CHAPTER XIV

PRODUCED BY CRUELTY: FUR, FEATHERS, AND THE
USE OF ANIMALS IN ENTERTAINMENT

The appeal to consumer conscience, always an important element in the humane repertoire, took on special urgency in early twentieth century campaigns against fur and performing animal abuse. These two issues were intimately tied to public demand and approval. Such uses of animals were not based upon primary human needs but rather upon aesthetic or sensory satisfaction, be it for an article of clothing or an evening’s entertainment. Because both these categories of use mainly involved wild animals (entertainment spectacles exploited domestic species as well), the humane movement’s response to them was also a part of the larger evolution of its wildlife agenda.

That agenda emerged only gradually as animal protectionists’ emphasis shifted from domestic animals to include the inhabitants of field and forest. The movement’s ideological basis for opposing trapping and entertainment cruelties began with its concerns about animal pain and human character. In the case of wild animals used in performance spectacle, moreover, it included a growing appreciation for the biological and behavioral needs of individual animals. It also involved the conviction that confinement, debasing tricks, and other conditions of life in vaudeville, zoos, circuses, film, and other venues frequently violated the basic dignity of animals. All of these elements would help to shape the longer development of a humane approach to wildlife issues during the twentieth century.
In their campaigns against these two industries, animal advocates had to make consumers aware of largely hidden abuses. In the end, they secured only limited gains against the cruelties of fur and the entertainment industry. Appeals for their suppression did not gain the broad social support that the campaign against the destruction of birds for plumage garnered. What progress humane groups made was modest. Nevertheless, the efforts made against fur and entertainment cruelties provided a foundation upon which the post-World War II movement would build, and signaled the emergence of characteristically humane concerns about animal pain and the denial of animals' basic needs and nature. During the second half of the twentieth century, these concerns would alter perspectives and practices concerning wildlife in the United States.

**Trapping Animals and Wearing Fur**

Although the first substantial bequest to a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals came from Louis Bonard, a man grown uneasy about his profits from the fur trade, animal protection organizations did not address the suffering of trapped animals until the first decade of the twentieth century. At that time, it became a regular concern for humane advocates, who began to speak out against the terrible torment animals experienced in the steel jaws of the trap. In time, animal protectionists linked trapping more directly to the popular demand for fur, and they shifted their energies toward consumers, especially women, who subsidized such cruelty through their purchases.

Discussion of trapping and its cruelties mounted during the decade prior to World War I. The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) was one of the most consistent sources of criticism, and, by the second decade of the
twentieth century, the suffering of animals in traps was a subject of steady commentary in *Our Dumb Animals*. The MSPCA produced its first pamphlet on the subject, “The Cruelties of Trapping,” in July 1913, after sending an agent out with a camera to document conditions along the trap line. For a time, MSPCA agent Edward H. Packard visited trapping and hunting camps in an attempt to evangelize the occupants.¹

Animal protectionists believed that trapping, like many other cruelties, exerted a reflexive impact upon youthful character. Once the American Humane Association (AHA) began publication of its journal in 1913, references to the steel jaw leghold trap greatly outnumbered references to hunting as a wildlife-related concern that bore on the issue of youthful character. AHA writers condemned trapping as an “inhumane atavism,” and alternatively called for its abolition or its reform. Trapping of “obnoxious vermin” was justified, and trapping of fur-bearing animals was perhaps justifiable, if conducted by some other means than the steel trap. But the participation of youth in trapping, which brought prolonged and excruciating suffering to the animals ensnared, and demoralized the perpetrator, was intolerable.²

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To a great extent, the campaign against fur drew on the precedent of the anti-plumage crusade. Although they did not usually originate bird protection campaigns, humane organizations provided steady and persistent support for them. Some of the earliest humane society leaders, including Henry Bergh, George Angell, Emily Appleton, Abraham Firth, Adele Biddle, and Caroline Earle White were honorary vice-presidents of the Audubon Society. In several instances, humane advocates provided practical assistance, letting Audubon societies operate from their organizational headquarters, or helping to defray the costs of a warden's salary.3

From the early 1880s on, Bergh was an active participant in the crusade against the use of birds as decorative adornments for hats. In 1881, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) attempted to prosecute some men who trapped and furnished birds for the fashion markets. Bergh regularly wrote on the subject of cruel and frivolous fashion. Like other humanitarians, he also came out against the trapping of songsters, another serious problem.4 Animal protectionists confronted other cruelties of fashion during this period as well. During the 1890s, humane societies along the East Coast campaigned to suppress the peculiar fad of wearing live chameleons as

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ornaments, relying on public education to dissuade citizens from purchasing such "animate jewelry." 

