife trade. In 1971, California banned the import of all kangaroo products. In 2012, Russia banned the import of kangaroo meat because of unacceptable bacterial contamination. In 2022, a motion was passed in the Netherlands calling on the government to address the import of controversial kangaroo products into the European Union. And, at present, bills to ban kangaroo products have been proposed in Italy, the Belgian region of Flanders, and the US states of Arizona, Connecticut, New Jersey, Oregon, and Vermont. Policymakers can rest assured that this is what Australians want, as our survey revealed that two-thirds of Aussies want other countries to stop trading kangaroo body parts.

CORPORATE VICTORIES

Corporations worldwide are ditching kangaroo products. Fashion empires Chanel, Diadora, Gucci, H&M, Prada, and Versace all banned the use of kangaroo skins. European supermarket giants Aldi, Carrefour, Delhaize, Makro, and Spar took kangaroo meat off the shelves. The Netherlands

saw storied ice skate brand Viking, e-commerce giant Bol, and over 60 other companies pledge to end the sales of kangaroo-derived products. Most recently, pet food giant Purina announced it had discontinued all products containing kangaroo due to animal welfare concerns.

This year, New Balance, Nike, and PUMA pledged to stop using kangaroo skins in their soccer cleats. Adidas stubbornly refuses, thus far, to follow their competitors' example, but we are confident that persistent and increasing public pressure will eventually prevail. Again, it's what Aussies want: Our survey revealed that 64 percent want commercial corporations to stop trading in kangaroo body parts, compared to just 13 percent who don't.

COEXISTING WITH KANGAROOS

In the period following European settlement of Australia, an apparent inability or lack of desire on the part of many settlers to coexist with wildlife gave rise to this cruel industry. World Kangaroo Day 2023, themed "Coexisting with Kangaroos," marked the kick-off of the exciting Kangaroo Coexistence Project. The aim of this community-driven effort is to compile an extensive resource with practical guides and information to inspire and enable farmers and landholders to stop the slaughter of kangaroos on their property, and instead switch to nonlethal coexistence methods. This project builds on the knowledge of scientists, Aboriginal leaders, and a large variety of nature-inclusive farmers who are taking the lead in the coexistence movement.

Furthermore, our new Kangaroo Walks & Talks program is now ready for an Australia-wide rollout after a successful pilot effort. This new "kangaroo watching" program, modeled after Australia's shift from whaling to whale watching, recognizes

the importance of the kangaroo—Australia's most iconic wild animal—to the nation's \$60 billion/year tourism industry. We proudly developed this program in close collaboration with our partner, Back to Country.

Our survey confirmed that Australians support this coexistence approach. A striking majority of Australians want kangaroos to remain part of the Australian landscape (90%) and think we should share the land with them (88%). Australians feel kangaroos deserve a fair share of grazing on their native land (80%) and support switching to nonlethal coexistence practices (69%). Over three-quarters of Australians (78%) think it is important to examine the potential economic benefits of kangaroo ecotourism versus the purported benefits of the commercial killing of kangaroos.

THE INDUSTRY WILL FALL

Australia's kangaroo-killing industry is clearly terrified, as evidenced by their delegations of lobbyists and corporate shills dispatched to Europe and the United States to defend the slaughter, as well as their recent rebranding efforts. They can no longer ignore the mounting global pressure and are well aware that they lack both future prospects and current social license.

Despite the slow pace inherent in complex and multifaceted campaigns like these, we sense the industry's imminent downfall, and they do too. The day will come when people visiting Australia will only encounter kangaroos in their natural habitat, happily hopping with their mob (as a group of kangaroos is called), and no one anywhere will encounter them as body parts on store shelves. Until then, we and our partner organizations worldwide will tirelessly continue to push for the protection that kangaroos deserve. 🐾



RIGHT WHALE CALF DIES AFTER APPARENT BOAT COLLISION

No more than 360 North Atlantic right whales remain, including fewer than 70 reproductively active females. The past seven years have been devastating, as entanglements in commercial fishing gear and vessel strikes continue to take a heavy toll, resulting in right whale deaths outweighing calf births.

This calving season, researchers identified 19 mother and calf right whale pairs, signaling the most productive calving season in years. Still, given the population size and mortality rate, a significantly higher number of newborn calves are needed annually to stem the population's decline.

Tragically, three of the newborns have already been reported dead. The first of these, spotted in late November, belonged to 38-year-old right whale Juno. Juno's family had previously suffered an estimated 28 entanglements and two vessel strikes. Six such incidents happened to calves under a year old. Sadly, Juno's newborn calf has joined this grim tally. A little

over a month after the mother-calf pair were first sighted, the calf was spotted with severe injuries to her head and mouth, apparently from a boat propeller. Two months later, in March, the calf was discovered dead—washed up on Georgia's Cumberland Island National Seashore.

The National Marine Fisheries Service has proposed extending vessel speed restrictions currently in place for larger vessels to include those 35–65 feet in length—the size of vessel thought to have struck Juno's calf—but has delayed issuing a final rule amid political blowback. (See page 4.) **Take action:** Visit awionline.org/saveNARWs to urge NMFS to immediately issue updated regulations to save North Atlantic right whales from fast-moving vessels.

