AWI Quarterly

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AWI Quarterly

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

75 Years Protecting Animals—and Many More Ahead

This year, as with any other, AWI staff are hard at work protecting animals across the globe. But 2026 also holds special significance: This year, AWI turns 75—an occasion to celebrate three quarters of a century of progress for animals in agriculture, in commerce, in our homes and communities, in research, and in the wild.

Much has changed since July 10, 1951—the day Christine Gesell Stevens founded the Animal Welfare Institute. Quiet but steadfast, Christine launched the organization with one goal in mind: to reform the abysmal housing and handling conditions endured by animals in laboratories. She did not stop there. AWI's aims soon expanded to address the myriad ways in which human activities can cause needless animal suffering and imperil species. But Christine's initial approach still holds true: Today, we remain committed to doing science-based advocacy and delivering commonsense solutions.

Over the years, AWI has played a vital role in the enactment of numerous landmark federal laws, including the Animal Welfare Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Humane Slaughter Act, Horse Protection Act, Pet and Women Safety Act, and Big Cat Public Safety Act. We've achieved passage of numerous animal welfare laws at the state level as well. Meanwhile, on the international stage, AWI has helped establish and strengthen legal protections for wild species the world over.

Many of these successes would not have been possible without the support of members like you. On June 1, AWI's board of directors, staff, and friends will gather in Washington, DC, to commemorate this anniversary, reminisce, and look to the future. As a valued contributor to AWI's longstanding successes, you are invited to join us. Please visit *awionline.org/75years* for more details and to RSVP.

—Susan Millward

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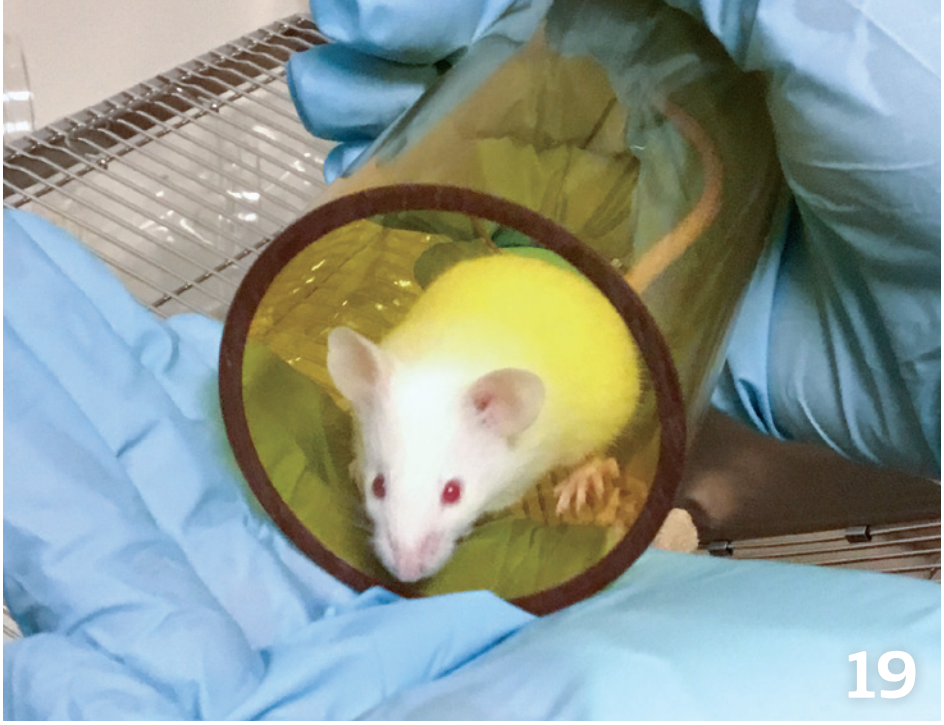

ANNA RATUSKI

AWI QUARTERLY SPRING 2026

Animal Welfare Institute

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ABOUT THE COVER

The Dorcas gazelle inhabits the grasslands, shrublands, and deserts of northern Africa and southern Israel. Among the threats to this diminutive antelope species: diminishing habitat, hunting for trophies and meat, and the capture of young gazelles to supply a growing demand for the animal as pets. At the 20th meeting of the Conference of Parties to CITES, held in Uzbekistan, AWI helped secure protections for the Dorcas gazelle and a number of other species imperiled by unsustainable international trade. A full recap of "CITES CoP20" begins on page 12. Photograph by Avi Hirschfield/500px.

government affairs

NEW FEDERAL FOCUS ON DOG FIGHTING AND PUPPY MILLS

In a surprising move, the US Departments of Agriculture, Justice, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security jointly announced the creation of a "coordinated effort to crackdown on chronic dog welfare violators" with a focus on dog fighting and Animal Welfare Act (AWA) violations at puppy mills. As part of this effort, the DOJ is scheduling an Animal Welfare Summit to train federal prosecutors and agents and creating an Animal Welfare Executive Strategy Committee to develop strategy for prosecutions nationwide, among other steps. With respect to puppy mills, AWI has repeatedly called for the USDA and the DOJ to exercise their full authority to alleviate the animal suffering caused by licensed dog breeders who persistently and egregiously violate the AWA's minimum standards of care. On paper, at least, this multidepartmental effort signals an unprecedented level of attention and commitment of resources to a pair of significant animal welfare issues. Hopefully, it will germinate concerted, coordinated efforts to end both a vicious underground bloodsport and the legal cover—via continued licensing—granted to breeders who openly flout the law.

HOUSE FARM BILL SOWS ANIMAL WELFARE SETBACKS

In March, the House Committee on Agriculture finalized its version of the long-overdue farm bill—HR 7567, the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026—and it is a mixed bag for animal welfare. On the plus side, it reauthorizes until 2031 the Protecting Animals with Shelter grant program, which helps service providers expand their capacity to assist domestic violence survivors who have companion animals. Additionally, an amendment offered by Rep. Zach Nunn (R-IA) removed language raising the threshold on the level of suffering necessary before the US Department of Agriculture would even have to consider confiscating dogs from breeding facilities.

Otherwise, much of what was wrong with the bill remains. One of the most troubling provisions is the inclusion of the Save Our Bacon Act, which would nullify California's Proposition 12 and other state-level measures that require more humane housing for farmed animals and prohibit the sale of products from animals raised in conditions that don't meet the new standards. Underscoring the controversy surrounding this effort, Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) offered and withdrew an amendment (meaning no vote took place) to strike that language.

HR 7567 would also permit the sale of uninspected meat from "custom" slaughterhouses to consumers. According to AWI's research, these facilities—which currently process meat for personal use, not for sale—are among the worst slaughter plants for humane handling violations. Moreover, despite overwhelming bipartisan support for the Save America's Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act (HR 1661/S 775) and requests from numerous members of the House, the bill fails to include a prohibition on the slaughter of American horses for human consumption.

Finally, the bill would allow the mink industry to receive taxpayer dollars for expanding into international markets, even though mink on fur farms incubate dangerous diseases such as COVID-19 and avian influenza, creating the perfect conditions for new variants to jump to humans. It is a poor use of federal dollars to subsidize an industry that American consumers have overwhelmingly rejected, and one that scientists confirm poses a severe risk to public health.

JO-ANNE MCARTHUR/MONTREAL SPCA/WE ANIMALS

Four federal departments recently announced a coordinated effort to crack down on dog fighting and abusive dog breeders.

BILL INTRODUCED TO DECLAW BIG CAT PROTECTIONS

The Big Cat Public Safety Act (BCPSA), enacted in 2022, ushered in historic protections for lions, tigers, and other big cats. However, a new bill in Congress, HR 7159, seeks to weaken these hard-won protections and line the pockets of special interests at the expense of big cats and public safety.

The BCPSA protects communities from dangerous encounters with big cats kept as pets and safeguards these animals against the appalling cruelty associated with exploitative "cub petting" operations and the exotic pet trade. HR 7159 would add massive loopholes to the BCPSA, benefitting those who wish to once again profit off cub-petting encounters, import big cats, and/or sell big cats as "exotic animal dealers," all of which fundamentally undermine a law that positions the United States as a leader in combatting the dangerous, abusive big cat pet trade.

TATIANA

GUNNING FOR SEA LIONS MISSES MARK ON SALMON RECOVERY

The House Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held an oversight hearing in December entitled "Sea Lion Predation in the Pacific Northwest." While several members of Congress and witnesses claimed that expanding the killing of pinnipeds is necessary to save endangered salmon, others were aligned with AWI's position that the lethal take of pinnipeds for salmon recovery in the Columbia River Basin is ineffective at recovering salmon populations and does not address the fact that the best available science indicates that the salmon decline is primarily due to human-caused factors. These include dams and culverts that create migration bottlenecks and degrade spawning habitat, industrial salmon fisheries, and non-native fish introduced for sport fishing. When viewed against these cumulative stressors, pinniped predation is a comparatively minor contributor to overall salmon mortality. Killing predators is merely a way to avoid culpability while taking aim at an easier target—thus repeating a strategy that has already failed to deliver conservation benefits.

HORSE PROTECTION ACT REFORMS DELAYED AGAIN

The US Department of Agriculture announced in January that it would delay implementation of Horse Protection Act (HPA) regulations until year's end—the third postponement since regulations aimed at eliminating the soring of Tennessee walking horses were finalized in May 2024. Soring methods include applying caustic chemicals to flesh, using chains to strike against sore legs, inserting hard objects into tender areas of the hooves, and forcing horses to wear extremely heavy weighted shoes, all to produce an unnatural high-stepping gait for competition.