**Feather Fashion and Bird Preservation**, Robin Doughty's history of the campaign against bird plumage fashions, acknowledges the contribution of humane societies to its success. Humanitarians campaigned against all four of the key activities—sport hunting, market killing, boys' mischief, and millinery demands—that Doughty identifies as responsible for the decline in populations that led to bird protection. Humanitarians stayed with the issue of bird preservation right through the historic legislative benchmarks that culminated in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916. 

Audubon activists and animal protectionists alike treated the plumage issue as a problem of women's consumption. Anti-plumage work was an extraordinarily self-reflexive exercise for middle-class supporters of the humane movement, especially women, many of whom wore or had worn feather fashions themselves. Mary Lovell made women's culpability for millinery demand that harmed birds a principal focus of her work in the Department of Mercy of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Stage actors George Arliss and Minnie Maddern Fiske issued a public call for

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women to inform milliners "that they will withdraw their patronage from any establishment that permits the sale of aigrettes or other plumes barbarously obtained."\(^7\)

Eventually, the animal protection movement began to frame the fur trapping issue as a problem of demand. As in the plumage campaign, humane advocates directed their appeals to women. In most instances, they assumed, women had purchased furs without real knowledge about the suffering of the animals slaughtered to procure them. The movement could remedy this by disseminating information about trapping. Animal protectionists also believed that women were more likely to want to change.\(^8\)

Humanitarians usually emphasized that their objection was not to the death of animals but to the suffering they endured in the traps. For this reason, humane advocates generally endorsed fur farming as an alternative. The naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton was an active supporter of this approach. At a major animal protection conference in 1913, Seton described his own experiments with the raising of wild animals and their destruction through lethal gas. In time, prominent humanitarians like Caroline Earle White and Minnie Maddern Fiske expressed their support for fur farming as preferable to

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the cruelty of trapping. Gradually, however, advocates came to realize that fur farming was only relatively more humane than trapping. Both living conditions and the methods of killing employed on fur farms left much to be desired. Among other things, the desire to kill while preserving the skin intact frequently led workers to use their feet to crush the animals’ chest walls and stop their hearts.

In 1924, following a suggestion from Thomas Edison, the Chemical Warfare Service of the Army began to investigate the use of poison gas in conjunction with trapping, so that animals would be killed almost instantaneously. Edison had already considered whether or not electricity could be used in a trapping device. He thought that impossible, but believed that a trap whose mechanism broke a canister of death gas was an excellent alternative.

Humanitarians also paid close attention to the search for a “painless” trap. For a time in the 1920s, the ASPCA had a standing offer of prize money for a humane device, but its expert reviewers rejected the several hundred designs submitted as unsuitable on practical or humane grounds. Dr. Vernon Bailey’s wire mesh trap, which he used to capture beavers in his work for the United States Biological Survey, attracted positive

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10 Mary F. Lovell, “What Fur Trapping Is,” Starry Cross 34 (Jan. 1925), 8-9; and idem, “The Fur Trade,” Starry Cross 34 (May 1925), 70. Post-World War II advocates were more sensitive to the extreme suffering on fur farms and would not advance ranching as an alternative.

11 Edison’s Suggestion to Use Poison Gas in Trapping Animals Taken Up by Army,” N. Y. Times, 23 Nov. 1923, 1.
attention. So did a refined version of the old time “box trap,” which the Biological Survey also employed.\(^\text{12}\)

The option of not wearing fur at all had its proponents too. The Millenium Guild not only condemned the wearing of fur but pioneered in the exhibition of cruelty-free fabrics as substitutes. This sparked a healthy debate in a movement where not all adherents had abandoned the real thing. In 1916, Emmarel Freshel put on a fake fur fashion show at an international conference. In 1923, a display at the AHA convention featured the simulated lamb, caracal, and Hudson seal fabrics of one textile firm. In 1930, American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS) president Robert Logan, in his capacity as a coordinator of the Animal Welfare Department of the Theosophical Order of Service, launched a mail campaign promoting the use of alternative fabrics.\(^\text{13}\)

The campaign to abolish the steel jaw leghold trap gained its best advocate in Edward Breck (1861-1929), scholar, journalist, naval intelligence officer, and outdoorsman. In 1909, after a stay in Nova Scotia that gave him an opportunity to study the practices of trappers there, he had a dramatic change of heart. In The Way of the


Woods (1909), Breck expressed his conviction that in the continued use of traps, "utility has ... triumphed over humanity."14

From 1910 on, Breck campaigned with powerful first-hand testimony about the cruelties of trapping. He also began to stage "fabric fur" exhibitions, featuring coats made from silk, mohair, or wool. Breck pulled no punches in his public presentations. On one occasion in early 1925, his description of the pain and suffering that animals suffered in traps provoked a number of fur-clad women to leave a lecture sponsored by a Washington humane organization. He even set up displays at sportsmen's shows, where he engaged passers-by in debate over the ethics of trapping.15