BYCATCH STANDARDS BYPASS FOREIGN FISHERIES

Around the globe each year, more than 650,000 marine mammals are killed or seriously injured as bycatch—entangled or hooked in fishing gear

meant for other species. Since 1972, the Marine Mammal Protection Act has decreed that seafood sold in the United States must be fished in accordance with strong standards for preventing bycatch. US fisheries have long been held to these MMPA standards, but the National Marine Fisheries Service has largely allowed foreign fisheries to ignore them. In 2016, the agency finally set a 2021 deadline for other nations to comply. That deadline, however, has been extended several times—most recently to December 2025.

To highlight this discrepancy, AWI and partner organizations produced *Ban Bycatch: The United States Must Ban Seafood from Countries Failing to Protect Marine Mammals*. This issue brief assesses the ability of 11 countries—of varying income levels and fishing capacities—to meet US bycatch standards. The results were discouraging. Most countries fail to sufficiently assess the status of marine mammal populations in their waters and lack adequate monitoring to determine fishery impacts on those populations.

Surveys indicate that American consumers do not wish to buy seafood caught via methods that harm or kill marine mammals. The US market is lucrative, with more than \$21 billion worth of seafood products imported annually, accounting for more than 15 percent of the global value of marine food products in trade. Flexing this economic muscle is vital to securing protections for marine mammals. **Take action:** Visit awionline.org/bycatch to urge NMFS to stop stalling and enforce the requirement that foreign fisheries comply with the MMPA.

According to the Marine Mammal Commission, "Bycatch is the number one source of direct human-caused death and serious injury to marine mammals worldwide."



FISHTEK MARINE



On Orca Captivity, China Chooses Regressive Path

AWI's Dr. Naomi Rose visited China in January on behalf of the China Cetacean Alliance, of which AWI is a founding member, to observe the orcas living in Chinese facilities. She also gave public presentations to eager audiences in Shanghai and Hangzhou on the welfare of captive cetaceans.

China now has 22 captive orcas—15 imported from Russia's Sea of Okhotsk and seven captive-born. The oldest of the latter is 4 years old and already performing. The wild-caught orcas in China all arrived between 2013 and 2016, but were not immediately put on public display. (Two still aren't, but a video of a May 2023 training session with them at Changqiao Ocean Kingdom in Wuxi was posted to Instagram in January.) The two adult females at Haichang Ocean Park in Shanghai—first displayed in 2018—were due to give birth by the end of 2023. Naomi, however, observed only one calf of the right age, alone in the medical tank, being raised by hand. A 2-year-old at the facility, now with the adult females, was also hand raised after being rejected by his mother.

Most of China's orcas were only put on display in autumn 2023, in a brand-new facility in Zhuhai called Chimelong Spaceship. Naomi saw six male orcas perform at this facility, which has the largest cetacean enclosure in the world at 36 feet (11m) deep and long enough to accommodate a wave machine at one end for enrichment. The juveniles did seem to enjoy surfing, but the waves are only available twice a day, before and after performances. At two locations, floor jets shoot up curtains of bubbles, but Naomi did not see any of

the animals interact with the bubbles during the time one set of jets was on. Two of the males are adults, whose fins have already collapsed. Despite the bubble and wave features, all six males have developed significant stereotypical behaviors, including repetitively approaching an underwater viewing window and bumping it with their foreheads or bellies—a sign of boredom or frustration. Four large viewing windows surround the enclosure, so when visitors are present, the whales cannot go “off view”—an option many zoo specialists consider important for welfare.

A second tank held three juveniles of around 1 month, 1 year, and 2 years of age accompanied by one adult female. She is believed to be the mother of the oldest and youngest of the three, while the 1-year-old has already been separated from their mother. The remaining four orcas (three wild-caught and one more calf) are reportedly held at the off-site “breeding center,” where all the whales were until last autumn, but there is no way to confirm this, as that facility is not open to the public.

China is going in the opposite direction to the rest of the world with regard to captive orcas. Russia outlawed capture of orcas within its waters in 2018, so now China will only be able to maintain its “collection” through breeding. With inbreeding a looming concern, the future of the Chinese orcas is uncertain. AWI will continue to do its utmost to increase awareness in China about the welfare issues associated with orca captivity and to influence Chinese authorities to reconsider their regressive choices. 🐾

Caribbean Species GAIN PROTECTIONS AT SPAW Protocol Meeting

The Caribbean Environment Programme was established in 1981 as one of the United Nations' "Regional Seas" programs, in recognition of the importance and value of the Wider Caribbean's fragile and vulnerable coastal and marine ecosystems. An action plan agreed to that year led to the 1983 adoption of the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (a.k.a. the Cartagena Convention)—the only legally binding treaty focused on protecting the region's biodiversity. The Cartagena Convention includes three protocols (technical agreements) on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW), Combatting Oil Spills, and Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities. AWI is most closely involved with the SPAW Protocol, which was adopted in 1990 and entered into force in June 2000.

AWI has been involved in the development and operation of the SPAW Protocol since the outset. AWI consultants Tom Garrett and Kate O'Connell (before she joined AWI) played key roles in the protocol's creation. AWI's executive director, Susan Millward, has long been involved, as well, including through active participation in the Species and Exemptions Working Groups. Mentored by Tom and the late Milton Kaufmann (who also helped craft the protocol), Susan has steered AWI toward its well-established role as a recognized expert and

observer at SPAW meetings, including the most recent, the Twelfth Conference of Parties (SPAW COP12) held in October 2023. AWI was also represented at COP12 by marine wildlife program director Georgia Hancock.