In January 2025, the US District Court for the Northern District of Texas, in a lawsuit brought by the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration Association (sponsors of the largest show for the breed), struck down portions of the regulations but left intact a critical provision to replace the current inspection model, whereby inspectors are principally appointed and hired by the horse shows. As both the USDA Office of Inspector General and National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine have concluded, this form of self-policing has led to soring abuse going undetected or overlooked, in part because of the conflicts of interest that exist among the industry-appointed inspectors. Under the new HPA regulations, horses would be inspected by independent inspectors who have relevant equine veterinary expertise and are overseen and trained by the USDA.

IWC AT 80:

An Evolution from Exploitation to Conservation

THIS YEAR, we celebrate a pair of milestones in the history of international wildlife governance: December 3, 2026, is the 80th anniversary of the signing of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), the treaty that established the International Whaling Commission (IWC). It has also been 40 years since the IWC's global prohibition on commercial whaling came into force. When the IWC gathers in Hobart, Australia, in late September for its next meeting, these anniversaries will offer more than an opportunity to reflect on progress over the past eight decades; they should serve as a call for renewed commitment to the essential role the IWC continues to play as whales face mounting threats in a rapidly changing ocean.

By the time the IWC was established shortly after World War II, the major whaling nations of the day had already driven many whale species to the brink of extinction. Centuries of commercial whaling had devastated whale populations around the world; in the 20th century alone, industrial fleets had killed nearly 3 million whales. And though the ICRW was ahead of its time in establishing both a conservation and management mandate, most IWC member governments initially viewed these mandates merely as a means to sustain whaling. As a result, they implemented few effective restrictions on hunting, and declines continued largely unchecked.

Eventually, however, the significance of the IWC's conservation mandate came fully into focus. In 1982, IWC member governments—feeling the pressure from a public galvanized by a global "Save the Whales" movement that AWI's founder, Christine Stevens, helped launch—made the historic decision to place a moratorium on commercial whaling. This global ban entered into force in 1986 and remains one of the most consequential conservation achievements of the modern era, staving off the imminent extinction of several whale species and populations and allowing others to begin a slow recovery from severe depletion. The whaling moratorium stands as clear evidence that principled, science-based international action—taken in time—can reverse the course of even the most catastrophic human impacts on wildlife.

But the story of the IWC is about far more than ending commercial whaling. Over the past eight decades, the organization has undergone a profound transformation—evolving from an industry-dominated quota-setting body into a globally respected forum for cetacean science, conservation, and welfare.

As the IWC approaches 80, the stakes are higher than ever. Despite the moratorium, some whale populations remain far below their pre-exploitation levels, and others that had recovered—such as North Pacific gray whales—are declining again. Unconscionably, some species are also still hunted—by Norway and Iceland through legal loopholes in the ICRW and by Japan as a nonmember (having withdrawn from the IWC in 2019 after years of trying to scuttle the moratorium).

ZIEN

NOAA NEWS ARCHIVE 011811

National Marine Fisheries Service scientists work to disentangle a young North Atlantic right whale from fishing gear off Cape Canaveral.

Meanwhile, accidental entanglement in fishing gear kills hundreds of thousands of whales each year, and vessel strikes take unknown numbers more, including critically endangered species such as the North Atlantic right whale and Rice's whale. Looming over all of this, climate change threatens to reconfigure ocean ecosystems in a shockingly fast timeframe, altering prey availability and cetaceans' migration routes and reducing their resilience to these and other stressors.

Today, the IWC's expanding conservation agenda reflects this reality. Through its Scientific and Conservation committees, the IWC now coordinates efforts to study and manage imperiled species, develops conservation management plans tailored to specific populations and regions, and pursues practical solutions to reduce human-caused harm. Critical programs such as the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative and the Ship Strike Strategic Plan translate scientific knowledge into concrete action, helping governments and industries prevent avoidable whale deaths.

Equally important is the IWC's focus on the impacts of these threats on animal welfare. Once limited to regulating whaling methods, the IWC's welfare agenda now recognizes that harpoons and rifles are not the only causes of pain and suffering in cetaceans. Entanglement, chronic noise exposure, vessel collisions, pollution, disease, and starvation also inflict immense suffering, often over long periods. By incorporating welfare science into its work, the IWC has helped reframe conservation not only as a population recovery issue, but also as an ethical responsibility to sentient individuals.

Looking ahead, the IWC's continued relevance and effectiveness will depend on its willingness to fully embrace its modern identity as a conservation and welfare body. That means strengthening collaboration with other international and regional agreements and organizations to address existing and emerging environmental threats. And it means investing in capacity building so that all countries—especially those with limited resources—can implement measures to protect cetaceans.

Today, commercial whaling offers no credible solution to food security and no benefit to national economic development. It is fundamentally incompatible with the biological realities of cetaceans and the conservation challenges of the 21st century. Protecting live whales, rather than exploiting them for meat and other unnecessary products, delivers far greater ecological and economic benefits—from supporting healthy marine food webs to sustaining responsible whale-watching industries worldwide. It means recognizing them not as commodities, but as living contributors to ocean health. Growing scientific evidence shows that whales play a significant role in nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, and ecosystem productivity. In a time of climate and biodiversity crises, their recovery is not a luxury—it is an indispensable part of the solution.

Over 80 years, the IWC has experienced both moments of profound failure and those of extraordinary vision. To ensure that its next decades are defined by recovery, not loss, the task before the nearly 90 governments, including the United States, gathering at a former whaling base in Australia this September is clear: Reaffirm the commercial whaling ban and support it with more whale sanctuaries, strengthen and adequately fund the IWC's conservation and welfare agenda, and ensure the organization's long-term financial stability so it can continue to meet the challenges of our planet in crisis.

For whales alive today and generations yet to come, the work of the International Whaling Commission has never mattered more.

MEXICO INTENDS TO WEAKEN VAQUITA PROTECTIONS

Mexico is considering wholesale revisions to fishing regulations, originally promulgated in September 2020 to protect the vaquita porpoise and its habitat in the Upper Gulf of California, the species' only home. The vaquita population has dwindled to 10 or fewer animals due to illegal fishing with gillnets, which entangle and kill vaquita. The 2020 regulations—were they to be fully implemented and enforced—would provide the vaquita a lifeline from extinction. The proposed amendments threaten to sever that lifeline.

The most substantive proposed change is an 85 percent reduction in the size of the Gillnet Prohibition Area (GPA) initially established in 2015. The GPA encompasses the vaquita refuge, which includes a Zero Tolerance Area (ZTA)—core vaquita habitat where fishing and vessel activity (with limited exceptions) is prohibited. Under the proposal, GPA areas outside the refuge would be eliminated, and the refuge itself would also shrink—losing areas where vaquita were seen as recently as 2015. In addition, the proposal includes a kilometer-wide transitway through the center of the ZTA to expedite vessels' access to areas open to fishing, exposing vaquita to additional risk.

Mexico claims that it cannot adequately enforce many of the provisions in the 2020 regulations. Consequently, rather than increasing enforcement efforts, it believes that reducing the size of the area requiring enforcement will improve its ability to protect the vaquita. While Mexico has kept the ZTA relatively gillnet free in recent years, illegal fishing has continued elsewhere in the refuge with little restraint, raising concerns as to whether enforcement efforts will be any more focused or effective in a smaller GPA/refuge.

Fundamentally, the proposed amendments increase the likelihood of vaquita ending up in gillnets—essentially pounding a final nail into the species' coffin.

MANA5280

ADMINISTRATION ADVANCES OFFSHORE DRILLING EXPANSION PLAN

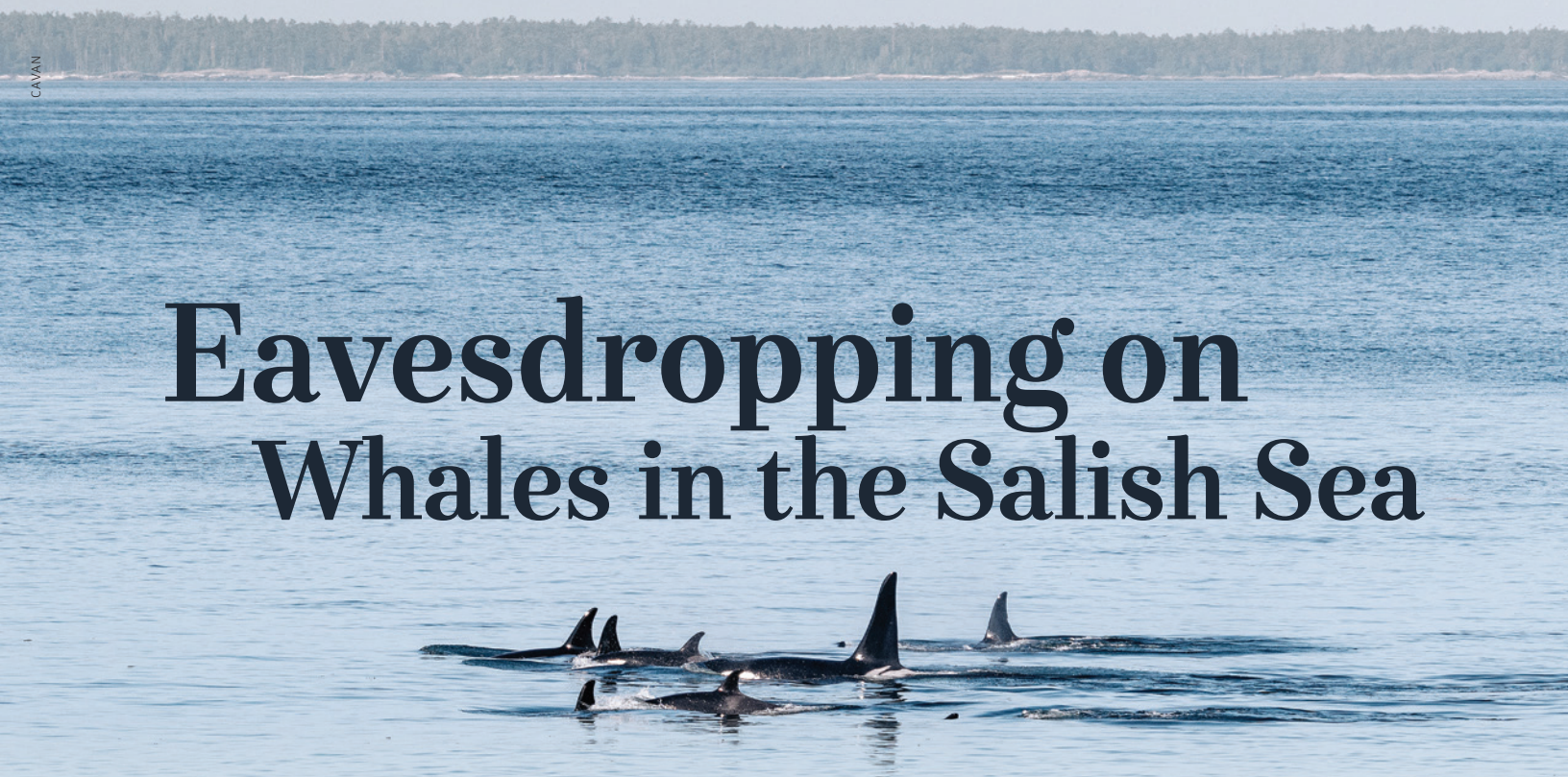
When the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management took public comments last summer to inform its forthcoming offshore oil and gas leasing plan, AWI submitted comments on behalf of dozens of wildlife protection groups opposing the agency's intent to drastically expand offshore oil and gas development to all US coasts. The draft plan published in late 2025 unfortunately made clear that vast areas remain under threat, including waters along the coasts of Alaska and California and in the Eastern Gulf. The proposal even includes areas overlapping with national marine sanctuaries—places long protected from human impacts.