In 1925, Breck founded the Anti-Steel Trap League (ASTL), which published literature on fur and trapping, and offered prizes for humane traps.16 It was one of the first single-issue focus organizations that the movement produced. The ASTL secured a number of influential supporters, including Minnie Maddern Fiske, Governor Percival Baxter, and Mrs. Gifford Pinchot. The ASTL made special appeals to women, who now enjoyed the ballot, to support legislation at both the state and federal levels to prohibit the use of the steel leghold trap. In 1926, Fiske, the ASTL's most prominent and vocal

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public representative, led a letter-writing campaign asking Mrs. Calvin Coolidge to forego wearing a sumptuous fur bestowed upon her by American fur manufacturers.\(^{17}\)

The ASTL achieved two successes, first with the abolition of the steel leghold trap in South Carolina in 1928, and then with the 1929 referendum ballot victory outlawing its use in Massachusetts. However, farmers and trappers combined to overturn the Massachusetts measure the following year. Although Breck passed away soon afterward, his wife Mary carried on for a few more years with the support of Lucy Furman, Mrs. John B. Henderson, and others, sponsoring dozens of anti-trapping measures at the state level.\(^ {18}\)

There were important links between Mary Breck, Lucy Furman, and Rosalie Edge, whose Emergency Conservation Committee (1929) launched radical challenges to the policies of the National Audubon Society and the United States Biological Survey during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. When Edge launched her attack on the Audubon Society's scandalous indulgence of steel leghold trap use on its Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary in Louisiana, a large number of the protest letters she collected came on humane society letterhead or from self-identified humane advocates. Lucy Furman


introduced the October 30, 1934 resolution decrying the practice, and Breck's widow authored the pamphlet "Blood Money," which addressed the Rainey scandal.\textsuperscript{19}

The work of the Brecks and their associates thus helped to lay the groundwork for post-World War II campaigns on behalf of fur-bearing animals, and the ASTL was the direct progenitor of Defenders of Wildlife.\textsuperscript{20} In later years, the programs of humane groups working on wildlife issues would combine the ASTL’s characteristic concern for eliminating the painful suffering of animals with the Emergency Conservation Committee’s bitter skepticism about the ties between commercial interests (gun and sport hunting product firms) and pre-World War II wildlife conservation organizations.

Despite its efforts to end the suffering of wild animals in traps, the humane movement was not in the vanguard of efforts to reevaluate the status of predators, and even some of the most advanced animal advocates did not oppose the destruction of "noxious animals." In general, animal protectionists excluded both animals thought harmful to humans, and predators (who they sometimes judged by human standards of conduct) from moral consideration.\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{20} Bennett, "The First Defender," 423; and Dunlap, Saving American Wildlife, 132. Defenders of Wildlife has become defensive about its well-substantiated lineage.

\textsuperscript{21} On American perceptions of predators, including those characteristic of humane advocates, see Lisa Migbetto, Wild Animals and American Environmental Ethics (Tucson: Arizona State University Press, 1991), 75-93. The transformation of attitudes concerning predators and other "noxious" animals was a critical shift in the history of human-animal relations. However, the principal agents of change were wildlife conservation scientists and animal behaviorists who experienced and rejected the older paradigm of "shoot, poison and exterminate." While the humane movement did not lead the way in this shift, in the
Still, the fur campaign failed to achieve the same level of success as the initiative against plumage, perhaps because the fur trapping issue did not raise the plumage trade's specter of extinction. Instead, it involved the destruction of largely unappreciated animal species. Moreover, the revision in attitudes about predators and “trash” species had not yet developed sufficient momentum to influence thought and conduct in the arena of trapping. As a result, few Audubon activists, scientists, conservationists, and environmentalists joined the chorus, limiting advocacy for fur-bearing animals to an insufficiently influential segment of Americans, those animal protectionists disturbed by the intense suffering the trap imposed.

**Captive Animals in Entertainment**

The appeal to consumer conscience also undergirded humane advocates’ challenge to cruelty to animals in entertainment. In this case, they engaged an area of animal usage undergoing dramatic transformation as the vaudeville act gave way to the circus extravaganza, the Wild West Show, and the filmed performance. Here, too, the movement gained only qualified successes, for the trained animal industry could rely upon its profits, popularity, and powerful friends to secure its position. By the 1930s, however, continuing concerns about the abuse of animals in Hollywood led to the formation of a “watchdog” office, staffed by the AHA, which policed the studio backlots and other venues for evidence of cruelty. Moreover, as in the case of fur, activists’ work post-World War II era it quickly joined the parade of voices calling for a new ethic toward predators. See Dunlap, *Saving American Wildlife*, passim.
in the pre-World War II era foreshadowed the robust anti-performing animal abuse platforms of the post-1970 animal protection movement.

