

The Limits of Species Advocacy¹

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Introduction

The ability for humans to develop empathic bonds with animals is demonstrated in a plethora of ways as we go about trying to represent and protect their interests. These emotional commitments to animals can be transposed onto politics at two different levels: at the individual level, which is best represented by discourses on welfare and animal rights – where the discussion revolves around the states of wellbeing of individual animals; and at the species level, which operates via a focus on the wellbeing of whole populations. While there are some similarities between the two types of advocacy, they differ greatly in how they are able to transpose into politics, our desire to care, save, protect or otherwise act on behalf of animal interests.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section draws on literature in human-animal studies in an attempt to uncover the affective and semiotic conditions that might explain how we are able to develop emotive responses towards protection campaigns. The basic argument made in this section is that any moral commitment towards preserving species that can be mobilised by advocacy campaigns is rooted in our desire to preserve our *experience of species*, as opposed to preserving *the lived*

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experiences of the individuals that make up the species. An overview is then provided on how the political mobilisation of species advocacy is fuelled by a very particular type of anthropocentric attachment to animals. This attachment is fostered as advocates celebrate the virtue of some species via presenting them as sets of congealed qualities that we tend to value. Thus, as is argued in section two, because a species is not valued as a collection of subjective experiences in themselves, advocacy is able to focus on securing intermediary conditions, such as habitat or genetic health. As illustrated in recent efforts to ‘save’ the polar bear, section three demonstrates not only how species advocacy is pursued by focusing on achieving broader environmental goals which are not exclusive to species protection, but also that the manner in which species protection is pursued is in itself made congruous with the broader political agendas held by the organisations which act on their behalf. As will be argued in further detail, conditions that allow for species advocacy to become transposed onto politics ensure that campaigns also exists as single incarnations, independent of any other advocacy campaigns. This independence increases the possibility of campaigns coming into contact with competing versions of animal advocacy. In the fourth section, further questions are raised regarding the political limits of species protection. Specifically, a key issue is whether pursuing species protection in this manner implies that achieving our goals for preserving species is predicated on achieving a variety of goals which are not directly related to species protection.

Advocacy and how species move us

Most people find animal suffering emotionally disturbing (Allen et al. 2002, Plous 1993). Psychologists have found that the perceived capacity for subjective experience – including the capacity for pain – partially underlies the extent to which entities are deemed worthy of moral concern (Waytz et al. 2010). The interpersonal relations that we develop with animals at the individual level provide ample opportunity to appreciate an animal’s capacity for subjective experience.¹ It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest, as others have (Shevelow 2008: 58, Sanders 1995: 197–8), that pet welfare law has grown out of the personal relations humans are able to develop with individual animals.

The human capacity to become emotionally responsive and committed to animals through interpersonal relations cannot as easily be transposed onto species advocacy. This inability is because we simply cannot readily develop interpersonal relations

with a 'species' because it is a unit for biological classification. Instead, a species is generally appreciated on account of its serving as a representation of something else, as opposed to being appreciated as a collection of individuals with subjective experiences independent from our own. Or, as Chris (2006: x) states in her book, *Watching Wildlife*, 'we look not only at animals to learn about them, but we also look through animals for ourselves'.² As is argued further in this chapter, when species advocacy is practised, as it has been with animals such as the polar bear, any affective motivation that supports such a campaign, does not originate from our appreciation of *the lived experiences of individual animals*, but rather from our appreciation for *our lived experiences of animals* collectively.

An appreciation of biodiversity is what usually underlines our celebration of other species inherent worth (Martinelli 2008: 91). However, appreciation of diversity is closely tied to being an appreciation for aesthetic value (Myers 1979). We must know something to exist, before it can be properly valued for its role in augmenting any state of diversity we might come to be emotionally committed to, through our experience. Therefore, our appreciation of a species should not be thought of as being independent from that which provides our subjective experience of it in the first place (Martinelli 2008). The value of diversity, like our appreciation of the 'inherent value' of a being, is often operationalized by policymakers through the concept of 'existence value'. Existence value describes the value or benefit that we obtain simply by knowing that a species exists (Privy Council Office). Here, moral value is not attributed to species on account of their having inherent worth, but rather on account of our coming to be aware of and, more importantly, moved by that fact. In other words, here, moral value is not attributed because species have subjective experiences independent from our own, but rather on account of their having existence or sentimental value that is important to our own subjective experiences. As a result, in practice, species advocacy seems to reflect the idea that some species, such as the polar bear, have more inherent value than others.

