

# Conservation Welfare for Captive and Free Living Wildlife

*Conservation welfare - the securing of welfare or well-being for wildlife, either in situ or ex situ while undertaking the conservation of species and their habitats.*

### Conservation Welfare

Conservation = saving kinds (species) of living things

Wildlife = wild animals and plants

Welfare = literally, “faring well” or living in a good way

Well-being = free of neglect, abuse, stress, distress deprivation; basic needs satisfied, comfort, contentment, general good . .

### Conservation Disciplines

There are different branches of expertise in conservation that have come about in the last decade or more, e.g., Conservation Education, Conservation Medicine, Conservation Biology and Conservation Welfare.

**Conservation Education** is a field of education which teaches all ages and levels of people about the importance of natural resources, from soil to plants to animals, etc., and how to conserve them. Conservation education helps people understand how these resources make up ecosystems, how they interact with one another, and how we interact with them. People develop understanding of how nature works and encourages them act to responsibly so they can conserve these valuable and lifesaving products of nature.

**Conservation Medicine** is a relatively new field about the relationship between human and animal health, and environmental conditions. Environmental catalysts of medical problems are complicated, international and not yet understood. It brings together a wide range of experts to tackle the clinical diseases that we know exist as well as emerging diseases.

**Conservation biology** studies the nature and status of biodiversity in order to prevent the extreme pace of extinction in species, habitats, and ecosystems. It utilises science, economics, and natural resource management in order to maintain valuable species and populations.

**Conservation psychology** is the scientific study of the reciprocal relationships between humans and the rest of nature, with a particular focus on how to encourage conservation of the natural world. It seeks to understand why humans hurt or help the environment and what can be done to change such behavior. Conservation psychologists use their abilities in “greening” psychology and make society ecologically sustainable.



**Conservation welfare** - securing welfare for wildlife, either *in situ* or *ex situ* while undertaking the conservation of species and their habitats.

All of these branches have wildlife conservation as their primary focus along with their discipline. "Conservation Welfare" is the newest of these (~2005) and not yet fully defined. That is the purpose of this article ... to introduce you to this and the other, older, fields to deepen your understanding of conservation generally.

Although the term "Conservation Welfare" has not been in general use for long, wildlife biologists, wildlife scientists and field wildlife researchers have been aware of potential and actual anomalies that have or might come up between conservation and welfare. Today wildlife declines and dangers have escalated and more and more dramatic measures are contemplated for trying to save species, such as breeding wild animals in captivity for release in the wild, relocating wild animals to better quality habitats when human presence deteriorates wild areas, translocating wild males to different localities to extend the gene pool. All of these are or lead to forms of reintroduction for the purpose of conservation upon which wildlife scientists have commented that welfare may be compromised. Reintroduction is just one of the among many activities that may create a nexus between wildlife conservation and the welfare of individuals and groups.

**Conservation welfare** is a discipline that focuses on how NOT to do that.

## Zoo conservation efforts

Zoos, at least good, well-intentioned zoos, are truly dedicated to wildlife conservation and also conservation welfare. They do not want their

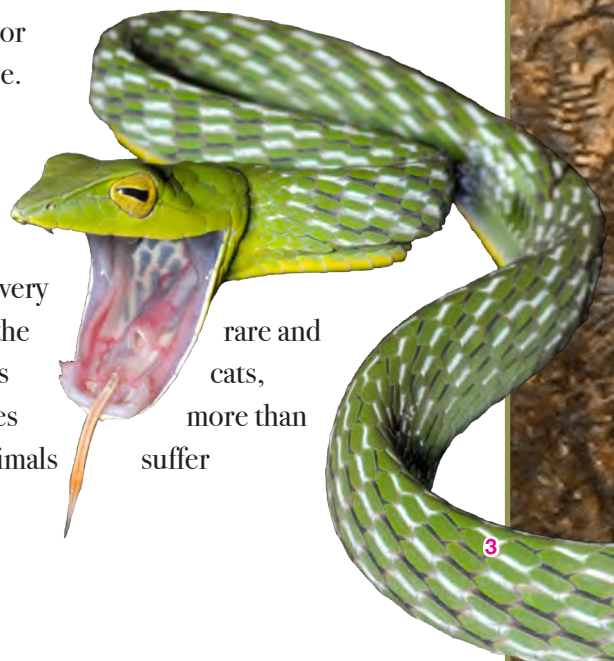
animal to suffer and take much care to see that they are not in danger or discomfort. Unfortunately these dedicated zoos are in a minority in the world. But even these zoos, in trying to make a strong statement contribution to conservation, make mistakes with every intention of saving species. Conservation activities like reintroducing wild animals that were born or for some other reason kept in captivity often hit snags due to details that were not considered. Under Case studies are two examples of innocent mistakes that were overlooked and could have ended in disaster. They were discovered in time and are good lessons.