In response, AWI partnered with Defenders of Wildlife to once again submit detailed comments opposing this unprecedented expansion. Drawing on extensive research, including lessons learned from the Deepwater Horizon disaster, we laid out the devastating and long-lasting impacts oil spills have on marine ecosystems, coastal economies, and sensitive wildlife. We urged consideration of Rice's whales, gray whales, sea turtles, polar bears, sea otters, and other vulnerable species already struggling against climate change and industrial pressures.

We were in good company: Public opposition to the plan was strong among the roughly 270,000 people who submitted comments, including nearly 5,000 who responded to AWI's action alert. We will continue to press the administration to abandon this reckless expansion plan that poses such a grave risk to fragile marine ecosystems and imperiled wildlife.

CAVAN

Eavesdropping on Whales in the Salish Sea



by Dr. Valeria Vergara, Senior Scientist, Raincoast Conservation Foundation

Even before humans started plying the oceans in noisy ships, the oceans produced a symphony of natural sounds emanating from marine life, rain, crashing waves, and the Earth itself. When the noise from ship engines, seismic testing, and active sonar was added, the symphony became a cacophony, with potential adverse impacts to marine life. Unlike the natural sounds in the ocean, sounds introduced from such anthropogenic sources are a form of noise pollution, often drowning out the sounds of marine life—including auditory cues that are key to the survival of many marine animals.

Whales use sounds to communicate, hunt, navigate, socialize, and find mates. Humans use whale sounds to monitor population numbers, track migration and distribution patterns, promote conservation, and mitigate the adverse impacts of human activities on imperiled whales and other marine life.

In June 2023, using funds from a Christine Stevens Wildlife Award, Raincoast Conservation Foundation researchers installed a hydrophone on the ocean bottom off the coast of the North Pender Island Interim Sanctuary Zone in Canada's Salish Sea. This zone was established by the Canadian government as a protected, no-go area for vessels in order to reduce acoustic and physical disturbance in a critical foraging area for Southern Resident killer whales (SRKWs), a distinct population of fewer than 75 orcas designated as endangered under both US and Canadian law. SRKWs are threatened by anthropogenic noise, which impairs their use of echolocation to hunt and their ability to effectively coordinate group movements using acoustic communication; by contaminants, which impair reproductive success; and by decreasing numbers of Chinook salmon, their primary prey, due to overfishing, habitat loss, and dams.

The hydrophone and associated camera (livestreamed at *awionline.org/hydrophone*) allow researchers to monitor SRKWs and other species, including Bigg's killer whales, porpoises, and humpback whales. Using this equipment, researchers can detect the presence of particular species by listening for their characteristic vocalizations and document their exposure to vessel traffic, while saving the recordings to analyze call production and underwater noise levels.

Despite interruptions in data collection due to setbacks in keeping the hydrophone operational, the data have revealed important patterns regarding how endangered orcas use this area and how noise affects their communication. Acoustic monitoring detected SRKW calls on 41 days between June 2023 and November 2025, with encounters lasting up to nearly four hours. Detections peaked in June, confirming this area as critical summer foraging habitat. Most strikingly, analysis of recordings from this hydrophone and a partner hydrophone in waters off of neighboring Saturna Island showed that SRKWs from J pod (one of three pods in the population) called less frequently as background noise levels rose, with call rates dropping by roughly 21 percent for every 10 decibel increase in ambient noise.

These findings demonstrate that vessel noise disrupts orca communication and underscore the conservation value of protecting natural acoustic environments in the Salish Sea. As such, the data help inform the development and strengthening of regulations and enforcement efforts in support of SRKW recovery.

DANIEL

MAKING ARTIFICIAL ROOSTS MORE HABITABLE FOR BATS

by Dr. Catherine Haase, Erik Anderson, and Drew McIllwain, Austin Peay State University

Many bat species use human-made structures for nightly roosts due to habitat loss from human causes. Disturbingly, recent research suggests that bats roosting in commonly used bat boxes often overheat during the summer due to size, box placement, and overcrowding, ultimately leading to mortality in vulnerable bat species. Though research has begun to define both the temperature limits of bats as well as what bat box designs can maintain temperatures within these limits, we have yet to assess how bats respond to the ambient temperature of bat boxes.

With funding from a Christine Stevens Wildlife Award, we developed an inexpensive electronic detection system that can be deployed on commonly used bat boxes to record the exact time a bat enters and exits a bat box. Each system consists of two passive infrared (PIR) sensors connected to a user-friendly microcontroller that records the time when the PIR sensor detects a change in infrared radiation, for example, when a bat enters or exits a box. By placing two PIR sensors at a specified distance apart, we can determine if the bat is entering the bat box (triggering the lower PIR sensor before the upper PIR sensor) or exiting it (triggering the upper PIR sensor before the lower PIR sensor). We included a clock and two temperature sensors to record the exact time and temperature inside and outside the bat box whenever the PIR sensor is triggered. Finally, we developed user-friendly code that will run the system and output the resulting temperature and time data.

We currently are testing the single system in the lab and then will deploy a total of 20 systems to field test on 20 bat boxes (10 single chamber, 10 rocket multichamber boxes) in the study area in Clarksville, Tennessee. These 20 bat boxes were placed on private properties to habituate bats to their presence and increase their usage by bats before our detection system is installed. Once field testing is complete, we will share the design, instructions, and code with the public and bat managers in order for this system to be widely deployed across North America. Using the temperature and time data collected from bats' use of the boxes, we can assess not only how warm these bat boxes can become, but also how bats respond to the ambient temperatures of the boxes. The results from this study will help managers understand how artificial roosts may not be as suitable for bats as originally thought and how best to mitigate these stresses.

Déjà Vu All Over Again: Proposed ESA Rollbacks Threaten Wildlife

The Trump administration is seeking to reinstate four regulations issued in 2019 during President Trump's first term that severely weakened critical Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections. These regulations curtailed protections afforded to threatened species, allowed economic considerations to be weighed when deciding whether to list a species, significantly undermined the process for designating protected habitat, and thwarted the interagency consultation process by restricting input from experts best suited to determine how federal projects affect imperiled species. The Biden administration largely restored ESA protections for species and their habitat. This latest deregulatory push seeks to once again undermine the ESA's implementation, disrupting decades of consistent safeguards and resurrecting the most destructive aspects of the 2019 rules.

First, the administration is proposing a "critical habitat exclusion rule" that would allow extractive industries to unduly influence the process through which the US Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) designate "critical habitat"—areas containing physical or biological features essential to the conservation of a species. Habitat destruction is the primary driver of an unprecedented rate of biodiversity loss in the United States, and preservation of a species' critical habitat is essential to preventing extinction. The proposed rule, however, would limit the agencies' authority to designate such habitat by adopting a more restrictive standard than the one Congress set forth in the ESA itself.

Presumptive legal protections for species listed as threatened would also be eliminated. Section 4(d) of the ESA requires the USFWS to issue regulations to conserve threatened species. It further authorizes the agency to grant full endangered species protections to a threatened species until regulations tailored to that species are in place—a provision known as the "blanket 4(d) rule." The USFWS now proposes to leave threatened species unprotected until it issues species-specific regulations, a process often delayed for years—and sometimes never completed—due to resource constraints.

The proposal would add hurdles to the interagency consultation process whereby other federal agencies are required to consult with the USFWS and NMFS to ensure that their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or adversely modify designated critical habitat. The ESA requires use of the best available science during the consultation process. The proposal would instead unlawfully require scientific data to be entirely free from doubt.

Finally, economic factors would be allowed to influence whether a species is even listed, undermining the ESA's unequivocal mandate that listing decisions be based solely on the best available scientific evidence of a species' need for protection. These changes would likely increase political pressure not to list certain species and pave the way for cost-benefit analyses that de-emphasize biological science.

AWI submitted comments urging withdrawal of the proposed rules, which would diminish the effectiveness of the ESA and—in combination with the administration's other deregulatory efforts—inevitably push more species closer to the brink of extinction.

The red knot, listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, could lose protections if the Trump administration's proposed ESA regulations are finalized. Photo by nexusby.