In 2008, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reported that 35% of birds, 52% of amphibians and 71% of reef-building corals have traits that are likely to make them particularly susceptible to a climate change driven extinction (Foden et al. 2008: 77). Yet it has been the polar bear that has become the animal used in everything from leaflets to TV advertisements and giant ice sculptures, all in order to draw attention to the global impacts of climate change. The polar bear has been a highly successful tool in drawing economic and political support for campaigns against climate change. Successfully using animals for

garnering public support for a broader environmental campaign depends on establishing an affinity between the potential donor and a species. This use is usually done by presenting species that already have characteristics we tend to value, and thus this familiar value might explain why we don't see many ice sculptures of the muskox or some ice-dwelling ex-tremophile. Advertising campaigns or media blitzes attempt to manufacture narratives of being, as Arran Stibbe (2012: 74) points out, do not aim to create affective relationships between people and animals by describing them as individuals 'caught up in a life and death battle against the encroachment of humans'. Instead, this affective relationship is established through presenting animals as evaluative descriptors of physical attributes, such as 'gentle giant', or degrees of rarity, such as 'the world's most endangered' (Stibbe 2012: 75). Here we can begin to see how advocacy acts to build an affinity between human and species in a way that celebrates the value of species by pronouncing their utility for augmenting our lived experience of the nonhuman world. We can see this in particular, through Stibbe's summary of the World Wide Fund's (WWF's) most used adjectives to describe 12 of its commonly advertised animals:

largest, larger, plentiful, mighty, huge, powerful, endangered, numerous, widespread, wondrous, remarkable, lovable, charismatic, popular, small, shy, majestic, silver, anadromous. (Stibbe 2005: 10)

Several scholars of human-animal studies (see Isenburg 2006, Chris 2006, Brower 2010) have shown how maintaining animals as part of a broader zoological heritage has importance for retaining a particular human experience of the nonhuman world. The process in which species become popularised is therefore accomplished not by presenting animals as having animal experiences independent from our own, but rather by presenting them as vehicles for the 'lovability' and 'rarity' of the world. As Turner et al. (2003) explain, existence value relates to several anthropocentric dispositions towards the instrumental and noninstrumental value of animals. For example, they note that 'in-tergenerational altruism' relates to a motivation to save species to ensure future generations have access to them (Turner et al. 2003). This intergenerational altruism has been recently engaged as a result of climate change threatening our ability (or our future children's ability) to enjoy the existence of the polar bear, and thus the quality of lived experience that is provided by a richer and more diverse 'animal kingdom'. This aggravation of anxieties is denoted in the following WWF (2009) quote:

The planet is rapidly moving towards a tipping point with climate change impacts on polar bears. Unless immediate action is taken by responsible governments, we may be relegating polar bears to extinction in the wild within the lifetime of our children.

The types of affective commitments that are sought after by species advocates are not constituted by the same emotive imageries that support animal welfare advocacy. At the individual level, advocacy can rely more on eliciting emotive responses from potential donors, as people are more susceptible to visceral responses towards individual pain and suffering experienced by animals (See Herzog and Golden 2009, Loughnan et al. 2014). We may care for an individual polar bear, but we cannot care for any species in itself, as they are simply voids, waiting to be filled up with our indirect and culturally embedded imaginings of them. The loss of one of the more prominent members of the ‘animal kingdom’ can therefore provide a source of anxiety over what could be construed a degradation to the diversity or quality of lived experience that we are currently able to obtain from ‘being human’ amongst ‘nonhumans’. Therefore, advocacy at the species level depends on eliciting states of anxiety through culturally construed anthropocentric representations of loss.³

Transposing our affective commitments onto a politics of care

It is clear that species advocacy is not directed at establishing positive attachments between humans and the daily experience of individual animals. As species advocacy doesn’t focus on the subjective experiences of the animal as a means to illicit emotive responses from supporters, it is therefore free from the need to use the body or the experiences of the animal as the point of departure when advocating for one means of protection over another. Instead, species advocacy is able to depart from any intermediary point of departure that can be argued as being a necessity for the survival of a given species. For example, in regard to saving the wolf of Sweden, the government has claimed that wolf ‘protection’ means achieving the intermediary goal of obtaining a certain level of genetic purity (Boyer and Hall 2013). Therefore, ‘protection’ has meant that the Swedish government has allowed a certain number of killings (from a total population of approximately 380) to occur in order to ensure that the wolves’ desire to procreate doesn’t impede the pursuit of this intermediary goal (Boyer and Hall 2013).