At the heart of entertainment cruelties lay the numerous devices and tricks that underpinned the training of animals, including whips, hidden wires, spiked collars and saddles, clubs, pistols, pitchforks, starvation, electric shock, and drugs. It was difficult to secure cruelty convictions because such practices normally occurred in secrecy. Beyond this, the animals used in entertainment often suffered cramped confinement in unsuitable quarters and shipping crates, as well as other hardships of transportation.

Anti-cruelty societies occasionally attempted to prosecute trainers and managers of stage shows or fairs where animals suffered abuse during training or in the course of the performance. In a few cases, the humane societies' policy of contact with theater managers apparently succeeded in the limitation or elimination of animal acts. In 1916, for example, the manager of the New Brighton Theater in New York State, after a series of confrontations with trainers over abuse and neglect, banned animal acts from the establishment.

The problem had already attracted considerable attention in England and Western Europe. On the continent, demand was high enough to support businesses that specialized in breaking and training animals. It was here, in the training facilities and in the barren cellars or backstage compartments where they were kept, rather than on stages

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22 "Trained Animals," ODA 7 (Apr. 1875), 84. For instance, in 1883, the Connecticut Humane Society (CHS) halted a scheme to parachute animals out of a balloon at a Fourth of July celebration; CHS, Ann. R. 1884, 28. In 1902, the CHS intervened against a stage show that electrified a lion's cage, to enrage the animal at appointed times in the performance; "Case No. 4243," CHS, Annual R. 1902, 65-66.

or in arenas, that animals suffered the most abuse. In 1897, a British journalist interviewed one theater manager who supported the abolition of animal shows. Unlike some colleagues, he was dubious about the possibility of training animals through kindness, observing, “Fifty years’ experience has taught me that they are attended with cruelty in varying degrees. I will not go into the question of training by kindness; it is possible in theory, and seldom or never apparent in practice.”

Discomfort over the use of animals in such performances created the kind of concern for humane advocates that the commercialization of children as performers caused. Animal protectionists objected not only to the physical pain and suffering the animals experienced, but also to these spectacles’ degrading influence upon the character of those who witnessed either training sessions or performances. This took on special urgency because so many acts were primarily pitched toward children, for whom, promoters claimed, they would provide valuable lessons in natural history. Performing animal cruelty also posed the threat of emulation that motivated so many humane campaigns.

Every now and then, humane societies were able to convince a judge or magistrate that performing animals were being treated cruelly. In 1913, an ASPCA board member reported that a court had stopped “the performance of a dog jumping forty feet into a net, and having to be pushed before leaping.” In 1915, the Camden, New Jersey,


SPCA gained custody of a "dodging monkey" used in a carnival act where pleasure-seekers paying a nickel could amuse themselves by throwing balls while the animal tried to avoid being hit.

The following year, in Philadelphia, the Women's Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (WPSPCA) found a true cause célébre in the case of Princess, a greyhound puppy starved to emaciation by a trainer. The man had been training animals to jump off of a thirty-foot ladder through the most shocking methods, forcing the starved creatures to mount the ladder in search of a small morsel of meat. The trainer would rope an animal round the neck and then let the dog ascend the ladder, only to yank the rope once the food had been devoured. The dogs, pulled by their feet from the ladder, landed in a net strung across the ground. The man had planned to stage a dramatic fire scene, clothing the animals in firemen's garb.

A Philadelphia magistrate fined the trainer after WPSPCA agents went to the man's home and found evidence of his neglect and abuse. The humane society was helpless when the man demanded the return of his property, however, and all of the confiscated dogs were given back, except for one, Princess, who one of the WPSPCA vice presidents made arrangements to purchase. Some days later, agents discovered the same conditions affecting the dogs at the man's home. Although humanitarians acting


independently purchased all of the animals whose suffering had come to light in the newspaper, the man could not be barred from owning and training animals.

Once in a while, an animal trainer might confess mistreatment in a moment of apostasy, or frankly concede that cruelty did occur. Thus, Frank Spellman, a bear trainer, confirmed the use of tough methods as well as his disdain for kind instruction in a newspaper interview. Spellman admitted, “In spite of the tall tales that are told about various kinds of animals being trained by kindness . . . [there] was never one in history trained for public exhibitions that was not at the early stage of its education beaten into submission.” Spellman thought that even Jim Key, the sagacious horse that humanitarians celebrated, got beaten “when he fails to do his act as it should be done.”

On some occasions, a local SPCA might be able to confiscate animals or fine a trainer when there was significant evidence of neglect. Sometimes, a charge of cruelty could be successfully brought in one locality when it could not be sustained in another. In other instances, like that of the organ grinder monkey, a humane society might be able to persuade a judge to order the act off of the streets as a public nuisance. Every now and then, an organization could arrest and prosecute trainers who killed their animals in fits of pique or spite, just as it would an ordinary citizen.29 Finally, the killing of an animal trainer sometimes allowed commentators to make the case that a civilized society should

28 Spellman’s interview with the Kalamazoo Evening Telegraph, 28 Nov. 1906, is reproduced in JOZ 16 (Jan. 1907), 5-6. Anna Harris Smith suspected the same of Jim Key’s training and general discipline. See “Which is Worse,” Our Fourfooted Friends (hereafter OFF) 5 (Jan. 1907), 9.

not keep animals in captivity for amusement. Making just this point, Charlotte Perkins Gilman noted, “To die nobly is to be admired; to die usefully is a worthy thing; to die because you can’t help it is at least blameless, but to die doing something unnecessary, inutile, and ignoble seems a pity.”