CITES CoP20

CONCLUDES WITH CONSERVATION SUCCESSES

Galapagos land iguana

IGUANA: TRAVELPHOTOBLOGGERS; TARANTULA: TEMPISCH

Hundreds of wild species gained important protections at the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES CoP20), held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in late 2025. After more than a fortnight of debate among more than 3,200 delegates representing over 160 countries that are parties to the convention and nearly the same number of nonparty nongovernmental organizations (including AWI), the evidence justifying greater species protections prevailed. The integrity of the convention was also maintained in the face of concerted efforts to weaken its provisions.

CITES is the primary global agreement designed to prevent animal and plant species targeted in international trade from becoming imperiled due to trade. Unlike many conventions that require consensus to reach decisions, CITES incorporates a voting procedure that allows difficult decisions to be made when consensus cannot be achieved, and it has enforcement mechanisms to compel party compliance.

Animals and plants impacted by international trade, whether extracted from the wild or bred in captivity, can be listed in one of three appendices that provide different levels of protection. Appendix I is the most restrictive, largely prohibiting trade in listed species for commercial purposes. Trade in species listed in Appendix II is allowed, but exporting countries are required to make a determination that trade will not harm the species in the wild before issuing any export permits. CITES currently regulates trade in nearly 41,000 species, with over 1,000 species listed in Appendix I and over 39,000 species in Appendix II. Approximately 500 species are listed in Appendix III at the request of individual parties seeking assistance from other CITES member nations in collecting trade data and preventing unsustainable or illegal exploitation of the species.

To secure a species listing in Appendix I or II, reclassify a listed species (“uplist” it to Appendix I or “downlist” it to Appendix II), or delete a species from either appendix,

a party must submit a proposal for consideration by the Conference of the Parties, which meets approximately every three years. Listing proposals are first deliberated and, if necessary, voted on in committee. (At each CoP, there is a Committee I that considers listing proposals to amend the appendices and other species-specific issues, while a Committee II reviews working documents pertaining to the interpretation and implementation of CITES.) Committee decisions are then either approved or reopened for debate during a plenary session at the end of the meeting. Proposals can be approved by the parties either by consensus or, failing that, through a vote by a two-thirds supermajority. For Appendix III, parties can unilaterally add species by informing the CITES Secretariat.

In advance of CoP20, there was concern that the insatiable desire by several countries and commercial interests to exploit wildlife for international trade would undermine efforts to secure or increase protection for a wide range of species. Also, though the United States has historically been a reliable advocate for measures to strengthen CITES and extend protections to qualifying species, many expected the Trump administration to effectuate a fundamental shift in US priorities. In the end, however, the United States largely continued to champion the treaty and conservation efforts—though there were a handful of notable exceptions, including advocacy for several proposals to reduce or remove protections for particular species and an attempt to dismantle the Sponsored Delegates Project, which facilitates meeting attendance by delegates from lower-income parties.

As in previous CoPs, considerable attention was given to proposals to either increase or decrease trade protections for charismatic megafauna such as elephants, rhinoceroses, big cats, and sharks. At this meeting, however, AWI focused on supporting listing proposals for less high-profile species that typically receive less attention, despite being threatened by the pet trade as well as by habitat loss and degradation, exacerbated by climate change. These included the Chilean rose-haired tarantula, Dorcas gazelle, two Ethiopian viper species (Bale Mountains adder and Ethiopian mountain adder), and Galapagos marine and land iguanas endemic to Ecuador. All were added to Appendix II by consensus, a significant achievement given the value of such species in trade.

ARACHNIDS AND INSECTS

The Chilean rose-haired tarantula is one of the most popular tarantula species in international trade, with over 9,500 imported into the United States alone from 2021 to 2024. Its road to listing at CoP20, however, was not a smooth one. Committee I rejected the original proposal by Bolivia, Argentina, and Panama, which included 14 "look-alike" species (CITES allows such species to be listed to aid enforcement efforts and prevent the serial depletion of similar-looking species). However, proponents of the listing were able to reopen the agenda item during the plenary session. The scope of the proposal was reduced to cover only the Chilean rose-haired tarantula, and the parties agreed by consensus to an Appendix II listing, to spirited applause. Bolivia, Argentina, and Panama also joined AWI in co-hosting a side event at CoP20 about the international trade in tarantulas. At this event, Dr. Carol Fukushima, a leading expert on tarantulas, gave a compelling presentation about the trade, threats to tarantula populations, and the benefit of listing imperiled tarantula species under CITES.

Chilean rose-haired tarantula

Both arachnids and insects, given their enormous diversity and often striking colors and patterns, are in high demand for the pet trade and curio market. It is estimated that over 50 percent of all known tarantula species are in trade, involving hundreds of thousands of individual animals. The majority of arachnids and insects in international trade are captured from the wild and either sold alive as pets or dead as decorations—including beetles, butterflies, and spiders displayed in shadow boxes, entombed in resin cubes, or sold in bulk for do-it-yourself art projects.

SLOTH: ONDŘEJ PROSICKÝ; HORNBILL: MARCEL RUDOLPH-GAJDA; FROG: BENNYTRAPP

Hoffman's two-toed sloth

Insects are nature's pollinators, providing an estimated $57 billion in pollination services annually in the United States alone. They are an essential part of the food chain (with some species helping to control other insects that threaten crops, thereby reducing the need for chemical fertilizers). They also improve soil health and fertility (e.g., by consuming carrion, dead plants, and manure) and—in the case of ants and some other species—disperse seeds. Arachnids are bioindicators of healthy ecosystems. They cycle nutrients, serve as predators and prey, protect crops and human health by controlling certain insect populations, and create burrows and webs that provide microhabitats for other species.

Although CITES protects several tarantulas, scorpions, and other arachnids, as well as nearly 100 insect species, these ecologically critical yet declining animals are woefully underrepresented in the CITES appendices. AWI, allied organizations, and scientists are working to rectify this lack of representation, initiating a global effort to identify arachnids and insects in need of trade protection and secure listings for those species at future CoPs. Given the immense ecosystem services and economic value of both taxa, the importance of this initiative is clear.

OTHER SPECIES

The newly Appendix II–listed Dorcas gazelle is the second smallest African gazelle species. Between 2020 and 2022, over 4,100 were traded internationally, including 3,900 live animals. Nearly 1,850 of those were captured in the wild from a population of less than 10,000. Demand for Dorcas gazelles as pets drives much of the trade, but they are also targeted for hunting trophies and parts, including horns, skulls, meat, and skins.

Several other mammal, bird, reptile, and amphibian species received increased protection from international trade at CoP20 as well. The Democratic Republic of the Congo secured an Appendix I listing for the okapi, a large ungulate in decline that is targeted for meat, skin, and oil. The golden-bellied mangabey—a primate under threat from the pet trade—was also uplisted from Appendix II to I.

After its Appendix I listing proposal for the striped hyena failed, Tajikistan nevertheless achieved an Appendix II listing with a zero commercial export quota for this species, which is in high demand in the exotic pet trade and for their body parts, which are used in traditional medicine, in superstition-based rituals, and for meat. The Hoffman's two-toed sloth, threatened by the pet trade and for use as a prop in tourist photographs, was also added to Appendix II in response to a proposal by Brazil, Costa Rica, and Panama.

Thankfully, efforts to remove protections from charismatic megafauna species were largely unsuccessful. A proposal by multiple southern African countries to delete several giraffe populations from Appendix II failed to obtain the two-thirds supermajority of votes, with 49 percent of parties opposed. Namibia's attempt to downlist its black rhinoceros population to Appendix II was rejected, and its efforts to reduce trade protections for Southern white rhinos and African elephants were rebuffed by a sizable majority of parties.

Some species did lose protections at CoP20, however: The bontebok, a large antelope endemic to South Africa and sport-hunted for trophies, was deleted from Appendix II, removing all international trade restrictions. Kazakhstan succeeded in reducing trade protections for saiga antelopes, who are killed primarily to acquire their horns for use in traditional medicine. And the parties approved a US-Mexico proposal to downlist the Guadeloupe fur seal to Appendix II.

Relatively few bird proposals were deliberated at CoP20, despite considerable evidence of a global decline in many avian species. AWI's advocacy helped secure Appendix II listings—approved by consensus—for white-backed and Ruppell's vultures. These species are threatened by ongoing population declines due to poisoning and threats from trade, including trade in live birds as well as their meat, feathers, brains, feet, and bones for human consumption, traditional medicines, and ritual animal sacrifice.

Black-casqued hornbill

Greek marsh frog

The parties approved Brazil's proposal to add six seed finch species to Appendix II, primarily to protect them from the songbird trade. A group of Central African countries were able to secure Appendix II listings for seven species of forest-dwelling African hornbills, including black-casqued and white-thighed hornbills. These large birds with declining populations are killed for the large casques on their upper beaks (referred to as "hornbill ivory"), which are carved into luxury ornamental items or ground into traditional medicines. An attempt by the United States and Canada to downlist the peregrine falcon, which continues to be threatened by trade for use in falconry, was fortunately rejected.

Decisions made at CoP20 also resulted in critical protections for several amphibian and reptile species. A proposal by the European Union, Israel, and North Macedonia resulted in Appendix II listings of four species of frogs, including the Greek marsh and Epirus water frogs used in the frog leg trade. The Dominican Republic secured an Appendix I listing for the Hispaniolan giant galliwasp (a lizard), and several African countries succeeded in getting the Home's hinge-back tortoise uplisted to Appendix I. Australia also obtained Appendix II protections for two endemic gecko species: the Mount Elliot leafed-tail gecko and the ringed thin-tailed gecko. Each of these species is exploited for the international pet trade, among other threats. Unfortunately, Bolivia and Mexico's proposal for an Appendix II listing for over 60 species of rattlesnakes traded for skins and other parts was defeated.