While demographic and eugenic pursuits have been a popular means to protect species, the most common intermediary goals pursued by species advocates are those that connect the protection of animals to some broader environmental condition, such as habitat protection.⁴ Animals used for drumming up support for broader environmental campaigns are what Kalland (1998) described as ‘flagship species’. The use of flagship species is often implied whenever species protection is directed towards influencing indirect determinants to animal wellbeing, such as habitat protection. In other words, flagship species allow advocates to use the affective value that has been attached to a particular group of animals exclusively, for advancing broader environmental campaigns that are not exclusive to advancing species protection. Herein lies what could be described as a politics of care: where in order to manifest an affinity between human and animal, advocacy at the species level depends on establishing an affective value by turning species into representations of the human experience of that species. These representations (as illustrated in the next section) are themselves made congruent to the broader political/environmental agenda of which species protection is a part.

Multiple incarnations of polar bear protection

An international legal campaign to ‘protect the polar bear’ began in 2005, when the Center for Biological Diversity, Greenpeace, and the National Resource Defense Council filed a petition with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS) to list the polar bear as a threatened species on the US Endangered Species List (ESL) (Kuhn 2010). Since Alaska is home to two polar bear populations, an ESL listing would require regulatory agencies to take into account how their decisions affect the polar bear, potentially resulting in stricter pollution laws (Navarro 2008). A listing would also require the government to investigate whether a habitat reserve for the species should be established (Navarro 2008). As such, the US government’s concern over the proposed listing of the polar bear centred on its potential impact on the development of non-renewable resources in Alaska. Not only would the listing of the polar bear carry immediate economic impacts, but as some on the US House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming warned, it also threatened national security by constraining the ability of the US to reduce its dependency on foreign oil (Sensenbrenner).

In September of 2008, a number of industry organisations, including the American Petroleum Institute and the National Mining Association, filed a motion to intervene

in one of the petitioner's legal attempts to force a US FWS ruling (Alston and Bird 2008). The group claimed that the listing of the polar bear would have an immediate adverse effect on its members, especially in Alaska where the imposition of special management considerations and protections would increase costs and delays of operations (Briscoe et al. 2008). In April 2008, a third and final attempt by the petitioners to force a FWS ruling was successful, and the US District Court for the Northern District of California ordered the FWS to make a final decision. In the following month, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne announced the listing of polar bears as being 'threatened' under the ESA (US FWS). The use of the polar bear as a flagship species was reiterated by the Center for Biological Diversity's celebratory statement that it was 'the first listing rule in which the impacts of global warming are cited as the sole reason for the listing' (Cummings and Siegel 2008). While the petitioners were successful in adding the polar bear to the ESA, the Department of Interior (DOI) moved to ensure that the use of the polar bear as a flagship species was not successful in compromising the national economic interests of the US. A statement made by Secretary Kempthorne outlined the government's stance on the ruling:

While the legal standards under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) compel me to list the polar bear as threatened, I want to make clear that this listing will not stop global climate change or prevent any sea ice from melting. Any real solution requires action by all major economies for it to be effective. That is why I am taking administrative and regulatory action to make certain the ESA isn't abused to make global warming policies. (Office of the Secretary 2008)

Kempthorne later clarified that the phrase 'administrative and regulatory action' meant that the amendment to the ruling was designed to ensure that the listing was 'to protect the polar bear while preventing unintended harm to the society and economy of the United States' (Office of the Secretary 2008). In elaboration, he announced that the US FWS

was using the authority provided in Section 4(d) of the ESA to develop a rule that states that if an activity is permissible under the stricter standards imposed by the Marine Mammal Protection Act, it is also permissible under the Endangered Species Act with respect to the polar bear. This rule, effective immediately, will ensure the protection of the bear while allowing us to continue to develop our natural resources in the arctic region in an environmentally sound way. (Office of the Secretary 2008)

The amendment helped insulate US economic interests by making sure that any mining operations would not be held legally accountable for their impact on the polar bear. The listing both acknowledged the moral commitment to ‘save the polar bear’ and attempted to restrict the consequences that doing so might have for a very particular set of human interests.

