

Chapter 3. KILLING ANIMALS

Human beings aren't innately against killing. Those belonging to societies where hunting provides essential food or a livelihood certainly are not, nor are children who are often too young to realize the implications of what they are doing. Agnes Smedley (1973, 84) recalls at the age of four stamping a kitten to death on the road "because it was strange and I pretended it was dangerous." I have seen a child squeeze the life out of a hamster, although from ignorance rather than malevolence.

The trend among many outdoor people is for them when young to kill animals, not because they are annoyed or angry with them but because their lives don't matter very much. However, sometimes later on they tire of killing and turn to conservation of animals instead. Rarely if ever does the reverse happen-- young people purposefully conserving animals, then when they are older deciding instead to kill them for sport.

Because of this trend toward compassion, there must be a change during their lives in the way that individuals regard animals. One way seems to be to gain information about creatures that are hated, and thus that one might kill; biologist Desmond Morris conducted an experiment that illustrates this possibility (1980, 246-7). While he was Curator of Mammals at the London Zoo he announced on his television program that he would carry out a survey of what animals children in Britain most loved and most hated. After many thousands of children had written to the Zoo about their choices, the staff compiled a list of the ten most liked and ten least liked species. Only one of the animals was on the lists of both "top ten" loves and "top ten" hates, and that was the lion. About half the children considered this beast the proud king of the jungle, while the other half considered it a nasty, savage killer.

At this time, Joy Adamson's book *Born Free* (1960) was just being published. It was an immediate success and would eventually sell five million copies world-wide, describing as it did the friendship that grew up between Adamson and Elsa, the orphaned lion cub she raised. The illustrations showed Elsa sprawled on the author's camp cot, draped over her husband George and riding contentedly on the roof of their Land Rover. People who knew about Elsa began to see lions as friendly rather than ruthless killers. This book also inspired Iain Douglas-Hamilton (1993, 393), who has devoted his life to studying and protecting elephants in Africa, to become a zoologist.

Nearly two years later, Morris' television program was rerun, including an announcement of the survey which caught everyone at the zoo unaware because they had forgotten about it. Again, to the initial astonishment of the staff, postcards flooded into the zoo, for a total of 30,000. The staff, who made a second major analysis of the children's loves and hates in the animal world, found that there was only one significant shift-- the lion was now more loved and less hated. "Joy Adamson's promotion campaign on behalf of the lion had worked. She had achieved the difficult goal of not merely providing a passing entertainment but of actually shifting public feelings toward an animal species," Morris wrote.

Elsa and the books about her and her cubs had done more than sweeten the lion's image, though. They had made people question the morality of keeping animals in zoos and circuses for human entertainment. The bars that separated people from animals began to seem less like protection for human beings and more like prisons for

animals. This sentiment has continued to grow up to the present, fuelled by superb nature films on television which portray animals in their native habitat. Perceptions of Elsa the lion give an example of incremental changes making a difference in how people think, but of course are not the subject of this book.

A number of samples of Big Jolts show that they have stopped various people from hunting. Most of the Big Jolts are visceral-- people experiencing some highly traumatic incident in which they suddenly realize what a terrible difference there is between a vibrant living creature and a limp corpse. Each incident made a major difference in their lives, turning them from being killers of, or indifferent to, animals, into people who so want to conserve them that they devote most of the rest of their lives to their betterment.

Perhaps the most horrible realization occurred to **Farley Mowat** (b1921) who was early taught by his father to be a hunter (Mowat, 1990, 14-15). At first he shot "vermin" on the prairies-- sparrows, gophers, crows and hawks, and then "game"-- prairie chicken, ruffed grouse and ducks. When he was 14, he accompanied his father before dawn one November day to a prairie slough where they would hunt wildfowl. They were awestruck when 100 whistling swans passed directly over them heading south through blowing snow. There followed large flocks of snow geese flying low, and then Canada geese in an immense "V" formation. The men leapt up and fired, wounding one bird which fell to the water a 100 yards from shore. **Although wounded, it tried to swim after the other geese, calling out to them with outstretched neck.** Mowat felt sick with dismay when he realized what they had done.

On the drive back to Saskatoon he experienced "a poignant but indefinable sense of loss. I felt, although I could not then have expressed it in words, as if I had glimpsed another and quite magical world-- a world of Oneness-- and had been denied entry into it through my own stupidity. I never hunted for sport again." Mowat would go on to become one of the world's best-known chroniclers of animal stories. He made readers love animals through his tales and want to preserve them because of his research and descriptions of past slaughter.