The campaign against cruelty to animals in entertainment gained support from graphic fictional narratives that revealed the dark side of the trade, like the one Marshall Saunders presented in The Wandering Dog. However, the greatest literary impetus for progress came with the posthumous publication of Jack London’s Michael Brother of Jerry. The book centered on the appalling cruelties suffered by its canine protagonist and other animal performers. London’s preface was a stinging criticism of the use of animals in circus and entertainment acts. He especially deplored the breaking of wild animals and the denial of their true nature by such spectacles.

With the permission of his widow Charmian, the American Humane Education Society (AHES) attached London’s name to a club movement that called for a boycott of performing animal spectacles, just as he had recommended in the book’s preface. The

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32 Jack London, Michael, Brother of Jerry (New York: MacMillan Co., 1917), v-viii. Opposition to the use of animals in entertainment was one of the many causes London espoused. In a short story, “The Madness of John Harned,” London condemned bullfighting. Animal welfare values were not the sole motive force behind his writing, however. London’s use of animals as subjects involved a complex, confused, and distinctive anthropomorphism tied to his belief in Spencerian and Darwinian codes concerning the survival of the fittest. For analysis of London’s views, see Marian Scholtmeijer, Animal Victims in Modern Fiction (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 100-7, and Mighetto, Wild Animals and Environmental Ethics, 68-69.
result was an organizational initiative similar to the Bands of Mercy. In this instance, young people pledged themselves to avoid all staged animal acts. The AHES/MSPCA stoked the campaign by publishing a monthly report on entertainment cruelties. Every issue of Our Dumb Animals contained a page or two devoted to exposés, exhortations, and expiatory recantations by those who had participated in the trade.33

Beyond the actual training and performance, humanitarians also objected to the lives that animals led offstage. Performing animals spent most of their lives confined in small cages, transported from place to place, and altogether deprived of their freedom and most basic biological and psychological needs. In the case of wild animals, humane advocates emphasized that they had also suffered the terror and hardship of capture and transport from their natural environments.34

The campaign got a big boost from celebrity support. Dancer Irene Castle, who would go on to a lifetime of service to animals, issued a public letter in support of the Jack London Clubs in which she recounted her personal observations of neglect and abuse in entertainment. Stage actor George Arliss, famous for his film portrayal of Disraeli and a staunch supporter of animal causes, took a strong public stand too. Albert Payson Terhune, a best-selling author of canine literature, underscored for youthful readers of The American Boy that every trick performed by stage dogs was learned through torture, and that every dog in a trained animal act represented five others starved,


34 “How Performing Animals Travel and Live,” JOZ 24 (Nov. 1915), 107; and Sydney H. Coleman, “Training Wild Animals.” NHR 19 (July 1931), 18. While providing advanced veterinary treatment for a performing leopard, the MSPCA took advantage of the opportunity to publish a photograph depicting the grossly inadequate box in which the animal spent most of his life. See “The Leopard’s Cage,” ODA 52 (Dec. 1919), 101.
beaten, or otherwise mistreated. Governor Percival Baxter of Maine also deplored trained animal acts and cruelty to animals in the cinema. Moreover, in 1923, Baxter released his letter to the authorities of Lowell, Massachusetts, denying assistance to them in their efforts to secure two bear cubs from the state of Maine for the city’s zoo.\(^{35}\)

Surveying the impact of the Jack London Clubs, one humane society leader thought it possible that the United States might one day eliminate “trick animals” altogether. A parallel movement was underway in England, where the Performing Animals Cruelty Act passed in 1925 in the wake of two parliamentary investigations, after being defeated in 1921. The 1925 law required licensures of all animal acts, and provided for revocation and financial penalties in the event of proven cruelty. The law—which applied to animals trained for stage, circus, and film performances—permitted courts to prohibit any training or intended performance likely to be accompanied by cruelty.\(^{36}\)

The circus, though never the subject of sustained campaigns, nevertheless disturbed animal advocates, who did what they could to discourage citizens from


attending the Big Top. In the early years of the twentieth century, the Los Angeles SPCA, among others, successfully prosecuted Ringling Brothers and several other traveling shows for cruelty to animals. In England, too, activity against the circus seemed to have diminished its popularity. In 1919, a North Carolina humane society took a less direct approach, successfully prosecuting a circus for cruelty to the many horse and mule teams who carried the troupe from town to town.