Another version of transposing the desire to ‘save’ the polar bear onto politics did eventually come to manifest and reflect a very different set of interests. In 2008, the US government, on behalf of polar bears, advocated that the species be up-listed in the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) (IFAW 2009). This new version of ‘saving’ was far less threatening to US economic interests in the Arctic because an up-listing from Appendix II to Appendix I would mean that polar bear protection would be achieved through an international ban on the international trade of polar bear parts. Such a ban would provide increased protection from hunting and, in particular, from the commercial trophy hunt which had been operating in several countries that is home to polar bear populations (IFAW 2009). Saving the polar bear in this way represented a major blow to interests of outfitters and trophy hunters and not those of oil and mineral developers. However and curiously, this version of saving was not supported by the same NGOs who had worked so hard at establishing themselves as the representative of the polar bear and its interests. The International Fund for Animal Welfare, citing the 1974 multinational Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, argued that commercial hunting still posed a major threat for polar bear populations (IFAW 2012). Yet the WWF actually opposed this type of protection during the run-up to the CITES convention. In attempting to retain the link to climate change, and their own agenda, the WWF stated that their ‘initial analysis indicated that hunting was not the primary threat’, and they asked ‘the international community to urgently make deep and long-term cuts to greenhouse gas emissions’ (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2008).

The polar bear illustration demonstrates that ‘saving’ is made politically actionable from within the broader political agendas of those who seek to advocate on its behalf. Therefore, ‘saving a species’ may mean two or more things at a single time – illustrated by the fact that saving the polar bear could and did come to mean two different things at the same time: protecting it from over-hunting, represented by a listing on CITES; and protecting it from climate change, represented by a listing on the ESL. With these protections, it is clear that multiple manifestations of species advocacy can exist independently from each other. So with each campaign being a

result of an individual incarnation of species advocacy, when another instance advances, it does so as independent of the associative arrangements that brought about any others' political existence. This causal advancement then implies that species advocacy brings with it a possibility that conflict can arise between two incarnations of species protection. And attaching the affective value of a species to a broader political agenda is of great potential use for advancing broader political interests.

Human-centric interests are pursued by directing the affective commitment that we have towards a particular species, towards those intermediary goals that are more reflective of their broader agendas. Promoting a type of advocacy that focused on limiting hunting and commercial exploitation was much more congruent to the broader economic interests of the US as opposed to the type of protection proposed by the environmental NGOs. At this level, the WWF's opposition to the CITES listing reveals a political dimension of species advocacy where the saving of a species can actually be presented as a threat to the saving of a species. Conversely, it brings about a strange condition where opposing the protection of a species can be argued by its representatives, to be in the interests of the species. Species advocacy is pursued by focusing on achieving broader environmental goals which are not exclusive to species protection, and the manner in which species protection is pursued is itself made constitutive to the broader political, economic and social agendas of the specific organisations which act on behalf of a species. With this political dimension, it seems doubtful that any given campaign can be reflective of all associated intermediary goals equally. This doubt raises fundamental questions regarding the limits of species protection, which are explored briefly in the next section.

Species protection as a predicate?

When advocacy transposes our desires to save or care for animals into politics, there is a relational dependency between achieving our altruistic goals and achieving the actionable goals that 'saving' is pursued through. At the individual level, animal welfare laws pertain to a referent that is relatively static and constant – the pursuit of a level of wellbeing, as it exists within the animal body. As a consequence, trajectories of advocacy generally seek to procure particular levels of nutrition, hydration and mental or social wellbeing. There isn't much room to interpret the determinants to wellbeing at this level; nor is there much opportunity to create an

overlap between the interests of animals and humans. There is a similar sort of relational dependency that occurs at the species advocacy level. In order to save the polar bear from extinction, we must protect its habitat (not the other way around). However, with species protection there is a far greater degree of separation between pursuing the general goal of animal protection and pursuing what ends up being the actionable goals. Thus, in species advocacy, there is greater opportunity to have the interests of animals overlap with certain sets of human interests, depending on how the threats and remedies of species protection are defined (as demonstrated by the polar bear case).