R.D. Lawrence (1921-2003), about the same age as Mowat, had a similar Big Jolt as Mowat but one evoked by a shark rather than a wild goose. Lawrence grew up in Europe, fought in the Spanish Civil War when he was 14, and then in World War II. He became injured to death because he had seen so much of it. In 1942, after being wounded in action, he took a leave to study and kill sharks in the Red Sea (Lawrence, 1985, 56-8). While trolling on a Jordanian fishing boat he caught a tiger shark which, after a long struggle, he pulled aboard and then killed by hitting it on the head. He writes: "After my volunteer helpers joined me in pulling up the catch, I regretted my action.... I found myself admiring the shark and marvelling at its enormous strength. For the very first time in my adult life I questioned my right to kill an animal so wantonly, feeling that by doing so **I had made ugly a being that in its own world reflected the beauty and creativity of nature....** The sea and the panorama of desert and mountain, the blazing African sun and the dead selachian combined to deepen my feelings of guilt, but I couldn't understand why I should so suddenly become upset because I had

killed a shark. This caused me to become angry at myself and I sought to rationalize my action on the grounds that selachians are dangerous animals and, as I believed at the time, were devoid of feelings. But try as I might, I could not contemplate the dead tiger shark without experiencing regret."

From this incident, Lawrence began his evolution toward becoming a scientist and ecologist. The shark became for him not a vicious killer, but a creature of purposeful beauty and integrity. The final encounter described in his book *The Shark* involves himself in an underwater metal cage watching the behavior of the sharks which swim around him, not harmed in any way. Lawrence has gone on to write many other books on animals and their behavior which have delighted thousands.

Chet Raymo's (b1936) Big Jolt came when he was a boy growing up in Tennessee (Raymo, 1991, 97). He borrowed his uncle's .22 rifle and with his first shot, brought down a gray squirrel from the branches of a pin oak tree. **"The squirrel lay on the ground at my feet, convulsed with pain, its belly pierced by a neat red hole.** I watched, paralyzed by the enormity of what I had done, until one of my friends dispatched the animal with a single crushing blow of his rifle butt. The sight of the suffering squirrel, and then of its broken cadaver, moved me deeply. Never since that day have I gratuitously injured another living thing." After this horrifying experience he studied the natural world from a very broad perspective, going on to become a professor of physics and astronomy who spends much of his time writing popular science books which explore the wonders of nature.

Julian Huxley's (1887-1975) Big Jolt came when he was 17 (Huxley, 1970, 58). Huxley actually loved animals as he was growing up, watching the behavior of birds, collecting some but not all eggs in a nest, reading books about nature and keeping nature notes, but like many well-to-do young men of his time he was also familiar with a rifle. When he went in 1904 to Scotland, he was allowed to go deer-stalking, crawling along on his stomach to approach within shot of a stag which he found very exciting. He killed one, **"but the sight of the lovely antlered creature falling to my rifle made me disgusted with myself, and I vowed never again to kill a large mammal** (and I never have, except once in Kenya, when I shot a Tommy gazelle for supper)." Huxley became a world-famous biologist who researched the behavior of animals but tried not to kill them during his long life.

John Muir (1838-1914) was not a hunter from a young age as many men were, but rather tended toward conservation. He strongly supported the establishment of American national parks and in 1892 founded the Sierra Club. He once referred to fishing as "seeking pleasure in the pain of fishes struggling for their lives..." (Weiss, 1993, 125). His Big Jolt came not from a surfeit of killing animals ending with a final traumatic death, but with killing at all. Initially he found rattlesnakes so dangerous and repellant that he thought they should be destroyed wherever found (Heffernan, 1993, 108-9). When walking in the San Joaquin Valley, **he killed a coiled rattlesnake by stamping on it with his boot, but he felt "degraded by the killing business"** so he

resolved in future only to kill in self-defense. The only other snake he killed was one living in his cabin that he thought might be a danger to others, especially children. From then on he no longer killed snakes. He came to see that all creatures have their place on earth, a primary biological concept. He became world famous as a conservationist of nature.