## Zoos' contributing to extinction

There are many, many more dysfunctional zoos than there are good zoos...many thousands in fact. Some of these dysfunctional zoos are run by people who are really trying to have a good zoo, but they don't understand some of the ethics and principles that should be applied to zoos and they don't seem to understand that their level of expertise cannot cover managing just any species. Several zoos in South Asia are in the habit of ordering nice animals over and over again, as if there were an unlimited supply. They cannot breed these animals and even keep them alive or even comfortable.

One zoo we know sends a trapper up to the mountains every year to capture the beautiful Pallas's taking sometimes six cats. The animals

rare and cats, more than suffer





in their cages, freezing because they don't have sufficient space to exercise and keep warm, and also because they are not getting enough to eat. They are "disposable" cats. No chance of conservation welfare here! The same zoo and similar ones nearby insists on having an elephant, even though they have to keep these sensitive animals chained continuously and do not have the skills to keep it in good health, or even alive. Another zoo in South Asia which sometime ago ordered over 250 exotic animals from around the world by instruction of their highest government authorities. Every other year they do so, without care that 95% of the animals are dead within months. Clearly this is the opposite of Conservation or Conservation Welfare. The truly shocking thing about these zoos is that if you ask them what is the purpose of their zoo, they will honestly say, as if you are a nutcase ... "why, its conservation!".

## Field conservation

Sometimes field biologist legitimately have to collect and kill animals so they can have a sample of new species, or uncertain identification, etc. Wildlife science (or, conservation biology) helps wild animals in the long term. However, when they kill the animal they must do so in the quickest and least painful manner. They must also refrain from killing more animals than they need. This is also conservation welfare practice ... providing scientific information for the long term survival of species but with compassionate and discipline in killing for the individuals.

Field biologists legitimately need to trap small animals so they can study them up close. In order to do this in terms of conservation

welfare, the field biologist must make sure to use box traps that do not harm the animal and also that the animals do not stay long in their traps. If the animals are trapped at night as that is when they move about, the field biologist must make sure he reaches the site early morning. This is to insure that the animal does not starve or become overheated in the metal box. Field biologists have to keep careful records of when and where they set their box traps. If they do so, they are practicing **conservation welfare**.

Field biologists sometimes do not want to go through the motions required to conduct their studies in the most compassionate way possible and at the same time get an accurate result. Blowing up streams with dynamite is easier than catching fish in order to get a population count, but it is beyond necessity, and it is certainly **not Conservation welfare**.

## Case Studies

### Musk Deer Breeding Centre

In a remote hill area of north India the forest department of the state set up a Musk deer breeding centre with an idea of breeding the rare Musk deer and then releasing them to wild. Each Musk deer had its own naturalistic living space enclosed by chain mesh. Every day a zookeeper would approach the enclosed area with a giant basket full of wild flowers which is a favourite food of Musk deer. The zookeeper had keys that rattled as he entered alerting the deer to the treat. The keeper unlocked every living area and dumped a pile of wild flowers in each one. The deer were not afraid of him. Can you imagine what would happen after





the deer were transferred from the centre to the wild. They were accustomed to people and when poachers entered the forest the deer would not be so likely to run from them. They associated people with food. Animals destined for release to the wild need to be wary of human beings in their new area ... they have to be trained to be frightened of man. That sounds mean in a way but it is actually the right thing to do for the safety and welfare of the animals.

## Sloth Bear Salvation

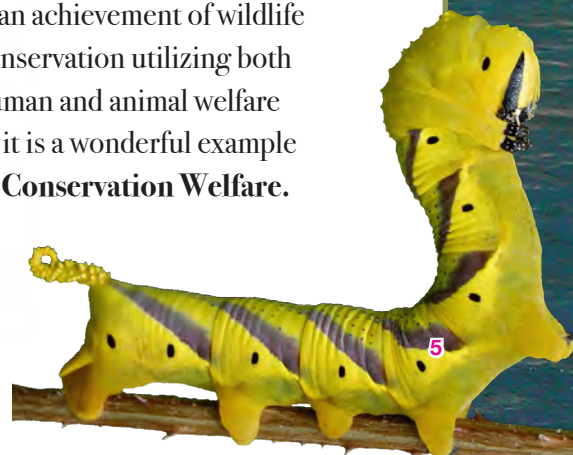
Sloth Bears in India were caught as tiny cubs and raised like unwanted orphans by people who were exploiting them. An ancient community called “Kalandars” made their living by performing trained “dancing bears” to people in towns, cities and on the roads to see for money. They continued this way of life for centuries and the bears suffered a lot.

They made a hard life for the bears and often needed replacements. They contracted with “go-to” men who went into the forests where they knew Sloth bears could be found and kidnapped the Sloth Bear cubs; they killed the enraged mother bear and sometimes the father bear. The men sold the bear cubs to Kalandars who punched a hole in the bear’s nose and attached a string to begin their training. They went from place to place displaying the “dancing bears” which were made to dance on hot streets. Mother and Father bears having been killed and their offspring put into service without being permitted to breed resulted in

a sharp decrease in Sloth bears. It became a wildlife conservation issue.