For species such as the West African Mountain gorilla, saving it from extinction has meant that individual gorillas become subject to visits by wealthy eco-tourists. These visits, while exposing the gorillas to foreign parasites and disease (Homs 1999), also provide a means to which habitat destruction and poaching is staved off on account of providing alternative means of economic development to the human communities which surround the gorillas (Butynski and Kalina 1998). What is important to note with the gorilla example is the manner in which the pursuit of species protection itself is made possible by dovetailing it with human-centric concerns. Here, saving the gorilla is conditioned by using it as a means to supply socio-economic development for surrounding communities or lived experiences for wealthy tourists. Species protection no doubt benefits by it overlapping with human goals such as the campaign against activities causing climate change. While it provides a means to advance species protection by couching the interests of animals in broader intermediary human agendas, these goals are so distant from the benchmarks normally used to orientate advocacy at the individual level (such as the body, expressive freedom and so on), it brings with it fundamental limitations to when and to what extent species protection can be achieved.

With species advocacy, there is a great degree of separation between protecting animals by protecting their habitat and protecting them by protecting their bodies. While one does eventually precede another, at the species level animal advocacy becomes enmeshed with distant political vectors, such as habitat protection. Here, the starting point for advocacy cannot be centred on securing the wellbeing of animals; it must be centred on advancing intermediary goals, such as climate change or social/economic development. The great degree of distance between the target of protection and the political goals associated with achieving those ends, implies that there is a change in patterns of contingency or in the direction of relational dependency between primary and intermediary goals. At the individual level, where

the reference point to which advocacy centres around is relatively static, this results in a condition where there is little flexibility regarding how animal advocacy can be transposed onto politics. Consequently, it is the pursuit of species protection which largely determines how our desire to care is transposed onto politics, and thus any intermediary goals remain largely focused on addressing the exclusive needs of the animal. This is not the case at the species level – as conflicting versions of saving the polar bear demonstrates. As we have seen, there is a greater degree of variability in how animal advocacy can come to be transposed onto politics at this level, and in consequence, there is a greater degree of dependency that the goal of species protection will have on intermediary conditions for how its political trajectory is defined. The final assertion is that the political goals associated with advancing the broader goal of animal advocacy are not exclusive to the animal; this assertion might imply that they in effect, precede it. In other words, for an animal such as the polar bear, the way we come to advocate on its behalf is somewhat preconditioned by whether doing so may converge with the variety of non-species-specific conditions that the broader political agendas of advocate groups must be party to (that is, social development or national economic interests).

If there is a failure to retain the link between the pursuit of saving a species and the actionable goals in which it is couched – then there is a failure to retain the political existence of a particular incarnation of species advocacy. A single incarnation of species advocacy relies on its usefulness in broader agendas for its political existence. It is, therefore, within the interests of the species, and the organisations representing them, to retain this link at all costs – even if it means opposing alternative formulations of saving them. If a species could act collectively to represent its own interests, under these conditions, it would still need to advance its goals in a way that wouldn't divert from the broader agenda it had aligned itself with. The consequence of this relational dependency means that species advocacy makes animals such as the polar bear not into flagship species, but rather into political parasites. Their existence and prevalence in politics (for their own saving) is dependent on whether they are able to be injected into a variety of thriving political hosts in the form of mobilised agendas, such as the ESL, by vectors such as the fight against climate change (and the organisations which represent them).

Conclusion

There are very strict limitations on how species advocacy can ever come to be – ultimately leaving a variety of other incarnations never to become articulated as a result of not being aligned to more humancentric concerns. However, when they do come to be, the politics in which species advocacy is advanced places fundamental limits on the way animal wellbeing can be defined and improved. What has been argued here is that the more the source of focus for advocacy moves away from secur-ing bodily health and expressive freedom, the more the survival of the species becomes predicated on achieving goals related to broader political campaigns and addressing considerations which are not exclusive to advancing species protection. It is clear that the conditions that give rise to species protection also provide their own limitations. These limitations are so fundamental that they cast doubt on whether the affective commitment that we have towards animals exclusively can be properly represented within the type of politics that the majority of popularised species advocacy operates within.

Notes

1. Driessen (this volume), provides further thought on how animals are able to express their subjective capacities via interpersonal relations.
2. For further discussion on the social construction of animals, see Arias- Maldonado, this volume.
3. I would also include here, any affective state which one might experience as response to the perceived loss of a species' habi-tat/home.
4. It is possible and common for species advocacy campaigns to refer to the suffering of individual members of a species, but these instances are contextu- alised as being consequential to the broader concerns (that is, habitat loss).

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