Marine species also had a strong showing at CoP20. The parties voted to approve Appendix II listings for the tope shark, 16 gulper shark species, and 28 smoothhound shark species. They also approved Appendix I uplistings for the oceanic whitetip shark, the whale shark, and all mobulid rays, as the previous Appendix II listings for these species had not sufficiently curtailed population declines due to legal and illegal trade in their fins, meat, and other products. Each year, this trade claims the lives of an estimated 73 to 100 million sharks of various species.

The declining shark numbers, combined with CITES listings and prominent anti-finning campaigns, have reduced the availability of shark fins in Asia and other key markets. Demand, however, is shifting to fish maws (swim bladders, which the fish use for buoyancy control) as an alternative ingredient in luxury foods, cosmetics, and medicine—or simply as an investment. Consequently, the fish maw trade is growing exponentially and targeting dozens of species—primarily the larger species of croaker with the biggest maws. With virtually no national or international regulation of this trade, there is increasing evidence of dire consequences for both targeted fish and nontargeted animals bycaught by maw fisheries. These include species of small cetaceans, sharks, rays, and marine turtles—most of which are listed under CITES.

AWI is very familiar with the maw trade, given our ongoing efforts to combat the illegal fishing of totoaba—a large croaker species endemic to Mexico's Gulf of California—and the trafficking of totoaba maws to China. Totoaba fishing is the primary threat to critically endangered vaquita porpoises, who are bycaught in totoaba gillnets. The totoaba maw trade, however, is merely the tip of the iceberg; without urgent international intervention, the looming extinction of the vaquita porpoise will be a mere prologue to the number of species jeopardized by the global maw trade.

To raise awareness of this threat, AWI and allies hosted a side event at CoP20. Attendees at this standing-room only gathering were introduced to the deadly consequences of the fish maw trade, and a global initiative was launched. This initiative—led by AWI in collaboration with an international suite of experts from civil society and academia—will examine all aspects of the burgeoning trade and seek global solutions, including CITES listings of targeted species at future CoPs and collaborative efforts in other forums to eliminate bycatch in maw fisheries.

Fish maws for sale in Hong Kong.

IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Committee II discussed more than 100 working documents that covered issues as diverse as zoonotic disease, a CITES gender action plan, wildlife crime enforcement, national ivory action plans, the transport of live specimens, curtailing trade in sharks and rays, and increasing parties' capacity to implement CITES. Overall, debates over these issues, which are often contentious, did not undermine the convention or its provisions.

Several working documents proposed amendments to existing CITES resolutions and decisions or contained new resolution and decision text. CITES resolutions provide guidance to the parties on implementing the convention at a more granular level (regarding, for example, trade in pangolins, big cats, or timber species) or on making "findings" (including "non-detriment" and "legal acquisition" findings—ostensibly, determinations by the party that trade will not harm the species in the wild and that the specimen in trade was legally acquired) that are a prerequisite to allowing trade in a particular species. CITES decisions guide party implementation of the convention between CoPs, often directing the parties, the CITES Secretariat, or CITES committees (e.g., Animals, Plants, or Standing committees) to undertake specific tasks.

The role of wildlife trade in facilitating zoonotic disease transmission has received considerable attention in CITES and other international forums in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. At CoP20, a resolution was approved that recommended adoption of a "One Health" approach to address the impact of wildlife trade on human and animal health. The One Health concept recognizes that the health of people, animals, plants, and the ecosystem are deeply interconnected and interdependent. It promotes multidisciplinary, integrated, and collaborative efforts to identify and resolve potential disease outbreaks before they can adversely impact human or animal health.

Parties also approved decisions to improve CITES implementation and compliance by increasing capacity-building efforts, such as providing training in investigation and enforcement techniques and species identification. A decision was also approved to use CITES guidelines to reduce demand for trafficked wildlife by educating consumers about the legal, ethical, and environmental impacts of purchasing illegal wildlife products.

To fully achieve compliance with the convention, every party must have adequate national legislation implementing CITES. Remarkably, 66 parties, including some that joined five decades ago, continue to have inadequate national legislation. The CITES Secretariat typically addresses these issues through outreach and offers of assistance to the relevant parties. A more effective approach, however, would be to use the convention's enforcement provisions to more rapidly compel compliance. At CoP20, minor amendments were adopted to avoid any weakening of these important processes.

The parties also provided guidance addressing concerns about legal and illegal trade in several CITES-listed species, including Asian big cats, African lions, cheetahs, terrestrial turtles and tortoises, marine turtles, songbirds, great apes, and marine ornamental fish. However, efforts to identify parties contributing to the illegal trade in pangolins—the most heavily trafficked land mammal on the planet—were deferred until the next Standing Committee meeting, in late 2026.

Despite the largely successful conservation outcomes from CoP20, the global biodiversity crisis is ongoing, with at least a million species threatened with extinction in the coming decades. Government inaction and corruption, corporate greed and indifference, and an ever-growing human population and its unrelenting demand for natural resources mean the crisis shows no signs of abating. While CITES cannot remedy all the myriad threats to biodiversity, it can safeguard species from the impacts of international trade, which significantly contribute to the decline of many species.

According to an analysis prepared for CoP20 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and partner organizations, 1,718 of the animal species designated as Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, or Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species are likely threatened by trade. Around 870 of these are not listed on the CITES appendices. The specter of hundreds of species imperiled by trade yet unprotected under CITES is sobering. More sobering still: Given that the study was limited to species already assessed by the IUCN—a mere fraction of all known species—it likely covers only a small proportion of the actual number of species in need of protection under CITES.

In the ongoing effort to stem the biodiversity crisis, AWI will continue to work with our partner organizations in the Species Survival Network, other NGOs, the CITES Secretariat, and CITES parties to improve implementation and enforcement of the treaty, secure protections for qualifying species, and combat illegal and unsustainable trade. We are already preparing for CoP21, scheduled for 2028 in Panama, where we hope the parties will use all the tools available to them through CITES to build on the protections achieved at CoP20.

NDOVULTOME

Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton

by Dr. Bill Clark

The African elephants have lost their great champion. Nature herself has lost a knowledgeable and eloquent advocate.

And I have lost a friend.

The always-astute Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton has been laid to rest after six decades of determined and usually successful efforts to protect Africa's elephants from the barbarisms and cruelties of the ivory trade. Iain's legacy is best appreciated simply by visiting the East African savannas to see great herds of free-living elephants marching off toward distant horizons. Iain started his spectacular career as a youthful and sometimes brash 23-year-old academic researcher in Tanzania's Lake Manyara National Park. Working on his doctoral dissertation from Oxford, Iain conducted the conventional research required by the university. But he went further, ultimately coming to understand the elephants as individuals. He gave them names rather than research subject numbers. He was a pioneer delving into social interactions and individual relationships.

This came at a time of soaring ivory prices and intensified elephant poaching. Iain started collecting data from colleagues around Africa and soon realized this was a continent-wide crisis. His amassed data indicated that, between 1979 and 1989, Africa's elephant population had plummeted from 1.3 million to 600,000. And the problem was getting worse.

The most efficient way to intervene was to have all African elephants listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)—a move that would effectively prohibit all commercial trade in elephant ivory everywhere on Earth. The next chance would come at the October 1989 CITES meeting—mere months away. But there was stiff opposition—from major ivory exporting countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe and from major ivory importers such as Japan and China. Just as troubling, several prominent wildlife charities insisted that "regulating" the ivory trade, rather than prohibiting it outright, was the only practical way to proceed.

In the face of this, persuading enough CITES delegates to impose a worldwide ban on the ivory trade would require prompt and effective action. Dr. Richard Leakey, the incoming director of the newly created Kenya Wildlife Service, provided the effort's dynamic leadership. He invited me to draft the CITES listing proposal for Iain to edit and incorporate the compelling scientific data he had accumulated. Five intense months of effort followed, culminating in victory: At the October meeting, CITES member countries voted 79–11 in favor of the proposal. Thus, the legal ivory trade was shut down across the globe, and the elephants had a respite. With only a couple of temporary hitches, the prohibition established in 1989 holds to this day.

After that landmark vote, Iain went on to found Save The Elephants to further ensure the continued presence of those magnificently lumbering pachyderms in Africa. And he put that Oxford education to superlatively good use by devising efficient, reliable methods for monitoring elephants and generating the data needed by wildlife agencies across the continent to guide their elephant conservation work.

May the memory of Iain Douglas-Hamilton be a blessing that inspires future generations of wildlife conservationists committed to defending those wonderfully ponderous giants.

MICHAEL

AWI Provides Funding to Improve Welfare of Animals in Labs

The growing momentum to phase out the use of animals in research and testing has been encouraging. At this stage, however, many circumstances remain in which effective nonanimal alternatives are not yet available or approved for use, and AWI is committed to safeguarding and advancing the welfare of animals who continue to be used in laboratories. Since AWI's founding 75 years ago, we have encouraged laboratory personnel to care for animals with compassion, minimize their pain and distress, and provide them with comfortable housing that allows the expression of species-specific behaviors such as foraging and social play.

AWI offers two annual grant programs to fund the efforts of individuals working to improve the lives of animals in laboratories across the United States and Canada. Our Refinement Research Award provides each recipient up to $15,000 in funding to develop or validate innovative methods of refinement to the housing, handling, or care of animals in research. Our Implementing Refinement Grant provides up to $8,000 in funding toward staff training or the purchase of equipment to improve the welfare of animals in research.

This year, the programs provided funding to the following individuals:

Refinement Research Award

Sarah Michelle Sparks, student, Prescott College, in affiliation with Texas Biomedical Research Institute, to study the gut microbiome of captive marmosets, which is easily disrupted by bacterial infections, to help establish procedures for earlier interventions and tailored treatments to reduce the marmosets' disease risk.