Grey Owl (1888-1938) and his wife Anahareo (1906-1986), an Iroquois woman, gave up killing animals some time after they settled down together (Anahareo, 1972). Grey Owl had come to Canada when 17, then moved to northern Ontario where Ojibwas taught him to trap, hunt and poison animals for their fur and meat; for many years he made his living by these skills. After their marriage, Grey Owl and Anahareo lived in the bush where there was no way of making money other than by trapping. Anahareo disliked killing animals, but did so for lack of an option. It was too much for her, though, when she trapped a lynx by one foot, then did not return to fetch it for ten days. **In its struggle to free itself the lynx had stripped the bark from all the trees and bushes within its reach, and gnawed the flesh from its injured paw.** It ate snow to stay alive. Anahareo was so remorseful at the animal's condition that she vowed never again to trap.

Sometimes killers give up their hunting or trapping when they come to really know animals which they have previously seen only as commodities. Grey Owl was like this. Although Anahareo refused to trap animals, Grey Owl continued to do so, at the end of one spring hunt drowning a mother beaver who left behind two kittens. Anahareo decided to raise these young by hand, although she was worried that Grey Owl would insist on selling them to pay off their debts after they had paddled to the nearest town.

At first, Grey Owl was annoyed with the two kittens who escaped from the pens he built them and made a fearful racket biting and clawing the metal stove which served as their home when they were in the canoe. One morning the couple were woken by the rambunctious beaver kits whom Anahareo then fed while Grey Owl returned to his bedroll. No sooner was he settled, than one of the beavers waddled over, propped himself against the bedroll, and combed his fur smooth. **Then the kit poked his cold wet nose in Grey Owl's face and nibbled his eyebrows. Finally, with a sigh, the beaver climbed onto Grey Owl's chest and fell asleep.** Grey Owl was so amazed that Anahareo began to hope the beavers had won his heart.

Sure enough, they had. When the couple reached town, Grey Owl decided not to sell the animals, but to form a society to conserve the species. It was the beginning of an entirely new direction for them both, although Grey Owl would continue to trap to some extent to fund his beaver projects. The rest of their lives would be largely devoted to preserving animals, not killing them. Eventually, they became caretakers of the Prince Albert National Park in Saskatchewan.

Some people change their behavior toward animals after a Big Jolt occasioned not by some inner sense of guilt from killing them, but from watching them and realizing how wonderful and deserving of protection wild animals are, just as Grey Owl had done with his beaver kits. **Brian Davies** and **Stephen Best** were two such men, both of whom

were involved with the Canadian seal hunt (Mowat, 1990, 148). Davies (b 1935) grew up in Wales where he spent a great deal of time in the woods, enjoying a closeness with animals and nature. He immigrated to Canada because of its magnificent environment where he began to work with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), first as a volunteer and then as its director. In 1964, when the international outcry against the St Lawrence seal hunt began, he was chosen as a representative of the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies to be a witness at the 1965 hunt. He didn't know anything about seals, but he did live in the Maritimes.

Davies found the seal hunt devastating. He arrived in time to see harp seals adults being shot in the water with rifles as they came up to breathe; over half the animals sank without their bodies or fur being recovered by the sealers. One seal was hit with 17 small-calibre bullets, but still escaped to suffer and die later. **The blood had fat in it, so rose to the surface of the water where it froze. As he walked along ice floes he could see the red blood slush covering the open water cracks between the ice.** Davies found the beauty of the ice and the horror of the slaughter such a profoundly moving experience that when he returned to land he determined that he would devote his life to stopping the seal hunt. He has done that, in part as head of the International Fund for Animal Welfare which helps seals and other animals as well to survive.

Stephen Best (b1948) witnessed the seal hunt in eastern Canada a few years later. He was born in Victoria and brought up in North Vancouver where he and his friends used BB guns to shoot birds and small animals: "Something went by, and you would try to kill it. The idea of having any respect for wildlife was just not in the cards at all."

As an adult, Best went into film production, learning how to shoot, edit and produce films. In 1972 he was hired by Brian Davies of the International Fund for Animal Welfare to make a film of harp seals, not because of his interest in animals-- he hadn't known there was a seal hunt-- but because he was cheap to hire.