At SPAW COPs, typically held every two years, representatives from member states, along with observer organizations such as AWI, discuss and decide on workplans, recommendations from the SPAW Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (in which AWI also participates), and other papers and documents submitted by parties and observers. At SPAW COP12, for example, the parties reviewed and adopted a proposal from the government of France to add Martinique Regional Nature Park to the protocol's list of protected areas. The parties also encouraged the SPAW Secretariat and Regional Activity Centre (RAC) to provide resources to mitigate the negative consequences of the Sargassum algal inundation that has plagued the region in recent years.

Species receive various levels of protection through inclusion on one of the protocol's annexes. AWI's years of advocacy via the Species Working Group on listing proposals paid off at COP12 with the uplisting—from Annex III to Annex II (the highest possible for fauna)—of the oceanic whitetip shark, Lesser Antillean iguana, whale shark, and giant manta





ray and the new listing of all parrotfishes and Caribbean reef shark on Annex III. For species listed on Annex II, the parties to the protocol must “ensure total protection and recovery” by (1) prohibiting the taking, possession, and killing of or commercial trade in the species and their eggs, parts, or products and (2) to the extent possible, prohibiting disturbance of the species during periods of biological stress such as breeding, incubation, dormancy, and migration. Somewhat less restrictive, Annex III requires parties to adopt appropriate measures to ensure protection and recovery of listed species.

Due to the rules of the protocol, however, the parties’ adoption of listing decisions is not always seamless or uniform. Some—such as the shark uplistings approved at this meeting—can take years to achieve. At COP12, the United States took a reservation (akin to an exception) to each of the 21 species listings agreed to at the meeting while it completes a thorough review of domestic measures required to comply with the listing requirements. The United States indicated it intends to complete this review as soon as possible so it can be in a position to withdraw the reservations and comply with the treaty with respect to these listings.

As expected, the parties adopted the RAC’s *2023–2028 Strategic Plan* and the *Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region*, which Susan had an integral role in updating in the years since COP11. Further, the parties urged the SPAW Secretariat to facilitate collaboration with other Cartagena Convention protocols to aid efficient implementation of the various agreements’ subprograms. Such collaboration is important given the extensive effects land-based pollution and oil spills can have on marine environments.

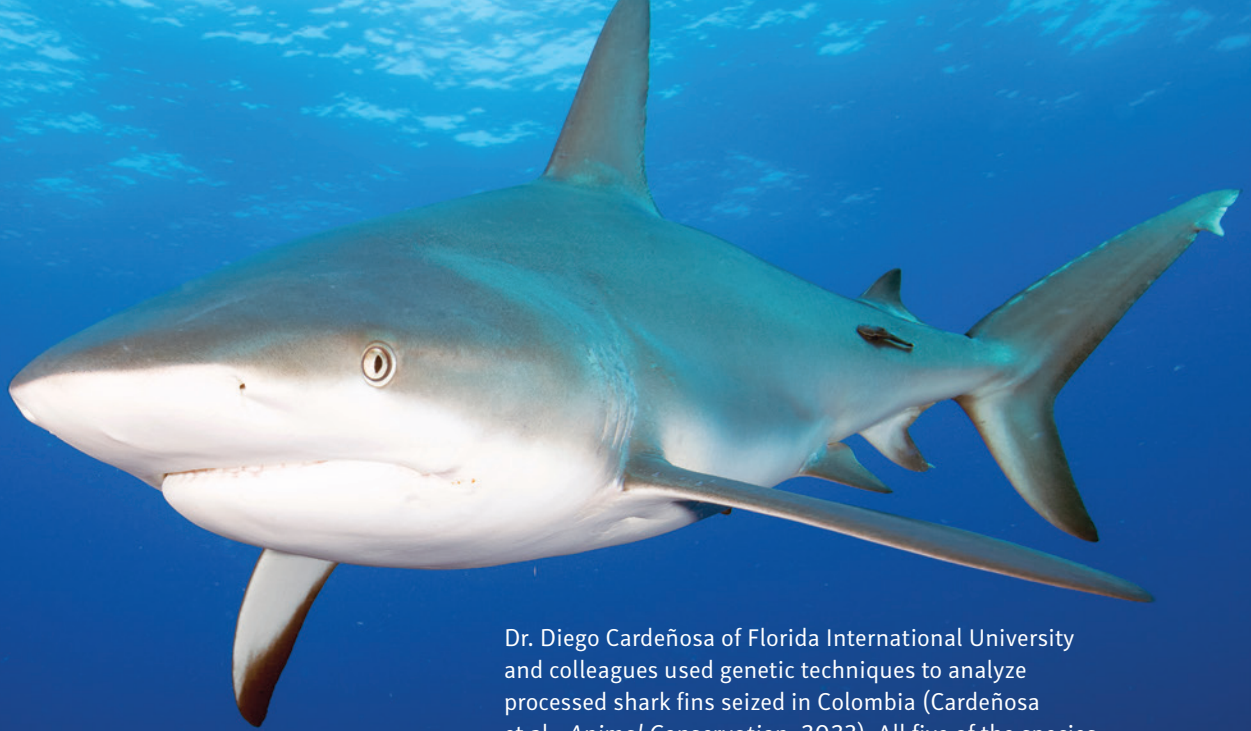
Another important moment came when the parties recognized the contribution of nongovernmental organizations to the implementation of the Cartagena Convention—and to the SPAW Protocol, in particular—and welcomed the establishment of the SPAW Consortium. The consortium was co-founded by AWI, Monitor Caribbean

(an organization founded by Milton Kaufman and on whose board Susan now sits), the Foundation for Development Planning, the Lightkeepers Foundation, and WIDECast as a vehicle to strengthen and expand the network of NGOs that play a critical role in the formation and implementation of the protocol’s protections. AWI sponsored a successful side event during the week to introduce the consortium to delegates and other meeting participants. With a keynote address by Chris Corbin, coordinator of the UN Caribbean Environment Programme, the SPAW Consortium was firmly launched.