The campaign the MSPCA built around Michael Brother of Jerry had an impressive if temporary effect. Sentiment about the mistreatment of performing animals gained enough momentum in the 1920s that the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus canceled its large animal acts during the second half of that decade. Billboard assigned credit for this decision to the opposition generated by the Jack London Clubs.

At times, animal protectionists' critiques of circuses went beyond concerns over cruelty in training, the forced performance of unnatural feats, the conditions under which circus animals lived and traveled, and the demoralization of the spectator. They demonstrated genuine respect for the rights of individual animals. The fundamental injustice of an animal's use for entertainment was not the treatment that animal experienced but the incarceration itself. "Why should one living creature be robbed of


38 AHA, Ann. R. 1911, 15-16; Caroline Earle White, "Performing Animals," JOZ 23 (June 1914), 83-84; and "The Pitiful Story of the Performing Animal," NHR 2 (Sept. 1914), 211.

39 "Look Out for Traveling Circuses," NHR 7 (Dec. 1919), 239.

his rights that others might enjoy his fate?” asked Nina Halvey. “If the trainer burned his
whips tomorrow and threw away his iron tongs and yet kept beasts for commercial
exploitation, the moral issue is unanswerable.”

Occasionally, animal protectionists and others expressed their disapproval of the
zoo. The zoo was a “‘beast prison,”’ Charlotte Perkins Gilman charged, “a coarse cruelty
[we] should struggle to outgrow.” Conditions at the Central Park menagerie in New
York City drew the condemnation of many sensitive people. Humane advocates
underscored the cruelties of trapping and procurement, the boredom and monotony that
characterized the lives of many zoo animals, the thoughtless cruelty of the visiting public,
and other defects typical of even the largest and best American zoos of the time. As for
the “roadside” zoo, its horrors were almost unspeakable. Animal advocates also tried to combat the growing popularity of Wild West
shows, frontier day exhibitions, rodeos, and bullfights. Quite apart from the overt
brutality of such spectacles, animal protectionists charged, they depended on many
behind-the-scenes cruelties in training and preparation. Minnie Maddern Fiske and the

41 William D. Bishop, “How Circus Animals Spend Their Winters,” NHR 3 (Apr. 1915), 80;
“Circus Animals Cramped,” NHR 8 (Sept. 1920), 171; and Nina Halvey, “A Plea for the Circus Beast,”
Starry Cross 32 (May 1923), 72-73.

42 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Beast Prison,” Forerunner 3 (May 1912), 128; Brandon
Fellow Creatures 8 (Sept. 1900), 269-70; Anna H. Smith, “The Case Against the Zoo,” Boston Transcript,
repr. in JOZ 14 (May 1905), 52-53; AHA, Ann R. 1906, 48-51; “Captives of the Zoo,” OFF 8 (July 1909),
11; “Facts from Zoos,” OFF 9 (June 1910), 2-3; Francis H. Rowley, “Beasts and Men,” ODA 43 (January
1911), 120; “The Zoo—The Animals’ Jail,” NHR 2 (Mar. 1914), 63; L. E. Eubanks, “Captive Animals and
the Public,” ODA 53 (September 1920), 64; Mrs. Morris K. Vandegrift, “A Moral Assessment of the
Benefits and Damages Arising to Humankind from Keeping Wild Animals in Captivity,” NHR 9 (May

1914), 259; Sydney H. Coleman, “Regulating Frontier Day Sports,” NHR 3 (Sept. 1915), 197-98; “Are
ASPCA mobilized to stop a planned bullfight in New York in late 1921. Among the many protests against rodeo was one by Philadelphia advocates, who deplored the inclusion of one such event as part of the nation’s Sesquicentennial Fair in 1926.44

In the early years of moviemaking, some humanitarians believed that the use of animals in cinema represented a major improvement over the hated vaudeville tradition of animal acts. However, time would soon demonstrate the roseate character of this assessment, as new cruelties emerged with the spread of animal use in the new medium. The policing and prosecution of animal abuse in Hollywood came to occupy a large part of the Los Angeles SPCA’s work. The problem regularly surfaced as a topic of discussion in the AHA’s journal. Under William Stillman’s leadership, the AHA supported the call for censorship, by state or federal authorities, to suppress cruel scenes.45 Not all agreed that censorship was the solution, however, and some emphasized the critical importance of patrons’ opinions. Many followed Jack London’s in Michael Brother of Jerry, and recommended that parents take their children out of the theaters.


when confronted by cruelty on screen, and notify the management of their reasons for doing so.\textsuperscript{46}