Dr. Lara Rangel, associate professor, University of California, San Diego, to record and compare the vocalizations of rats in the wild versus in the laboratory under various social conditions to assess how social complexity influences rat communication and welfare.

Implementing Refinement Grant

James Sheehy, animal facilities supervisor, IIT Research Institute, to purchase and install stainless steel vertical socialization tunnels for the institute's colony of long-tailed macaques, doubling their living space and adding vertical complexity.

Dr. Wai Hanson, senior clinical veterinarian and assistant professor, Emory University, to purchase and install high-quality images of gravel—designed to mimic natural substrate—beneath 780 tanks housing some 13,000 zebrafish across two facilities. This simple, easy-to-implement refinement has been shown to reduce zebrafish stress levels.

Lillian Basom, director of operations, Franklin and Marshall College Vivarium, to improve the facility's rat housing, resulting in a fivefold increase in the current living space, enhancing its complexity and promoting the expression of natural behaviors such as climbing, upright standing, and play.

Cecily Burbidge, animal care and welfare supervisor, University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, to purchase high-quality nesting boxes and provide increased opportunities for exercise and enrichment for the institution's colony of woodchucks.

Dr. Julia Goldman, clinical veterinarian, Baylor College of Medicine; Melissa Marceau, animal health technician, Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre; and **Dr. Jennifer Mitchell, associate professor, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center,** to purchase mouse handling tunnels, which are proven to be a more humane and less stressful alternative to the traditional practice of picking up mice by their tails.

Congratulations to all funding recipients!

ZEBRAFISH, MIRKO ROSENAU

DEEPSHIKHA

One of the nation's seven National Primate Research Centers is contemplating a conversion from biomedical research to monkey sanctuary.

PRIMATE RESEARCH CENTER COULD EVOLVE INTO SANCTUARY

The Oregon National Primate Research Center (ONPRC) at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU)—the largest of the seven National Primate Research Centers and one with a notoriously poor welfare record—may cease biomedical research and be transformed into a nonhuman primate sanctuary.

Last year, amid criticism from animal advocates, state legislators, and the public, OHSU was directed by the Oregon legislature to estimate the costs of potential options for future uses of the ONPRC. The university's subsequent report indicated that maintaining current operations would be the cheapest option ($50–70 million), compared to closing the facility ($241 million) or converting it to a sanctuary ($220–291 million).

Nonetheless, in an unprecedented move, the National Institutes of Health approached OHSU in February "to explore whether federal support could be available to transition the [ONPRC] to a primate sanctuary." The following week, OHSU's board passed a resolution authorizing a 180-day negotiation period with the NIH over a potential agreement.

It remains to be seen whether an agreement will materialize. Those who oppose converting the center argue that alternatives are not available to replace the research conducted at NPRCs. The sheer number of monkeys at the ONPRC is also an issue: The nation's largest sanctuaries currently hold no more than a few hundred primates each, while the ONPRC holds nearly 5,000. Former ONPRC director Nancy Haigwood, a proponent of continued research at the center, told the journal *Science* that she believes OHSU is grossly underestimating the cost of closing the ONPRC or transforming it into a sanctuary, and that either move would likely require OHSU to transfer a large number of monkeys elsewhere—to zoos, other sanctuaries, or research facilities. The situation highlights the need to increase the nation's certified sanctuary space for monkeys as the government continues to look toward reducing their use in laboratories.

MAJOR MONKEY SUPPLIER SCALES UP

Alpha Genesis, Inc. (AGI), a massive supplier and user of monkeys in biomedical research, made headlines in late 2024 due to the escape of 43 monkeys, the deaths of another 22 from apparent carbon monoxide poisoning, and the emergence of whistleblower reports alleging grave negligence and incompetence at the company's South Carolina facility.

Despite these disturbing events and a long history of reported noncompliance with the Animal Welfare Act, AGI announced late last year that a 40 percent expansion of its breeding operations—with 1,200 new research spaces and 15 new enclosures—would be ready by early 2026. AGI claims the expansion will allow it to offer more attractive rates on monkeys and contract research versus competitors that are dependent on imported monkeys and thus subject to tariffs, long delays, and a shaky supply chain.

Early this year, AGI also said it is looking to provide long-term care for monkeys whose assignments to research have ended at other institutions, adding that these "biological resources" (i.e., monkeys) could re-enter the experimentation pipeline in the event of future public health emergencies.

With such an abysmal animal welfare record, the prospect of the company expanding and assuming responsibility for the care of so many more vulnerable animals is deeply troubling.

CHARLES RIVER TO PURCHASE CAMBODIAN MONKEY SUPPLIER

In January, Charles River Laboratories (CRL)—a major provider of biomedical products and services—announced a $510 million agreement to acquire K.F. (Cambodia) Ltd., one of its suppliers of captive-bred monkeys for use in research and testing. CRL stated the acquisition would "enable greater oversight and operational control of a key supply source."

Prior to 2023, CRL sourced many of its monkeys from Cambodia. In late 2022, however, the Cambodian supply chain came under scrutiny when six representatives of Vanny Resources Holdings, Ltd. and related companies (collectively, "Vanny"), along with two Cambodian government officials, were federally charged with multiple felonies stemming from an alleged international conspiracy to smuggle wild-caught monkeys into the United States for biomedical research under paperwork falsely identifying them as captive-bred at Vanny's Cambodian breeding center (see *AWI Quarterly*, spring 2025). Shortly thereafter, CRL came under federal investigation over its monkey imports from Cambodia, prompting the company to suspend shipments of monkeys from that country.

CRL has since resumed imports from Cambodia, and this acquisition signals an intent to continue. Meanwhile, however, Health and Human Services Secretary Kennedy has hinted at a possible ban on monkey imports.

CDC TO END MONKEY EXPERIMENTATION

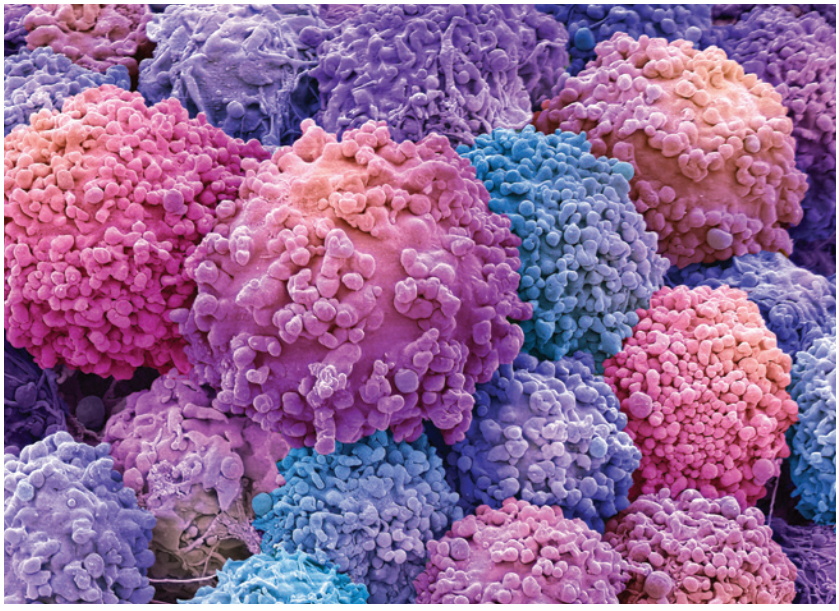
According to the journal *Science*, researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have been instructed to phase out all research involving monkeys by the end of the year. The CDC primarily uses monkeys in HIV-prevention research. The directive was reportedly passed down by a former Department of Government Efficiency employee (a recent college graduate with no apparent scientific background) acting as the CDC's deputy director at the time.

AWI supports a thoughtful, science-backed transition away from animal experimentation. In this case, however, no roadmap has been provided describing the details of this directive, and most scientists contend that nonanimal alternatives are not yet able to replace the kinds of infectious disease research conducted by the CDC—leaving it unclear how it would proceed going forward. Therefore, while this directive may be good news for monkeys, AWI is concerned that the experimental burden will simply shift to other species, such as rodents, who have fewer federal protections and garner less public sympathy. The fate of approximately 200 monkeys currently at the CDC also remains unknown; retirement to sanctuary, euthanasia, or transfer to other research facilities are all possibilities.

NIH UNVEILS INITIATIVE TO DEVELOP AND DISSEMINATE ORGANOIDS

The National Institutes of Health plans to award $87 million in contracts to launch a Standardized Organoid Modeling Center. Organoids are collections of cells that serve as miniature three-dimensional models of various organs. They are among a suite of "new approach methodologies" (NAMs) that, increasingly, are allowing scientists to conduct research and testing without using live animals.

According to the NIH, the center will develop standardized organoids to "reduce reliance on animal testing [and] generate more precise results." The plan is to focus initially on liver, lung, heart, and intestine organoids and later expand into brain, thymus, and other disease-specific models. To aid the effort, the NIH also plans to implement policies to ensure "consistency, transparency, and broad scientific benefit," including openly sharing protocols and data and providing organoids at minimal cost to qualified US researchers.



NEURAL ORGANOID. STEVE GSCHMEISSNER/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

SUNRISE TEAM

Decade of Data Delivers Clearer View of **Animal Cruelty Crimes**

This year, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the addition of animal cruelty data to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). This accomplishment came after a hard-fought campaign of as many years by AWI and allies.

Previously, information collected about animal cruelty crimes was relegated to the catch-all "All Other Offenses" category of NIBRS, making tracking and analysis all but impossible. Thus, the addition of animal cruelty as its own category—with sub-categories of neglect, intentional abuse, organized abuse (i.e., animal fighting), and animal sexual abuse—represented a dramatic change.