The same side event featured presentations on the Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network (CAR-WEN), to which AWI serves as a supporting partner and advisor. Led by representatives from Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas and facilitated by Sustainable Innovation Initiatives’ Nurture Nature Campaign, CAR-WEN aims to enhance enforcement efforts and combat wildlife crimes through collaboration between regional governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders. The initiative draws inspiration from the operations of wildlife enforcement networks in other regions. We are excited about CAR-WEN’s potential to foster collaborative efforts to protect wildlife in the region and will continue to provide updates on its development and evolution.

AWI also participated in the concurrent half-day Workshop on Innovative Strategies for Shark and Ray Management, part of the RAC’s Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities (CAMAC) project. The Caribbean is home to a wide range of shark and ray species found in a variety of habitats and ecosystems—creating challenges for their management. This workshop presented several examples of innovative management strategies and addressed considerations for future priorities. Through CAMAC, an action plan to increase our knowledge of the region’s sharks, rays, and related species is being developed by the Dutch Elasmobranch Society.

All in all, years of planning culminated in a very busy but successful and productive COP12. 🐾



Shark Killing Shows No Sign of Slowing Down

Three recent studies highlight the enormous impact that shark fishing and the demand for fins continue to have on global shark populations, as well as the difficulties inherent in efforts to stem illegal trade in fins and protect vulnerable species.

Law enforcement's ability to identify the species of landed sharks once fins are processed is a particular challenge. Dried or frozen fins can often be identified to species visually. Once processed, however, visual characteristics that allow for species identification are lost. Without genetic testing, it can be impossible to do so.

A study led by Dr. Kai-Lin Selena Shen of Yale-NUS College and the National University of Singapore (Shen et al., *Peer J Life & Environment*, 2024) examined shark fins acquired from seafood and traditional medicine shops in Singapore. The researchers examined more than 500 specimens and identified 27 species—three of which are categorized as “Critically Endangered,” four as “Endangered,” and 10 as “Vulnerable” on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. Six species were listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). An Appendix II listing means trade must be regulated “to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.”

Dr. Diego Cardeñoso of Florida International University and colleagues used genetic techniques to analyze processed shark fins seized in Colombia (Cardeñoso et al., *Animal Conservation*, 2023). All five of the species identified are listed on CITES Appendix II, including four that are considered threatened (i.e., categorized as Critically Endangered, Endangered, or Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List). The authors conclude that early-supply-chain processing of shark fins significantly complicates enforcement actions. They recommend the use of in-port genetic testing to facilitate enforcement, particularly in regions where shark products are frequently traded.

Finally, a study led by Dr. Boris Worm of Dalhousie University (Worm et al., *Science*, 2024) estimates that total annual shark mortality increased from over 76 million in 2012 to over 80 million in 2017, averaging 79 million from 2017 to 2019, including 25 million sharks from threatened species. Ninety-five percent of the catch between 2017 and 2019 occurred in coastal waters. When the authors factored in shark mortality from catch that nations report only as “Elasmobranchii”—a subclass that includes sharks, rays, skates, and sawfish—the number of sharks estimated killed in 2019 increased to 101 million.

Worm et al. compiled data on hundreds of millions of shark deaths and found that, while mortality decreased by 7 percent in pelagic (open ocean) fisheries—most notably in the Atlantic and Western Pacific—it increased by 4 percent in coastal waters. Based on their data and on interviews with shark scientists and fishers, the authors concluded that shark finning bans, which result in sharks being landed whole, may actually increase shark killing by expanding or creating new markets for shark meat and other products. Conversely, regional shark fishing or retention bans had some success in reducing mortality. Their analysis underscores the need for broadscale shark protections such as fishing bans, sanctuaries and no-take protected areas, and catch limits on imperiled species to protect these important marine predators. 🐾

ANOTHER DEVASTATING YEAR FOR BARN FIRES

More than 486,000 farmed animals suffered horrific deaths in barn fires in 2023, pushing the death toll over the past decade to more than 6.8 million. As in previous years, birds accounted for the vast majority of barn fire victims, with around 400,000 perishing in massive fires on large egg-producing factory farms. The deadliest fire involving cattle since 2013—the year AWI began tracking this issue—also occurred last year: In April 2023, a fire and explosion on South Fork Dairy in Dimmitt, Texas, killed 18,000 cows.

A few weeks into 2024, another Texas factory farm made headlines when a fire broke out on Feather Crest Farms, a large egg operation near Kurten. The death toll, although not disclosed, was likely significant—hens were reportedly trapped inside one of two destroyed housing units. The site is owned by MPS Eggs, the sixth-largest egg producer in the country, with 11 million egg-laying hens in total at six sites in Indiana, Texas, and Illinois.

