

Whales for Sale

Whales and most other endangered species are wild animals, unowned by anyone. Might private ownership be a means for protecting species from extinction?

Consider animal species that are far from extinction. Cats, dogs, chickens, cows, and horses come quickly to mind. When animals have value to people, as both whales and chickens do, private ownership seems to secure the survival of the
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species better than common ownership. When the animals are owned, the owner has a strong incentive to ensure that they stay around. When the animals are unowned, as is the case with whales, people have an incentive to kill as many as possible as quickly as possible before others get to them.

A system of private ownership could be administered by the United Nations and might include licenses granting exclusive rights to harvest whales. Whalers from countries like Japan and Russia would purchase these exclusive rights. These rights would prevent others from harvesting whales and thereby provide the owners with an incentive to preserve whales. Much the way farmers slaughter their chickens and steers only at a sustainable rate, whalers would have an incentive to ensure that whales survive into the indefinite future. Do you agree that private owners would have a strong incentive to protect and preserve endangered species? ~~Rely on the discussion by Stroup and Baden to develop your answer.~~ Does the right of private property include the right to destroy that property? If ownership of whales was granted to private individuals or groups, would the owners be within their rights to destroy all the whales? ~~How might Stroup and Baden answer this question? Is the supply of whales infinite? How might Julian Simon (Chapter 3) and Herman Daly (Chapter 4) answer this question?~~