In the opinion of humane workers, both stage and cinematic cruelty raised the problem of imitation by impressionable children. Animal and child protection advocates agreed with other reformers that lurid, thrilling, or provocative performances and moving pictures were the seedbed for juvenile delinquency. A Boston boy once stole two baby lions from the Bostock Animal Circus after watching a performance, and confined the two animals in a shed where he tried to teach them tricks. One lion died of starvation before the youth’s parents found him out. On other occasions, the fear of such an occurrence led animal protectionists to move against some productions, as in 1922, when the MSPCA criticized Boy Scout Commissioner Daniel Carter Beard for endorsing “Bill and Bob,” a film that showed two boys in scout-like uniforms trapping a bobcat.\textsuperscript{47}

Quite often, the animal protection community directly contacted the film companies or the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, seeking to discourage such scenes. In 1916, the National Board of Review issued a circular to producers and directors admonishing them to observe a higher standard of concern for animals. This admonition underscored the fact that apparent cruelty to animals had generated severe


\textsuperscript{47} “Humane Education,” OFF 5 (Nov. 1906), 5; “Lurid Movies Plant Crime Germ in Child Mind,” NHR 8 (May 1920), 89; and “The Boy Scouts and a Bad Film,” ODA 54 (Feb. 1922), 138. Chief Scout James E. West assured Rowley that Beard had withdrawn his letter.
criticism and sometimes resulted in the suppression of certain films in the national market.  

Humanitarians sometimes attempted to prosecute those responsible for particular movies portraying cruelty to animals. In 1916, the ASPCA brought charges under the New York State anti-cruelty statute against the Fox Film Company and a number of individuals involved in one film—the rider, the veterinarian, the writer, the director, and a stage carpenter—for an incident in which a horse was forced to jump into a chasm from a height of forty feet. Each defendant was fined $25.  

For a numbers of years, advocates wrote letters to distributors and theater managers to decry objectionable films. Finally, they moved to address the problem more directly. In early 1924, a coalition of animal organizations sent representatives to meet with Will Hays of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) to discuss the elimination of cruelty in the movies. Hays expressed his support for the establishment of an agency to observe and oversee the treatment of animals in the studios and on location. Further agitation on the question resulted in an investigation by the Christian Science Monitor, which in 1924 made extensive inquiries about cruelty in film production. Producers and others associated with the industry adamantly denied any misuse or abuse of animals, and speculated that some humanitarians had been fooled by the use of

48 "Censoring Motion Pictures," ODA 49 (June 1916), 8; and "Producing Directors of Motion Pictures Warned Against Cruelty," ODA 49 (July 1916), 24.  

dummies and cutaway shots. Trainers emphasized their reliance on kind methods of training.  

But California activists disagreed, on the basis of their ongoing engagement with the issue. While not on location, they claimed, the animals were badly neglected by ignorant keepers. On the set, they were drugged, beaten with whips, pounded with clubs, and strung on wires to pace their movements. Activists charged that hundreds of animals had been killed in films depicting westward migration, battle, and other grand scenes.

The Monitor asked Percival Baxter, retired Governor of Maine, Francis Rowley, and Rufus Steele to form a committee to investigate the charge that animals were treated cruelly in the cinema. They hired an investigator to survey the uses of animals in Hollywood. However, he soon lost the confidence of animal advocates, by insisting on a rigorous standard of evidence that alienated some potential witnesses, and excluding instances of cruelty that had not been proven in court. He also accepted the classification of many animal deaths as "accidents," although Los Angeles area critics of the industry generally viewed such morbidity as the direct result of "wanton disregard of the welfare of animals."

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The final committee report concluded that cruelty to animals in film production was common and countenanced in the industry. The Monitor committee recommended the elimination of all scenes where dumb creatures are coerced to perform unnatural and dangerous acts, whether actual cruelties are practiced upon, or foolish stunts are required of, the animal performers. Bull fights, rodeos, diving horses, stampedes of herds of cattle, animals performing dressed as humans, and similar acts degrade the public taste and cause pain to the harmless creatures employed.\textsuperscript{53}

The committee commented further that the filming of scenes in which cruelty to animals is suggested and where dummies are employed also is condemned by us. Although in such cases living animals are not maltreated, deception is practiced upon audiences who are led to believe that living creatures actually are involved in the acts portrayed. The effect of such “faked” pictures is to excite cruelty, and dull their senses both the rights of dumb creatures and to man’s duty to be kind and merciful toward them.\textsuperscript{54}

Humanitarians continued to make charges of cruelty to animals in the cinema in subsequent years, and maintained a steady correspondence with Hays’s office.\textsuperscript{55}

As Hays had told animal protectionists in 1924, many incidents of apparent cruelty could be represented through “trick photography.” In addition, by the 1930s, Hollywood had begun to use fake animals in some instances in an effort to avoid expense, inconvenience, and cruelty. However, reliance on live animals continued, as Hollywood producers quickly came to appreciate the thrills that the sight of wild animals generated for their audiences. After a period of hiring animals from circuses or