MISTREATMENT OF BIRDS IN SLAUGHTER PLANTS GOES UNCHECKED

An AWI report released in December revealed that the US Department of Agriculture's approach to preventing and responding to the mistreatment of birds in slaughter plants remains largely ineffective. *The Welfare of Birds at Slaughter in the United States* analyzed USDA poultry slaughter

inspection records from 2020 through 2022 at approximately 350 federally inspected plants, which process the vast majority of the 9.7 billion chickens, turkeys, ducks, and other birds killed each year for meat in the United States.

Federal law does not explicitly require that individual birds be handled humanely while being processed for slaughter. However, in 2005, in response to public and congressional outcry, the USDA issued a notice that poultry “must be handled in a manner that is consistent with good commercial practices [GCP], which means they should be treated humanely.” The department began documenting violations of GCP, such as intentional, repeated abuse, or birds entering scald tanks while still alive. The USDA also began documenting instances of mishandling that were not deemed comprehensive enough to be considered GCP violations, such as when a small number of birds are mistreated or are harmed by an isolated equipment malfunction.

From 2006 until 2018, the USDA gradually increased the number of

Noncompliance Records (for GCP violations) and Memorandums of Interview (for incidents not considered GCP violations) issued to slaughter plants. However, from 2018 to 2022, the number decreased by more than 40 percent, from 509 down to 223. And from 2020 through 2022, inspectors took actions to prevent the abuse of birds—such as by slowing or stopping the slaughter line—in only 12 percent of documented incidents. During that same period, inspectors issued only five Letters of Concern (for serious and repeated GCP violations), two of which were sent to the same plant, and four of which were issued by just one of the USDA's 10 district offices.

AWI's report concluded with a list of steps the USDA should take to better protect birds at slaughter, including the promulgation of regulations to require humane handling of birds and the practice of referring egregious instances of abuse to local law enforcement for prosecution under state animal cruelty laws. Visit awionline.org/slaughterreport to download the report.

farmed animals



A new report from AWI presents ample evidence of the USDA's failure to clamp down on abuse of birds at slaughter plants.

MERCY FOR ANIMALS

LONG, HARD ROAD:

Interstate Transport of Animals Unfit to Travel



The cross-country movement of farmed animals has increased steadily over the past several decades, as animal agriculture has shifted toward large-scale industrial production under the control of fewer companies and relying on separate, specialized facilities to handle various stages of production. As a result, each year, millions of farmed animals (not counting poultry) are routinely

transported for a variety of purposes, including breeding, grazing, feeding, marketing, and slaughter.

Transport is recognized as one of the most stressful times in a farmed animal's life. In addition to the vibration, noise, fumes, and unfamiliar environments, transported animals often experience prolonged food and water deprivation, intense crowding, exposure to extreme heat and cold, and physical stress and injuries from rough handling and having to balance in a moving truck.

Studies have shown that stress, particularly when prolonged, lowers an animal's ability to resist infection. Consequently, stress during transport has significant impacts not only on animal health and welfare, but also on food safety (when diseased animals are slaughtered), and antibiotic resistance (when large quantities of antibiotics are used to treat or ward off disease).

Transport is difficult even when the animals are healthy and physically fit, but the stressors are amplified for young, weak, diseased, or injured animals. The young and those already in a state of poor health are less able to cope with the challenges associated with transport and often experience further deterioration in condition.

Currently, the only federal law in place to protect animals in transit is the "Twenty-Eight Hour Law," which requires animals transported domestically for 28 hours or more to be offloaded for food, water, and rest for five consecutive hours. This law, however, is poorly enforced. Particularly vulnerable animals, such as "cull" animals and neonatal "surplus" calves, have less economic value than their "market" counterparts—thus, their welfare during transport is even less of a priority to producers and carriers.

Cull Animals

Cull animals are those removed from a herd and sent to slaughter due to age, illness, or other infirmity affecting productivity. Dairy cows—typically culled once age or ill



health leads to diminished milk production or fertility—are at high risk of lameness and other serious ailments. Cull breeding sows are similarly prone to lameness or other painful conditions.

Because these animals commonly develop numerous health issues due to age and the rigors of their time in production, they are more likely to experience poor welfare outcomes during transit—significant pain, becoming nonambulatory, even dying en route. Cull animals are the most at risk for being transported while unfit, and peer-reviewed research indicates that they are often transported in this condition. This is unsurprising, as they have no meaningful legal protection, and there are no incentives for producers to stop transporting unfit animals.

Cull animals, in fact, are regularly transported long distances, as only a limited number of slaughterhouses accept them. Although the US Department of Agriculture does not track the movement of cull animals to slaughter, it does record the number slaughtered. The most recent USDA data indicate that, in 2022, more than 3 million cull dairy cows, more than 3 million cull sows, and nearly 300,000 cull boars were slaughtered at federally inspected plants.

Young Dairy Calves

In the US dairy industry, young calves are often transported soon after birth. A portion of the female calves (referred to as “replacement heifers”) are reared off site by specialized operations until they are ready to give birth and produce milk. The remainder, as well as the males, are “surplus” and usually slated to become veal or “dairy beef.”

Transporting neonatal calves over long distances is particularly troublesome, as it significantly increases the risk that they will contract disease or die during or shortly after shipping. Several contributing factors are identified in the scientific and veterinary literature, including (1) immature immune function in young calves, (2) immunosuppressive effects of transport stress, (3) high levels of pre-transport illness and disease in young calves, and (4) mixing of calves from different facilities, resulting in exposure to novel pathogens.

