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## Stopping the Bulldozers

Contribution to GTI Forum [Solidarity with Animals](#)

Guy Dauncey

Eileen Crist's [essay](#) opens the door to a discussion so important and yet so multi-faceted that it easily confuses the mind. When I remove the empathy-shutters that enable me to go about my daily life, my mind seeks to find order in the unbelievable scale of suffering that we inflict on the animal realm.

The scale of the apocalypse can be captured in two appalling data sets. The first tells us that since 1950 we have taken 90% of the large fish from the ocean—the sharks, tuna, swordfish, marlin, groupers, and cod. The second tells us that since 1970 we have wiped out 68% of the populations of the world's mammals, birds, fish, and reptiles. Behind each loss was a living being, a set of eyes, a will to live.<sup>1</sup>

We are the apex predator. Across the planet, I picture five huge metaphorical bulldozers dragging mile-wide nets through nature, grabbing or killing every living being they want, and discarding the rest.

The first bulldozer is private capital, determined to maximize its return. Of the \$247 trillion currently invested around the world, only 13% is screened for socially responsible criteria, impacted by corporate ESG commitments, or loosely shaped by shareholder actions.<sup>2</sup> 87% is still chasing selfish returns, including investments that finance ecological collapse and climate disaster. Most of the finance behind illegal fishing and tropical rainforest destruction is being channeled through tax havens.<sup>3</sup> Every project that harms or kills animals is being financed by someone, including pension funds. Without the money, none of it would happen.

The second bulldozer is the big agricultural, forestry, and fisheries corporations—and the big media corporations that give so little space to the deaths and losses, yet invent so much space for outrage when an animal rights activist does something provocative. Take the global food company Cargill, based in Minnetonka, Minnesota. It is destroying the Amazon, the Grand Chaco, and the Cerrado ecosystems to clear space for soy and beef production in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia. In Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, it buys coca grown illegally in protected areas and parks. In Indonesia and Malaysia, it buys palm oil from illegally cleared rainforests. Its sells to McDonald's, Burger King, Walmart, and Unilever.<sup>4</sup>

The third bulldozer is the brute power of modern technology, from the feller-buncher machines that clearcut entire forests to the bottom trawlers that clearcut the ocean floor. Tools and machinery, in their functioning, often appear have a soul of their own which takes over their operators, saying, "I was designed to do this—let's do it!" Nature doesn't stand a chance.

The fourth bulldozer is our own pride and selfishness. The selfishness makes us choose not to think about the cruelty that happens on the farm to bring us meat, in the ocean to bring us fish, and in rainforests destroyed to create palm oil plantations to give us lipstick, shampoo, and instant noodles. Our pride makes us boast about the big fish we caught, the animals we hunted for the satisfaction of killing, the wetlands we drained to build new housing.

The final bulldozer is simple ignorance. Most people do not know what goes on to bring us the comforts we enjoy—the animal experimentation that lurks behind cosmetics, the long-line fishing that kills turtles and albatross, the farm pesticides that kill so many insects, including bees.

What is our response to these five bulldozers of the animal apocalypse? Collectively, those who care have erected four barriers. None of it is enough, but it is a huge effort. The first is education, inspiration, and political action, led by champions such as Jane Goodall, David Attenborough, Jacques Cousteau, Sangita Ayer, and the members of thousands of nonprofits who care about nature, habitat loss, and animal suffering and work to inspire people with love for nature, to make us aware of the losses, and to win legislation to protect the world's animals.

The second barrier is agitation and occupation, led by champions like Paul Watson and Sea Shepherd's fleet of ships out on the ocean working to stop illegal fishing in coastal waters from Africa to East Timor, and to protect turtles, dolphins, and whales. It includes the Greenpeace champions who are dropping boulders into the North Sea and English Channel to stop the bottom trawlers, and the animal rights champions who run exposés and investigations into animal abuse in laboratories, farms and slaughterhouses, the clothing industry, tourist activities, and the pet trade, seeking legislative protection.<sup>5</sup>

The third barrier is the purchase and stewardship of land for permanent protection, led by Indigenous people around the world who are protecting some 20–30% of the Earth's land while still living in it; by groups such as the Conservation Alliance whose business members have helped to protect 73 million acres of land; by governments that create parks and marine protected areas; and by landowners who place conservation covenants on their land.<sup>6</sup>

The final and most lasting barrier is legislation, which has the capacity to end the animal apocalypse through laws and regulations. The Global Animal Law Association tracks which nations are doing what, ranging from those in East Asia, the Middle East, and Africa that have no animal welfare legislation at all, to those that have passed strong legislation and recognized the sentience and rights of animals. Two hundred years ago, most workers had no rights or legal protection. Thanks to determined campaigning, many workers now have those rights. Today, most animals have no protection. Will it take two hundred years to achieve the same for them? We need to bend the arc of the moral justice towards justice for animals, as well as for humans.

The movement for animal care and protection is broad and diverse, but it is also scattered. It focuses on certain species, because this generates a better human response. It is weak when it comes to screening investments, or pressing governments for broad rafts of legislation that would protect animals everywhere. It has yet to build coalitions of support with the climate movement, the women's movement, the LGBTQ+ movement, and the social justice movement.

When two researchers analyzed support for animal rights and welfare in America, they found that political conservatives and more religious people were less likely to support animal rights, that women were much more likely than men to support them, and that support for progressive issues

was strongly associated with positive views about animal rights.<sup>7</sup> This is encouraging, for it indicates that the ground is fertile for an effort to connect the different movements, bringing more strength to them all.

In the meantime, what can we do as individuals? We can eat a far more plant-based diet, we can switch any investments we might have to animal-friendly funds, and we can write to our political leaders urging support for big moves such as including ecocide in the legal code (as Belgium is close to doing) and protecting of 30% of the land and ocean by 2030, as the UN Conference on Biodiversity is asking. The animals have no voice in the halls of power. We must speak for them, to express their will to live.

## Endnotes

1. Boris Worm et al., "Global Patterns of Predator Diversity in the Open Oceans," *Science* 309 (2005): 1365–1369, <https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.1113399>; Rosamunde Almond, Monique Grooten, and Tanya Petersen, eds., *Living Planet Report 2020: Bending the Curve of Biodiversity Loss* (Gland, Switzerland: World Wildlife Fund, 2020), [https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/LPR20\\_Full\\_report.pdf](https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/LPR20_Full_report.pdf).
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## About the Author



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