At first while camping on the ice in the Gulf of St Lawrence, Best spent his time rushing around trying to photograph the live seals-- he was used to being the centre of action in the film world and of controlling what went on around him. After a week, exhausted, he instead sat down in a bundle of warm clothing at the edge of a blow-hole to see what would happen. "Pretty soon the seals began to come up and look at me; inspect me; do water dances in front of me; and play games, like trying to get me wet," he said in an interview. "It was really clear after a few days that they were dog-like in terms of sociability and trust of people. **One insisted on going into my little tent and I had to shoo her away. The pups would come up to me and want to be nursed. They were an absolute delight.**"

As well, Best found the environment enchanting-- fabulous sunsets, the shifting aurora, water of molten gold with the seals' heads popping up in it. He realized that the seals' world was the real one; by contrast, his life in television and film production was artificial and ephemeral.

Best's conversion on the ice to protector of wildlife was almost instantaneous. "All of a sudden everything opened up. It was the sense of oneness-- a sense of being

a part. It then became an absolute joy filming these animals and being part of it. I stopped thinking of them as just animals I could get some shots of, and it was as if a rapport started to develop.... Maybe the highest compliment you get from animals is when they ignore you and totally go about their business."

The following week, Best flew to a sealing ship to document on film the killing of seals for their fur. He was appalled at what he saw. He knew immediately that what the sealers were doing was wrong. And he has worked since for wildlife in the International Wildlife Coalition.

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence (1894-1992) experienced a Jolt that was to turn her from a selective lover of animals to one who appreciated all of nature (Lawrence, 1968, 52-3). An ardent bird watcher, Lawrence kept an active feeder, cherishing all the birds who visited it. Because red squirrels stole food from this feeder and sometimes killed nestlings, one day she shot one as it fed. She tried to convince herself that some animals were good-- birds, while others were bad-- red squirrels, because they were enemies of birds. **But when she saw the small still red body "the iniquity of my deed struck me full force. The squirrel was without fault, an innocent."** Her killing of the squirrel forced her to reevaluate her love of nature. "Naturally the realization of all this did not come overnight, but the incident was a turning point...at least I understood now that the inclination to kill was wrong. Drastically and thoughtlessly I had played with the life and death of creatures that lived around us and had no means of defense except their utter innocence." She not only stopped killing animals, but she became close friends with some red squirrels so that she could learn to understand them. She also continued to love nature and to write award-winning books about it.

The above examples are all of people who witnessed or took part in a scene so traumatic that it permanently changed their behavior toward animals. Another kind of Big Jolt is a rational one experienced usually by academics such as **Earl Godfrey** (1910-2002), for many years Canada's foremost authority on birds (Bohuslawsky, 1993). However, Godfrey was not always their friend. As a boy, he made a slingshot with which he killed robins and sparrows in an apple orchard near Wolfville, Nova Scotia, where he grew up. One day a Migratory Bird Officer saw what he was doing, reprimanded him, and confiscated his slingshot. **Godfrey's Big Jolt came when rather than punish him further, the officer introduced him to the wonder of birds, showing him the different species and their varied behavior.** Godfrey never looked back. Birding became a passion that led him after university into his life's work. He studied birds for 30 years in what is now the Canadian Museum of Nature until he retired in 1977. He wrote *The Birds of Canada* which has sold 200,000 copies and remains the bible of information on birds in Canada.

Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996) was an even more famous ornithologist than Godfrey, but his Big Jolt was aesthetic rather than rational. He "traced his abiding interest in birds to a mystical experience he had with an injured flicker when he was 11 ("Bird watcher"..., 1996). **"I thought it was dead," he recalled. "One moment it was**

just a bundle of brown feathers. Then suddenly it exploded into life, and I was hooked."

Peterson began to write the first field guides to bird identification so that individuals did not have to be shot to be identified as had happened in the past. His classic guide would eventually sell over four million copies in four editions.

Some individuals have Selective Big Jolts which, for example, do not prevent them in the future from killing at all, but only from killing certain favoured species. Such as one was **Ernest Thompson Seton** (1860-1946) who, like Huxley, also spent his life among wildlife and experienced his Big Jolt when he killed a large mammal. (It seems the smaller the mammal, the less likely its life is to matter to its destroyer). When Seton was 32, while hunting moose in Manitoba, he and a friend tracked one for three days before they finally shot it. According to his biographer, "Having 'killed the grandest beast of chase that roams America's woods,' Seton was temporarily jubilant, but **his pleasure soon faded to remorse. He had transformed this 'superb animal...into a pile of butcher's meat for the sake of a passing thrill of triumph'**" (Keller, 1984, 111-2). He made a vow never again to shoot any of America's big game as long as extinction threatened them. As Keller notes, however, this vow "left him free to kill wolves, foxes and other mammals as well as birds, but it was the first step in a process that would change him into an outspoken conservationist."