Records obtained by AWI illustrate the significant toll transport takes on young calves. In one example, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service personnel at a slaughter plant in Rupert, Idaho, documented the mortality of “bob veal” calves (under 3 weeks old) transported from California

on journeys that likely lasted 9–12 hours. A staggering 18.5 percent loss, on average, was reported on dozens of shipments that occurred over an 18-month period. Dead-on-arrival calves made up roughly two-thirds of the reported losses; the remainder were calves who arrived “non-ambulatory, disabled” and were thus euthanized.

Calves not transported directly to slaughter, but rather shipped elsewhere to be raised as replacement heifers or dairy beef, are also at increased risk of illness and death. These calves are routinely administered antibiotics—both to buffer their systems against the stressful conditions and to treat and contain disease in the weeks after transport, thereby increasing the risk of creating antibiotic-resistant pathogens.

As with cull animals, the USDA does not track the number of neonatal calves transported interstate. However, AWI research revealed that the industry routinely subjects hundreds of thousands of young, unweaned calves to stressful journeys of up to 1,000 miles or more throughout the country.

The Investigation

AWI obtained export records from six of the 10 largest dairy-producing states (California, Minnesota, New York, Michigan, Idaho, and Wisconsin) as well as import records from two states with dozens of calf ranches (New Mexico and California). These records revealed that the six exporting states shipped more than 525,000 calves less than a month old on journeys of over 100 miles, with 39 percent of those traveling over 1,000 miles—a minimum of 14 hours.

To confirm what the records revealed, AWI partnered with the nonprofit organization Animals’ Angels to monitor a truckload of 1-week-old calves on a 1,113-mile journey from

a mega-dairy in Minnesota to a calf ranch in New Mexico. Investigators followed the calves as they traveled 19 hours through Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico.

The investigators documented the calves’ condition on two occasions, once about two hours into the trip and again nine hours later. During the first observation, the investigators noted ear tags confirming the calves were around 1 week old, as well as the presence of umbilical cords on some, meaning their navels were unhealed and could easily become infected. Some of the calves were observed being stepped on by other animals due to overcrowding on the truck. At the 11-hour mark, all the calves were standing, and many were bellowing in the 100°F heat—a sign of distress. The investigators were unable to observe the animals’ condition during the final eight hours of the journey or during unloading at the calf ranch in New Mexico.

The Solution

The amount of suffering an animal endures and the possibility of death during transport depend primarily on two things: the conditions of transport (including stocking density, provision and condition of bedding, trailer design, journey duration, and weather) and the animal’s fitness to travel. Because of their delicate physical state, neonatal calves and many cull animals are unfit—they are likely to suffer and more likely to die en route.

The regular practice of transporting unfit animals violates the animal welfare code of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), which, along with regulations of Canada, the European Union, Australia, and the United Kingdom, contains criteria for assessing the fitness of animals for transport. Although all transport poses a risk to animal health and welfare, particularly if the journey is very long, this risk can be substantially decreased if fitness-to-travel requirements are implemented and enforced.

In response to a rulemaking petition submitted by AWI in 2011, regulations governing the export of live animals were amended in 2016 to include fitness-to-travel requirements for all farmed animals exported from the United States, except those traveling overland to Canada or Mexico. AWI is now petitioning the USDA to establish fitness-to-travel requirements for cull animals and neonatal calves in transit within the United States. The petition specifically requests that the USDA prohibit the interstate transport of neonatal and cull animals who are (1) sick, injured, weak, disabled, or fatigued, (2) have an unhealed navel, or (3) have a body condition that would result in poor welfare because of the expected climatic conditions.



EXPORTED DAIRY CALVES

STATE	TOTAL EXPORTS	JOURNEY DISTANCE DISTRIBUTION			
	Total <2 Weeks Old	100–499 miles	500–999 miles	1,000–1,499 miles	1,500+ miles
CALIFORNIA	15,745	0	13,469	2,276	0
	13,469 (85.5%)				
WISCONSIN	235,793	124,016	61,223	49,914	640
	233,164 (98.8%)				
IDAHO	26,440	1,123	15,324	9,956	37
	19,941 (74.4%)				
NEW YORK	73,718	19,699	51,599	2,012	408
	72,284 (98.1%)				
MICHIGAN	31,961	15,505	4,717	11,739	0
	18,039 (56.4%)				
MINNESOTA	142,795	8,050	6,112	107,354	21,279
	141,870 (99.4%)				
TOTAL	526,452	168,393	152,444	183,251	22,364
% OF TOTAL <2 WEEKS OLD	94.7%	31.9%	28.9%	34.8%	4.2%

