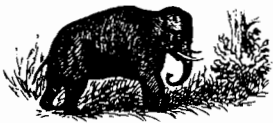


Roger Caras

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There Are Two Ways



There are two distinct ways of looking at animals in our modern world. Although they need not be mutually exclusive, a great many people treat them as if they were.

The scientists and the scientifically oriented lay person view animals as species. That makes a great deal of sense. But the boast often is that when you view animals as a species, you are unencumbered with emotions and sentimentality. That implies, of course, that emotions and sentimentality are in some way sins against right-think biology.

Are scientifically aligned people who view species as species and not as a bunch of individual animals really free of emotions? Can they view conservation problems, habitat problems, and all of the other quandaries in the battle to save wild animals and wild plants from extinction without passion, with a perfectly clear, scientific state of mind? I doubt it very much. I have seen passions rising and I have seen scientists profoundly depressed over the plight of the California condor. Before her tragic murder, Dr. Dian Fossey became very emotional over the fate of the mountain gorillas she so long fought to save. She certainly wept in my presence. Personally, I would be very leery of a scientist whose eyes were incapable of misting over under the right circumstance. I have known very few like that, but the fiction of the test-tube-like brain is a pleasing one for some people to adopt for themselves.

The other way of looking at animals is as individuals. People who work their lives away, slave their lives away, for the benefit of animals most often take this approach. Hunters call them Bambi-ites in what is supposed to be an ultimate pejorative. I love being called a Bambi-ite, myself. It implies that I am an old softy, that I despise suffering and that however good and sincere and long-laboring a conservationist I may be, I can still look at a lamb or a fawn, a baby rabbit or a baby elephant, and feel like cooing. (After twenty-four or so African safaris I still coo at baby elephants and I talk to my dogs and cats all the time. It doesn't matter that my exact words are lost on my pets — they get the message from my tone of voice — or that elephants don't understand when I coo even when they can hear me, which they almost always can't.) I like reacting to the animals that have occupied so very much of my life.

I hate to see animals suffer. Once, in Africa, we came upon a very pregnant impala that had apparently been hit by a car. She lay beside the dirt road with both of her hind legs and her spine broken. She was in terrible pain. It was late in the afternoon and in a matter of hours some predator would finish her off and probably feed her to its own young. Still she would be in agony and terror for those hours. We turned back and six miles away found a game warden with a rifle. We spoke enough Swahili and he enough English for him to understand that he was to return with us and shoot the gazelle. I dislike killing animals with a knife, and he did have a perfectly adequate rifle — a .303. He thought we were crazy, since a lion or hyena would get her in three or four hours, but we made it quite clear that that was not going to be the case. What the predators would get would be carrion. Shouting counts for a lot in Africa, even when the other fellow has the gun, and the warden finally went along with us and put the impala out of her misery.

Now that is sentimentality. Impala in Africa are more than plentiful. They are everywhere you look, like jack rabbits in Oklahoma. But this was not the species *Aepyceros melampus* — the impala — this was one terribly hurt, terribly frightened animal that would know in whatever way animals have of "knowing" such things that night was falling. As the night noises increased that animal would again "know" that it could not flee or defend itself and would have to lie there waiting to die. It would listen for unmistakable sounds and then,

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by Roger A. Caras

because it would not have to be pulled down by predators, it might die very slowly.

All of that has nothing to do with saving habitat or protecting hoofed animals or making the world safe for predators. It is pure Bambi-itis, it is hating avoidable pain, it is staunching controllable terror, it is sentimental and emotional and has little to do with science. But so what? Am I to be drummed out of the scientific community because that impala in its awful plight made me want to weep? I am an adjunct professor of animal ecology at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine and an old African hand. I know the role of the impala as a prey-base animal for the larger cats and other notable predators. Does that mean I am banned from feeling for a single impala? I really think not.

Do the two approaches, concern for one animal and concern for whole species, ever come into conflict? Indeed they do, and the conflict is far more serious than the asinine rhetoric of the macho vs. the I-don't-need-to-be-macho. The operative words for the conflict are game management. We should, by the way, put the word "game" into historical perspective. Game comes down to us from the Olde English from whence it came from the Olde German. In the German of the Middle Ages it was "gamin" and it meant glee. A game animal is one people take glee in killing.

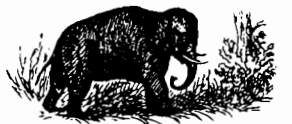
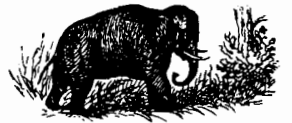
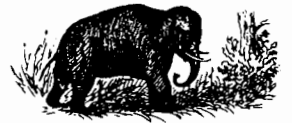
The specialists in game management look on Bambi-ites with disdain, generally. And Bambi-ites, individuals who are sentimental about animals one by one, are very often no kinder to species-by-species people, whom they perceive as the enemy. Humane workers who see game managers making the world better for hunters and trappers are often less than generous in their appraisals of their fellow man.

The irony, of course, is that both sides are quite wrong in their assessment of one another. I have seen cowboys carefully, even tenderly caring for orphaned calves even though they were raising the animals for slaughter. Similarly, I have known scientists, species-by-species people, who cared very much about suffering and the welfare of individual animals. I have also known an enormous number of humanitarians, animal-by-animal people, who understood very well the need for the conservation of habitat and the techniques for doing it. Some of the very best conservationists are sentimental about every living creature out there, and some of the best humane workers never miss a hearing, a fight, or any kind of confrontation when species are at stake.

In fact, I am wary of humane workers who do not know enough about the ways nature works to understand that animals and plants have to die to keep the system in order. And I certainly don't want anyone who can't feel for an individual animal (and who wouldn't coo over an infant elephant) managing anything closer to the natural world than a fast-food hamburger franchise. I would not trust either person's judgment or ability to make a moral evaluation.

The two basic approaches — species as a whole and animal-by-animal — are at times confrontational, but there is no real polarity. The battles are largely personality problems, and the less battling that is done over this classic nonissue the quicker we can all get down to the task of saving individual animals and whole species. The needs of both are seldom far apart. As much cannot be said for our individual egos. ●

Roger Caras is Special Correspondent for Animals and the Environment for ABC News and the author of numerous award-winning books, the latest being The Endless Migrations (E.P. Dutton, 1985).



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