Animal Welfare organizations with interest also in wildlife conservation provided a means for stopping this cruel practice. They searched for the Kalandar families and interviewed them. They learned that the Kalandars also had hard lives but continued the dancing bear trade because they knew no other way. The welfare organizations offered the Kalandars help if they turned over their bears to them and sign a paper promising never again to work Sloth Bears. They provided training and helped the Kalandars set up a normal business.

Sometimes the Kalandars failed in business but were given another chance. SOS Wildlife created bear parks for the mistreated bears because having lived with human beings, they could never be wild again. Now, there are very few Kalandars pursuing this cruel profession. They have been rehabilitated and are working like normal people. Now the Sloth bear populations are gradually coming back without the losses of male and female bears and their cubs. This is an achievement of wildlife conservation utilizing both human and animal welfare ... it is a wonderful example of **Conservation Welfare**.





# Fantastic Facts

## Elephant Ethics

Asian Elephants are being crowded out of their habitat by development and human overpopulation. The elephants' enormous size and strength, intellect, and propensity to roam is at odds with human beings and their needs. This results in conflict with human beings in cities, rural areas and forests. Fear of conflict overwhelms the affection and trust many people have had for elephants in previous decades and centuries. Now people are afraid for their property and lives. Development has reduced elephant options - they have nowhere to go as the larger forest areas are now not available to them.

Modern lifestyles have led to significant changes in the spiritual values and attitudes of human beings than was the case years ago when they were more in tune with the earth. These changes and the growing nuisance value of elephants causes conflict between humans and elephants. Human Elephant Conflict, HEC, is to blame for elephant and human deaths.

Government compensation for elephant damage just makes human beings less patient with the elephants, thinking that elephants have turned on them when in fact they have turned on elephants. Elephants also die of other causes such as insufficient food and water, accidents occurring as they move into

unknown territories. Government solutions resolve little. Conservation of elephants requires cooperation and compassion from human beings on a massive scale— is it even possible? Yes!

There ARE people living nearby elephants who have much more success in coping with HEC. These people have lived close to elephants for generations and willingly coexist with them, accepting them and their anomalies as part of life. They have many less irrevocable tragedies, such as loss of life or limb, than people who prefer fighting the elephants.

HECx (Human Elephant Coexistence) is required ... it is the opposite of the philosophy of Human Elephant Conflict. HECx can bring a change of attitude toward elephants. Practicing HECx is doing whatever keeps humans and elephants out of trouble, such as *giving the elephant the right of way*. Demanding your rights or trying to get your way in some situations may cost your life itself. What good are your rights then? Giving-in is for your *welfare*, and for the *welfare* of elephants.

HECx people who coexist in elephant areas give the elephant right of way. Because of the small sacrifices they make when they “stand down” and give the right of way to the elephant, they can save their life and the lives of many elephants. It is for their own well-being or *welfare*, as well as for *welfare* of the elephants. This way of thinking and acting is **Conservation Welfare**.





## Daily Life Wildlife

“Wildlife refers to wild animals that are not domesticated, or plants that are not cultivated”.

Normally, when we think of wildlife we envision animals in forests and jungles, away from humans and their habitations like tigers, bears, monkeys, vultures, etc., that one sees in the forest. Any free-ranging animal is probably wildlife.

What about frogs, insects, house geckos, lizards, spiders, snakes, crows, etc., that live around our houses and compounds. They are also wildlife, both in the wild and in villages, towns and cities. We see them often but do not think much about them unless they fall in our soup or run up our pants leg... then we want to kill them! These animals, as good a wild animal as a tiger or a deer, are small and available ... children use them as toys, pulling their wings, wrapping a string around their neck or body and watching them buzz around. Most parents think this is harmless and even cute. We think children should be taught to have interest and respect for these as well as larger and more powerful animals. We call these animals “daily life wildlife”.

“Daily life wildlife” is a name intended to draw attention to animals that live close to us that we all take for granted. They are so common that human beings treat them like objects, as if they didn’t feel pain. Youngsters may get a habit of mistreating larger animals or even people by being unkind to



harmless and helpful animals they encounter on a daily basis. Youngsters who torment animals grow up to be seriously jaded.

## Cruelty in Daily Life

Killing household insects that can be shoo’d out and set free. Killing harmless animals - frogs, lizards, insects, birds etc. Torturing any animals just for entertainment. Keeping wild animals as pets.

Such animals are not just harmless ... most of them are helpful !

We are making daily life mistakes to kill creatures that play beneficial roles in our lives, e.g., a few examples  
Frogs, snakes, bats control insect and rodent populations.



Many insects, bats, etc. are pollinators, providing a third of our food, & flowers and trees. Shrews & mice spread seeds and eat up grasses that clog waterways. Worms break down living material for enriching the soil.

Life without these daily life wild animals and their useful contribution would be far less comfortable. Let’s conserve them harmless and their helpfulness. **This is also Conservation Welfare.**

*Extract from Teaching Conservation Welfare for Captive and Wild Animals Manual by Sally R Walker.*