IMPORTED DAIRY CALVES

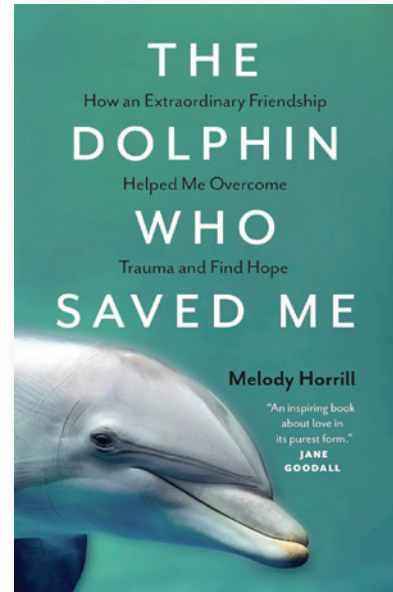
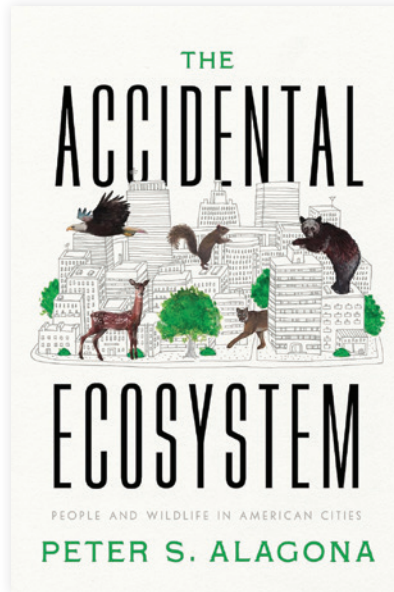
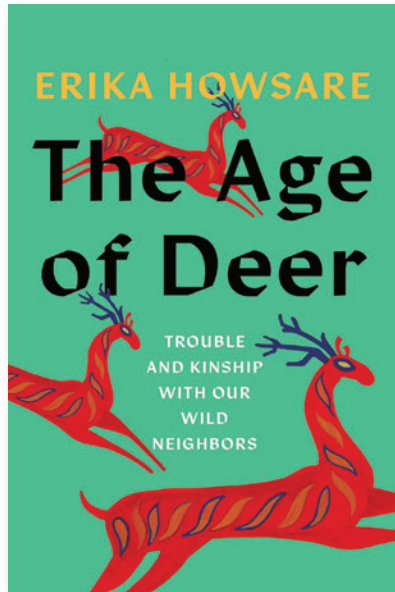
STATE	TOTAL IMPORTS	JOURNEY DISTANCE DISTRIBUTION			
	Total <2 Weeks Old	100–499 miles	500–999 miles	1,000–1,499 miles	1,500+ miles
CALIFORNIA	141,082	30,580	80,530	14,869	15,103
	93,700 (66.4%)				
NEW MEXICO	182,114	13,388	13,548	154,018	1,160
	157,749 (86.6%)				
TOTAL	323,196	43,968	94,078	168,887	16,263
% OF TOTAL <2 WEEKS OLD	77.8%	13.6%	29.1%	52.3%	5%

Note: The exact number of calves under two weeks old is unknown, because some certificates of veterinary inspection gave broad age ranges (e.g., “200 calves between 1–30 days”) without further specification.

These three criteria are particularly relevant to vulnerable animals and are drawn directly from the WOA code chapter on the transport of animals by land. AWI is asking the USDA to further require that all neonatal and cull animals be accompanied by a certificate of veterinary inspection indicating that a veterinarian has confirmed fitness to travel based on these criteria. Such certificates are already required by many state and federal regulations for certain animals transported interstate—including those neonatal calves not sent directly to slaughter—but are typically not required

for animals transported directly to slaughter and thus not required for most cull animals.

Take action: Visit AWI’s Action Center at awionline.org/dairytransport to encourage the USDA to grant the petition. Meanwhile—even as we seek reforms to ease suffering within the system—consumers can avoid contributing to the plight of these vulnerable animals by choosing plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy. 🐾



THE AGE OF DEER

Erika Howsare / Catapult / 368 pages

Erika Howsare worked in local journalism for 20 years and has written two books of poetry. She was raised in rural America in a family of avid hunters before heading off to Oberlin College and Brown University. Her new book, *The Age of Deer: Trouble and Kinship with Our Wild Neighbors*, is very much a product of her personal and professional history.

The book is reflective, pondering, and exhaustively introspective. Howsare serves up extensive mythology and history and seemingly sought out every deer-related event, professional, or hobbyist she could find. She describes the horrors of chronic wasting disease, an insidious condition spread by deer farms that threatens to substantially diminish deer populations. She covers deer-vehicle collisions and talks to a man whose job is to remove the bodies and layer them in giant compost bins. She attends a New Jersey deer-culling where deer are lured by piles of

bait; but she's only allowed to see the aftermath, when the bodies are furtively dragged away under the cover of night.

Howsare explains how the public's notion of a "natural" population level is premised on faulty ideas of ecological history and "balance of nature" fictions. However, she has a tendency to poeticize the gore and killing she observes, offering pseudo-profound musings on "paradoxical" types of love and "marriage to discomfort" in an effort, perhaps, to alleviate the cognitive dissonance. She admits to "feeling profoundly uninterested in" the veracity of claims made by an anti-cull activist she encounters, commenting dismissively on the satisfaction people derive from "feeling righteous."

Yet, in the end, Howsare expresses gratitude "that, after so many large animals have disappeared with the advance of human beings, there is still this one—an exquisite and mysterious creature—that I can see, often, in my Anthropocene life; one that despite our caricatures, remains a survivor, a supreme example of life among the ruins."

THE ACCIDENTAL ECOSYSTEM

Peter S. Alagona / University of California Press / 296 pages

When we encounter a raccoon, deer, bat, fox, or some other wild animal in our neighborhood, we're often pleasantly surprised—but not as amazed, perhaps, as our recent urban forebears might have been. It wasn't that long ago that sizable cities were virtually barren of wildlife. As environmental historian Peter Alagona notes in *The Accidental Ecosystem: People and Wildlife in American Cities*, an escaped eastern gray squirrel that dashed across Broadway in New York City in 1856 caused quite a stir because Manhattan did not even have a population of wild squirrels at the time. Today, no one would bat an eye at a squirrel in an American megalopolis.