In 2024, AWI launched the Center for the Study of NIBRS Animal Cruelty Data (the Center) to encourage researchers, policymakers, law enforcement officials, and animal advocates to use this newly available wealth of information on animal cruelty in ways that will inform more effective intervention and prevention strategies. The Center provides easy online access to the annually released NIBRS animal cruelty data on the Center's website as SPSS and Excel files—formats typically used by researchers.

NIBRS animal cruelty crime data provide information such as offender demographics (but not identity), co-occurring crimes, location of crime, and whether an arrest was made. Researchers and policymakers now have the opportunity to analyze this data, use it to reexamine findings from earlier studies, and obtain a more nuanced understanding of animal cruelty.

While previous studies were helpful in calling attention to the link between animal cruelty and other interpersonal offenses, they had limitations. They said little, for example, about how animal cruelty patterns changed over time and varied across jurisdictions. They often lacked detailed information about the demographics of animal cruelty offenders. Moreover, previous research on animal cruelty did not distinguish between neglect and intentional animal cruelty.

One of the first studies using NIBRS data to examine animal cruelty focused on these two distinct forms of animal cruelty—neglect and intentional abuse. The study found no great difference in the percentage of males and females implicated in cases of neglect; however, males were four times more likely than females to commit acts of intentional abuse. Compared to neglect, intentional abuse was also far more likely to co-occur with other criminal activity: In 20 percent of the intentional abuse cases, other crimes were committed—including assault, sexual assault, and robbery—compared to only 3 percent in neglect cases.

Another study focused on animal cruelty that co-occurred with interpersonal violence specifically. Although previous studies have reported on the connections between animal abuse and domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse, this study was able to analyze a wider range of relationships. It found that the two most prominent forms of violence against family members (excluding spouses) associated with animal cruelty were sibling violence (20.2%) and parental abuse (26.7%)—both involving interfamily dynamics not examined in prior studies. (As a category, parental abuse is distinguished from elder abuse in that it includes abuse of both elderly and nonelderly parents.) In terms of intimate partner violence, this study found that the type of relationship most strongly associated with animal cruelty was boyfriend/girlfriend (66.3%), followed by spousal (18.9%).

NIBRS data have also been used to examine animal cruelty committed by individuals 25 years old and younger, yielding findings not reported previously. For example, within this population segment, individuals 11 to 18 years of age were responsible for 56 percent of animal sexual abuse incidents. More broadly, a quarter of the intentional animal abuse cases involved individuals 18 and under (the vast majority of whom were again in this 11–18 range, although children 7 to 10 years of age did account for 2.3 percent of the total for the entire 25-and-under population). This study, and others like it, would not have been possible without the addition of animal cruelty crime data to NIBRS.

While analysis of NIBRS animal cruelty data has given law enforcement and policymakers important information, there are still challenges to achieving a comprehensive understanding of animal cruelty offenses. First and foremost, NIBRS does not allow reporting agencies to include details about the types of animals victimized—NIBRS reports, for instance, do not indicate whether the crime involved companion animals or farmed animals. The motivation for harming one type of animal versus another may vary and require different interventions, so the inability to capture details concerning the animal victims is problematic.

Another element that cannot specifically be captured in NIBRS is animal hoarding—for which there is no subcategory—and this means important information is overlooked. The number of animals affected by animal hoarding is often much greater than any other type of animal cruelty. One study estimated that a quarter of a million animals a year are victims of hoarding (Arluke & Patronek, 2016). Given that the nature and circumstances surrounding animal hoarding are markedly different from other forms of animal cruelty, AWI is urging that it be recognized as a separate animal cruelty subcategory in NIBRS.

An additional challenge is that, currently, only animal control agencies that operate as divisions of law enforcement agencies can report to NIBRS, yet approximately 50 percent of animal control agencies operate independently from local law enforcement. We need robust reporting if we are to truly understand the scope of these crimes, so finding ways for these other animal control agencies to also report animal cruelty is vital. AWI is working to evaluate and promote trainings that would help fill this gap.

As we seek refinements to the categorization of animal cruelty crimes and consistent reporting from a wider pool of animal control agencies, we are also working to improve data collection and reporting rates of current contributors to NIBRS. The Center's website now includes state-specific reporting rates, and we encourage constituents to help us disseminate information on reporting rates and be advocates for improved data collection and reporting in their communities.

The animal cruelty crime data captured via NIBRS over the last 10 years has allowed for significant improvement in our ability to understand and address these heart-wrenching crimes. Looking ahead, improved reporting and increased access to state-level data will allow us to further our understanding of animal cruelty and use what we learn to promote meaningful change.

A growing body of research is using the FBI's collected data on animal cruelty to shed light on its connection to interpersonal violence and other criminal behaviors. Photo by olezzo.

LITTLEWOLF1989

The vast majority of American consumers think that a number of animal welfare practices on industrial dairy farms are unacceptable, according to a recent Harris Poll.

USDA SEEKS TO SPEED UP SLAUGHTER LINES

In February, the US Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) proposed two rules to allow most poultry and pig slaughter plants to increase line speeds (the rate at which animals are slaughtered, eviscerated, and processed). One rule would allow chicken processing plants to boost line speeds from 140 to 175 birds per minute (bpm) and turkey processors to raise speeds from 55 to 60 bpm. The other rule would allow pig slaughter facilities that maintain "effective process control" (as determined by federal inspectors) to set their own line speeds.

Increasing line speeds raises a host of serious concerns for humans and animals alike. More hastily handled and processed animals could result in more injuries, more throats cut while the animals are still conscious, and more animals dropped in scalding water while still breathing. And unless plants hire additional workers, faster line speeds likely means more animal parts handled per person on the line, which the FSIS has acknowledged can increase workers' risk of acute and chronic musculoskeletal disorders. It could also make it harder for inspectors to detect contamination, signs of disease, and other factors that would make meat unfit for human consumption, raising the health risk to consumers as well.

In collaboration with a coalition of worker safety, food safety, environmental, and animal protection organizations, AWI intends to comment on the rules and, if necessary, challenge them in court.

CONSUMERS CONCERNED ABOUT DAIRY COW CONDITIONS

In late February, The Harris Poll, on behalf of AWI, conducted a national online survey of consumer attitudes regarding the treatment of dairy cows. The survey asked over 2,000 Americans to rate the acceptability of specific dairy production practices and indicate the extent to which a producer's engagement in such practices might affect their own purchasing decisions. (Survey summary and methodology can be found at *awionline.org/dairysurvey*.)

Among the survey findings, roughly three in four Americans said they'd be less likely to buy a dairy product from a producer that denies cows and calves an opportunity for daily exercise (75%), houses cows in a way that does not allow them to easily stand up and lie down (77%), houses calves in a way that does not allow them to easily turn around (77%), or fails to provide appropriate pain relief during and after physical procedures that cause significant pain (such as castration).

AWI uses information gleaned from such surveys to urge industry groups to adopt and implement higher welfare standards. For example, AWI has consistently urged the National Dairy Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) Program to improve its welfare requirements to better align with consumer expectations. Among other things, AWI has encouraged the program to make compliance with all FARM Animal Care standards a prerequisite for certification. Producers currently need only comply with slightly over half the standards. How do Americans feel about that? According to our survey, 85% agree that if a dairy industry trade group certifies producers based on animal welfare standards, then producers should be required to meet all standards (not just a subset) before receiving certification.

farmed animals

SAFETY REGS MUTED AS BARN FIRES RAGE

Another devastating year for barn fires is in the books: More than 573,000 animals are known to have died in fires during 2025. What isn't in the books: state-established fire safety standards that might have spared many of these animals from such a horrible fate.

As in previous years, the overwhelming majority (99%) of the victims were chickens, mostly on densely crowded industrial farms. The three deadliest fires in 2025—all on large-scale poultry operations—reportedly killed 410,000 chickens combined. More troubling still is that, on two of these farms, this wasn't the first such incident: Both have previously experienced conflagrations that killed hundreds of thousands of chickens on the premises.

New York logged the highest number of fatal barn fires last year (14), followed by Pennsylvania (13), Illinois (9), Ohio (8), and Wisconsin (6). Ohio, however, had the highest number of fatalities—200,136—a total almost entirely due to a single fire on a pullet (young laying hen) operation in Darke County. None of these states have established specific fire safety standards to protect animals on farms. AWI is urging states to adopt the latest version of NFPA 150, the National Fire Protection Association's animal housing fire safety standards.

AVMA GUIDE GREENLIGHTS GHASTLY DEPOPULATION METHODS

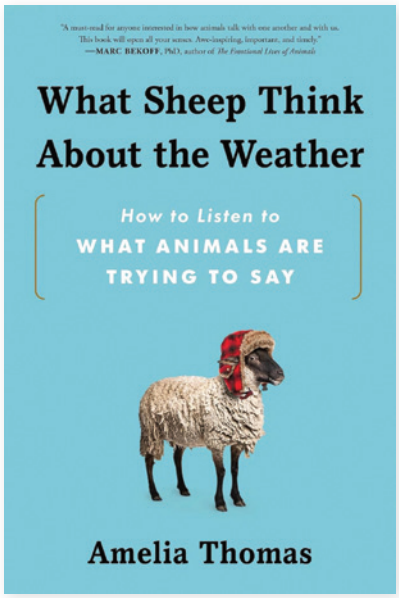
The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has released an updated edition of its *Guidelines for the Depopulation of Animals*, which the federal and some state governments use to set policy related to the mass killing of flocks or herds of farmed animals for disease control or other reasons. When a draft of the *Guidelines* was released for comment, AWI submitted more than 120 technical comments flagging errors, omissions, and overlooked scientific research. We also worked with veterinary and animal protection organizations to develop a sign-on letter urging the AVMA to discourage use of a depopulation method called "ventilation shutdown plus" (VSD+)—which induces fatal heatstroke in animals—by reclassifying it to Tier 3 (the least preferred level—labeled "not recommended" in prior editions of the *Guidelines*). This letter, signed by 868 veterinarians and veterinary students, also called for a reclassification to Tier 3 of two other methods that result in poor animal welfare: water-based foam, which kills by blocking an animal's windpipe with wet foam, and manual blunt force trauma.