\textsuperscript{53} “Inquiry into Use of Animals in Motion Picture Production Completed by Investigators,” \textit{Christian Science Monitor}, 18 June 1925, 1.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

menageries, several Californian entrepreneurs established their own collections or wild animal farms, assembling a great variety of species.\(^5^6\)

Serious problems of performing animal abuse continued unabated until the late 1930s, when scandal surrounding the production of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1936) and "Jesse James" (1939) forced another wave of reform through the industry. Over time, preoccupation with Hollywood's influence led to the establishment of an AHA office specifically charged to deal with the issue of cruelty in the movies. That office helped to secure a few gains in the industry, eliminating the use of the "Running W," or trip wire, and the "pit fall," two techniques that claimed numerous equine victims as the cowboy western became an American staple. In 1940, the office secured an agreement with the MPAA that gave the AHA authority to visit all studio sets and locations where animals were being used, and made its representative the arbiter of all matters connected with the use of animals.\(^5^7\)

During the period of this study, the steady popularity of zoos, circuses, movies, and stage acts featuring animals insulated them against many of the criticisms that animal protectionists leveled. Public knowledge and credulity concerning abuse in these industries did not expand to sufficient proportions to spur substantial change or reform. Significant progress in identifying and resolving the cruelties inherent in these areas of animal use, as in so many others, would not come until the post-World War II era.


Conclusion

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Harvard scientist Nathaniel Shaler expressed his view that the example of the SPCAs might usefully be extended to a protective effort for wild species.\(^{58}\) Even as Shaler wrote, such an expansion of the humane movement's ideology and its scope of activity was underway. Increasingly, humane advocates did begin to extend their concern for suffering to wildlife, and to argue that wild animals were deserving of greater moral consideration. The movement's campaigns against fur and animal abuse in entertainment reflected not just its developing philosophy about wildlife issues, but also the complex interplay between humane and consumption-oriented value systems in the early to mid-twentieth century.

Animal protectionists went beyond what their peers in Audubon circles had envisioned, joining the question of wearing fur to the plumage issue, and extending the boycott principle from one campaign to the other. However, the campaign against fur did not achieve the dramatic successes of the plumage crusade. Try as they might, advocates could not persuade sufficient numbers of Americans that fur was as frivolous as feather fashion. Nor could they generate commensurate concern for the unappreciated and non-endangered species who most frequently died in leghold traps as others had been able to do in making the case against the plumage trade.

Anti-trapping and anti-fur campaigners did make some important inroads, however. Early in the twentieth century, they began to investigate and to expose the routine cruelties of trapping. They emphasized its brutalization of youth in response to

\(^{58}\) Nathaniel S. Shaler, Domesticated Animals: Their Relation to Man and To His Advancement in Civilization (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 216.
advertisements that encouraged boys to take up trapping as a moneymaking sideline. For a time, they supported fur farming as a lesser evil. In addition, animal protectionists became significant promoters of alternatives to trapped fur, staging “Humanifur” fashion shows and contests for less painful traps. Anti-leghold trap referenda and related initiatives became important hallmarks of their campaign and outreach work. They challenged the shockingly inhumane policies of conservation organizations supposedly devoted to the interests of wildlife.

Humane advocates also questioned the ethics of training and using animals for captive performance. Their opposition did not hinge merely upon the pain, suffering, and neglect that confinement, training, performance, and transportation inflicted upon the animals. Like the fur issue, the use of animals in entertainment reflected the movement’s developing philosophy about wildlife, and the concrete extension of its efforts to incorporate the interests of wild animals into the humane agenda. In addition, it signaled animal protectionists’ increased understanding of man as an ecologically dominant force whose attitude and behavior toward non-human nature merited greater moral scrutiny. Finally, their critique underscored the unnatural and demeaning terms of existence that the entertainment industry imposed upon captive animals.

On occasion, humane advocates tried to apply their enforcement authority to intervene against cruel usage and neglect. However, the movement gained its greatest momentum around this issue by harnessing Jack London’s powerful exposé of the animal training underworld to a massive publicity campaign involving celebrity opposition to the trade and investigative work that sparked newspaper coverage throughout the nation.
Curbing the abuse of animals in entertainment proved a difficult challenge, as the commercialization of leisure and the advent of cinema transformed the issue just as the movement began to address it in earnest. Ultimately, the formidable tasks of documenting and punishing cruelty—and the sheer popularity of such spectacles—limited the potential for progress. The movement did not succeed in leading the public to heightened skepticism and scrutiny about abuses in entertainment, or to an enduring awareness of the cruelties that occurred offstage and behind the scenes.

Despite the limited gains that animal protectionists made in addressing fur and entertainment cruelties, both issues represented the working out of the humane movement's philosophy of concern for wildlife. In their approach to these issues, animal protectionists unmistakably diverged from the conventional utilitarianism of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century conservation organizations, presenting a moral perspective on the treatment of wildlife with few precedents, and helping to build a climate of greater empathy with non-human nature.