The Accidental Ecosystem offers myriad examples of wildlife seeking refuge and resources in urban environments. From the mountain lion in LA's Griffith Park who was famously photographed beneath the Hollywood sign to the sea lions in Seattle's Ballard Locks who were unjustly blamed for declining steelhead populations, Alagona explores what drives various wild species to risk venturing into the proverbial concrete jungle and other areas shaped and occupied by humans.

Black bears, coyotes, and other large charismatic animals figure prominently in *The Accidental Ecosystem*, but Alagona gives equal footing to the animals we see nearly every day, including many bird species. Birds, in fact, aptly illustrate the unique dangers of urban living: Millions perish each year in collisions with building windows.

The Accidental Ecosystem examines both the remarkable adaptability of wildlife and our society's evolving ethics around conservation and coexistence. Alagona rightly questions the "management" practices of yore, which in some cases persist to this day (e.g., the government's widespread use of lethal control to eradicate perceived nuisance animals). On the other hand, he seems to regard hunting as a sustainable form of conservation, with little analysis of animal welfare and moral considerations, or the negative impacts hunting has had on various species. Nevertheless, the book is

a vivid reminder that cities are not distinct from nature; they are ecosystems in their own right, replete with animals that are learning to live near us, against all odds.

THE DOLPHIN WHO SAVED ME

Melody Horrill / Greystone Books / 296 pages

In *The Dolphin Who Saved Me: How an Extraordinary Friendship Helped Me Overcome Trauma and Find Hope*, author Melody Horrill holds nothing back with her blunt and unrelenting descriptions of the violence and trauma she experienced growing up in a deeply dysfunctional home. Yet, just when her suffering seems too much to bear, she takes the reader into another reality: the time she spent with the dolphins of Australia's Port River—in particular, a scarred and solitary male bottlenose named Jock. For much of the book, Horrill alternates between these two experiences. As she dives into her time with Jock and the other dolphins, one begins to see how her journey to Port River helped heal her, teaching her empathy for others and giving her a belief in her own strengths.

The dolphin sections are not all joyous, however. Horrill learns firsthand about the trauma and suffering caused to her beloved dolphins from human activities, including vessel strikes, fishing gear entanglement, and even outright attacks. Jock eventually died after accumulating high levels of PCBs and other contaminants from years of living in waters befouled by industrial pollution. Horrill comes to the realization that something must be done to protect the Port River dolphin community. In collaboration with her mentor, the well-known researcher Dr. Mike Bossley, she helped establish the Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary, a marine protected area in South Australia.

Although *The Dolphin Who Saved Me* is not an easy read, Horrill manages to find hope and compassion, both for herself and for the dolphins of Port River. One important message she leaves with the reader is that in the decades since she first swam with Jock, people are now advised (as with other wild animals) not to interact directly with wild cetaceans. From a respectful distance, their grace and playfulness can still delight and inspire us all to do more to protect marine life.

BEQUESTS

If you would like to help assure AWI's future through a provision in your will, this general form of bequest is suggested: *I give, devise and bequeath to the Animal Welfare Institute, located in Washington, DC, the sum of \$ _____ and/or (specifically described property).*

Donations to AWI, a not-for-profit corporation exempt under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3), are tax-deductible. We welcome any inquiries you may have. In cases in which you have specific wishes about the disposition of your bequest, we suggest you discuss such provisions with your attorney.



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AWI AWARDS FIRST “SAFE HAVENS FOR PETS” GRANTS

In connection with the launch of our Safe Havens for Pets Grant Program, AWI is pleased to announce that the first grants have been awarded.

Since 2011, AWI has operated the Safe Havens for Pets Project (formerly the Safe Havens Mapping Project), a one-of-a-kind, searchable directory of sheltering services for pets of domestic violence survivors. The Safe Havens for Pets Grant Program was designed to help promote the development of critical services in communities that lack sufficient resources. After an internal assessment identified regions of North Dakota and Mississippi where pet-related resources for domestic violence survivors were few and far between, we invited organizations in those communities to apply for grants of up to \$20,000.

In North Dakota, a Safe Havens for Pets grant was awarded to Fargo's Rape and Abuse Crisis Center. The funding will be used to establish a volunteer foster program for pets of domestic violence survivors, defray the cost of veterinary care, assist with pet-related safety planning, and conduct community

outreach and education on the relationship between domestic violence and animal cruelty.

In Mississippi, a grant was awarded to the Tupelo-Lee Humane Society in partnership with SAFE, Inc., a local domestic violence shelter. Funding will be used to create and equip a pet-safe space at the SAFE, Inc. shelter in Tupelo, transport companion animals to temporary shelter at the Tupelo-Lee Humane Society, recruit foster families, coordinate visits between survivors and their pets, fund veterinary care, and cross-train staff at both organizations. “This program allows us to offer immediate shelter, counseling, safety planning, and continued support to survivors and their pets, fostering a safe and supportive environment for healing,” said Rebekah Reed of SAFE, Inc.

Providing domestic violence survivors with pet-friendly services and shelter is an essential step in addressing barriers to safety. With these Safe Havens for Pets grants and future funding opportunities, AWI is encouraging the development of vital resources in communities that most need them. 🐾