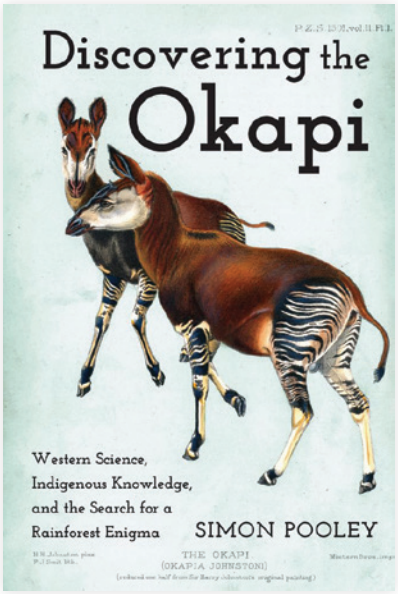
The AVMA, unfortunately, adopted none of the letter's recommendations and very few of those suggested in AWI's technical comments. While the *Guidelines* are touted as a tool to help ensure depopulations "are carried out as humanely as possible," descriptions of many methods lack information about the killing mechanism and what the animals likely experience before losing consciousness. The AVMA's conclusions regarding the acceptability of several methods differ markedly from those of other national and international animal health authorities.

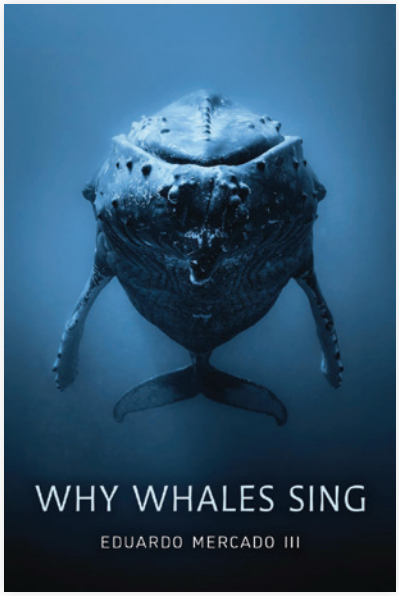
The 2026 *Guidelines* do include some improvements over the 2019 edition. They now at least describe higher-welfare depopulation methods, such as nitrogen gassing and high-expansion nitrogen foam, and the chapter on pig depopulation has downgraded heatstroke-based depopulation methods to Tier 3. In addition, the poultry chapter now cites the importance of advanced preparedness—a crucial component given that millions of birds each year are killed with VSD+, in part due to lack of preparation to apply higher-welfare methods.

ST. KOLESNIKOV

The AVMA continues to view an exceedingly cruel method of killing birds en masse as acceptable despite the availability of far more humane methods.







WHAT SHEEP THINK ABOUT THE WEATHER

Amelia Thomas • Sourcebooks • 368 pages

A wealth of scientific articles, how-to books, and online videos instruct and inform humans on how to tell animals what we want them to do: sit, stay, don't eat the flowers in my garden, etc. However, in typical anthropocentric fashion, decidedly less attention has been devoted to understanding the messages animals are sending *us*.

Author, naturalist, and journalist Amelia Thomas begins *What Sheep Think About the Weather: How to Listen to What Animals Are Trying to Say* with the deceptively simple question of "how, why, and what it means to listen" to animals. The book, a chronicle of her year-long search for an answer, weaves personal narrative—populated with stories of her small farm's pigs, dogs, horses, and resident wildlife—with expert interviews and insights from a veritable who's who of animal scientists, trainers, trackers, and even telepaths.

What Thomas discovers along the way is illuminating, sometimes heartbreaking, and always thought-provoking. She delves into the myriad welfare concerns that stem from humans' consistent, almost determined failure to understand the animals with which we share our world. In some areas, opportunities for further exploration are overlooked: The billions of unheard and unseen animals on factory farms receive only passing mentions, as do most animals used in research—though Thomas does devote a truly moving chapter to the ape sign language experiments popular in the 1960s and '70s.

Ultimately, *What Sheep Think About the Weather* is an overdue, thoroughly researched, and deeply compelling exploration of what it means to listen to animals—from earwigs to elephants. The book will inspire and resonate with anyone who has ever looked into an animal's eyes and wondered what they had to say.

DISCOVERING THE OKAPI

Simon Pooley • Johns Hopkins University Press • 392 pages

In *Discovering the Okapi: Western Science, Indigenous Knowledge, and the Search for a Rainforest Enigma*, Dr. Simon Pooley, a scientist with a particular focus on human-

wildlife conflict and coexistence, examines the plight of the endangered okapi—closest living relative of the giraffe—which dwells in the shadows of the Ituri rainforests of northeast Democratic Republic of Congo. He begins with "discovery" of the species in 1900 by British naturalist Sir Harry Johnston and traces how colonial ambitions and attitudes shaped early efforts to gain an understanding of—and a degree of control over—this mysterious animal and its story.

Sadly, the tale follows a familiar script: News of an exotic creature brings explorer/hunters—intrepid adventurers on heroic treks to collect "specimens" to ship back to museums or private collections in the name of science. Pooley quotes from their journals, which tend toward florid, self-aggrandizing accounts more elaborately embroidered than the Bayeux Tapestry. Efforts to capture live animals for zoos result in more removals from the habitat—and many more animal deaths. Trophy hunters follow, killing without pretense of scientific purpose. Timber and mining companies arrive to chop down and uproot forest habitat, creating inroads for opportunistic bushmeat hunters. (Today, at least a million tons of bushmeat flow out of the Congo Basin *every year*.) Like other species under such onslaughts, the okapi thus began its slide toward extinction: once rarely seen, now simply *rare*.

Pooley incorporates pertinent historical, cultural, and biological elements to reveal how the Okapi became a symbol of scientific curiosity, colonial power, and conservation challenges. Along the way, he paints a vivid picture of the natural history, physiology, and behavior of the okapi, as well as the prevailing mores and mindsets that have inflicted so much damage on the species and its homeland and made conservation efforts so challenging. Pooley also stresses how the Indigenous people's deep knowledge of the land and its inhabitants played an indispensable—but largely uncredited—role in Western scientific efforts to learn the okapi's secrets. He concludes this richly detailed account with an appeal to knit Western and Indigenous approaches to conservation into shared solutions that will ensure the future of this remarkable, reclusive wild species.

WHY WHALES SING

Eduardo Mercado III • Johns Hopkins University Press • 328 pages

In *Why Whales Sing*, cognitive scientist Dr. Eduardo Mercado III challenges decades of scientific research into the purpose behind humpback whale song, in which the prevailing view is that it is a function of sexual selection and is used by males to attract a mate. He argues that humpback whales may instead be using their songs to visualize their environment through sound, interpreting echoes that carry information back to them across great distances, similar to echolocation used by bats and dolphins.

While clearly passionate about his subject, the author's work is not always easily accessible, as it relies heavily on technical descriptions of neuroscience, ocean acoustics, and whale physiology. The book at times also carries a whiff of bitterness about it, a resentment that his theories have not been more readily accepted. This unfortunately detracts from what is a fascinating, albeit controversial, review of current scientific inconsistencies surrounding the whale song "mate-attraction hypothesis."

The most riveting and important aspect of the book occurs toward the end, when the author sounds the alarm about the degradation of the ocean environment and its impact on the future of whales. Whether whale song is a central aspect of whale culture and social cohesion, a means to perceive and navigate the world around them, or some mix of the two, human-caused ocean noise, vessel traffic, and rises in ocean temperatures are all, as Mercado notes, "tinkering with whales' singing behavior."

Why Whales Sing is both a provocative scientific argument and a reminder that whale song is still as necessary a part of the Save the Whales movement as it was in the 1970s. Regardless of how one views Mercado's scientific conclusions, one cannot deny the passion of his call to protect humpback whales so they can continue to sing, be heard, and—eventually, perhaps—be understood.

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HONEY_PAWS

MICE FROM LABS HAVE A FIELD DAY... AND LOWER ANXIETY

A study in the journal *Current Biology* (Zipple et al., 2025) has shown that one week of living in nature prevents the development of anxiety or reverses established anxiety in mice who were formerly held in laboratories.

The elevated plus maze is a common laboratory tool to measure rodent anxiety under various conditions. It is used, for example, to assess whether certain drugs affect anxiety in mice. The maze consists of a plus-shaped runway about 20 inches above ground, in which two arms are enclosed and two are open. Rodents are typically fearful of open spaces, but less anxious individuals will spend comparatively more time in the open arms. After the first exposure to the maze, however, all rodents spend dramatically less time in the open arms on subsequent trials—even if they are given an anxiolytic (a drug to decrease anxiety).

In the new study, researchers found that mice who were released into a protected field outdoors did not show the typical decrease in time spent in open arms on subsequent trials. Moreover, mice previously exposed to the maze three times in the laboratory—and who showed the typical decrease in open-arm exploration—reverted to their baseline exploration levels after just one week in the field. These results suggest that living outdoors is more effective against anxiety than anxiolytics in mice held under standard laboratory conditions.

The authors propose that this apparent reduction in anxiety results from mice experiencing more agency (i.e., control over their lives) in the field. In laboratories, mice are typically held in shoebox-sized cages with little or no stimulation. In the field, mice can burrow and forage, make decisions, and respond to challenges. These experiences allow them to face new situations (such as the maze) with confidence rather than anxiety.

According to the study, these results "underscor[e] the risks of inferring general behavioral principles from impoverished housing conditions"—yet more evidence that improving housing conditions in laboratories enhances both animal welfare and scientific validity.