Jack Miner (1865-1944), like Seton, also experienced a Selective Big Jolt (Miner, 1969, xxi ff). When at age 13 he moved with his family from Ohio to south-west Ontario, he became a professional hunter, killing skunks and rattlesnakes for bounty, and bear and moose for fur and food as well as game birds and waterfowl by the hundreds. It was the waterfowl that gave him his Jolt. In the spring of 1903, he was lying in wait to shoot at a flock of geese flying overhead when he noticed two men ditching nearby. He was at first afraid that the workers would disturb the geese. However, he noticed that the birds weren't bothered at all by these men but sailed right over them. Rather, when they flew near enough to see him under a blanket, the leader gave a cry that scattered the birds out of range. On his dejected way home, Miner thought "**Why did these geese fly within shooting distance of those men, and shy so suddenly when they caught a glimpse of me?** Plainly, it must be because they regard the men as their friends, and me as their enemy."

From that time on, Miner vowed that he would be the friend of birds rather than their enemy. He set up The Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary near Kingsville, Ontario, which over the years has offered rest and food for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl. In 1909, he began banding ducks and later Canada geese as well; hundreds of the bands have been returned from hunters, allowing Miner to calculate migration routes. (He also put Biblical quotations on the bands to bring religion to these hunters.) However, Miner still felt free to kill wolves and foxes and other "evil vermin" that preyed on birds.

Carl Akeley (1864-1926) also experienced a Selective Big Jolt. He worked for the American Museum of Natural History in New York in which capacity he spent much time

in Africa hunting big game (Bodry-Sanders, 1991). He was known as a hunter's hunter, focusing on animals that were big and dangerous such as lion, elephant and buffalo.

Akeley had heard that gorillas were also dangerous, but he found that this was not so, to his shame. He told Jack Miner (1969, 257): "**I shot a family of [gorilla]. But I will never shoot another one, for they are no more to be feared than a lot of old women at a quilting-bee.** Moreover they are an animal that should be protected, and not allowed to be murdered.... Yes, murder is the right word when we take a rifle and shoot an innocent, harmless animal like that."

From then on, one of Akeley's aims in life was the preservation of the gorilla in Africa. He wrote articles and gave speeches around the United States on the gorilla and contacted the Belgian government, urging it to proclaim a game reserve for gorillas where they could not be killed; because of his efforts, Parc National Albert was established in 1925. Without his work, the gorilla might have become extinct before anyone began to worry about this possibility. His conversion from hunter to conservationist had begun.

It would be nice to report that Akeley no longer killed wild animals in Africa, but this is not so. On his final trip to this continent he shot buffalo, giraffe, wildebeest and wild dogs to be stuffed for the African Hall of the American Museum of Natural History. He died in Africa near the gorillas.

Bibliography

- * Anahareo. 1972. *Devil in Deerskins*. Toronto: New Press.
- * Bird watcher lured millions with guides. 1996, Jul 30. *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, D6.
- * Bodry-Sanders, Penelope. 1991. *Carl Akeley: Africa's Collector, Africa's Savior*. New York: Paragon House.
- * Bohuslawsky, Maria. 1993, Nov 22. This god of birding shares his passion with all Canadians. *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, p D1.
- * Heffernan, James D. 1993. Why wilderness? John Muir's "Deep Ecology". In Sally M. Miller, ed. *John Muir: Life and Work*, pp 102-116. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- * Huxley, Julian. 1970. *Memories*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- * Keller, Betty. 1984. *Black Wolf: The Life of Ernest Thompson Seton*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre.
- * Lawrence, Louise de Kiriline. 1968. *The Lovely and the Wild*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- * Lawrence, R. D. 1985. *The Shark: Nature's Masterpiece*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- * Miner, Jack. 1969. *His Life and Religion*. Kingsville, ON: Jack Miner Migratory Bird Foundation.
- * Morris, Desmond. 1980. *Animal Days*. New York: Morrow.
- * Mowat, Farley. 1990. *Rescue the Earth!* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- * Raymo, Chet. 1991. *The Virgin and the Mousetrap*. New York: Viking.
- * Smedley, Agnes. 1973. *Daughter of Earth*. New York: Feminist Press.
- * Weiss, Don. 1993. John Muir and the wilderness ideal. In Sally M. Miller, ed. *John Muir: Life and Work*, pp 118-134. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

