

JPIC Corner

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An E-Publication of the United States Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart to promote Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. **Sign up now.**



Coordinator's Note

*Brother Warren Perrotto, MSC
JPIC Coordinator
Missionaries of the Sacred Heart*

Animal Rights

Frequently we see on television advertisements for adopting abandoned dogs and cats. I remember in Mexico and Guatemala seeing many dogs in the streets which were abandoned. While the dogs do no harm to humans—in fact they most often are afraid of them—they join packs and fight among themselves. Weak and emaciated dogs struggling for survival are frequently attacked viciously by other dogs. A dog may experience its whole life from birth to death in the streets.

In 1929, under the auspices of Cardinal Bourne, the Catholic Study Circle for Animal Welfare was formed. This was the first Catholic organization to express concern for the welfare of animals. Today it is known as the Catholic Concern for Animals (CCA).¹ It

exists to influence the Christian Church and, ultimately the wider society, into adopting a more just, understanding and compassionate attitude towards the animal creation. We research and disseminate authentic teachings of the Catholic Tradition, and of other religious beliefs, to help bring about a way of living in accordance with the Creator's design. We support and encourage those working towards these aims.²

The CCA gives testimony to the sacramental character of creation. It affirms that the whole of creation is good, and that we are called by God to be stewards of God's creation. While we affirm the superior dignity and worth of the human being, we cannot lose sight of the fact that

Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them
Continued next page



Photo by Bill Kuffery

*Simply by their existence, animals give glory to God.
Therefore, we owe them kindness.*



Photo by Anna Cervova

Did You Know?

- **Scientists have classified approximately 1.7 million organisms, but still haven't catalogued the overwhelming majority. Between 10 and 50 million species may inhabit our planet**
- **In the United States, the profit made from illegal trade in wildlife is second only to the trade of illegal drugs**
- **13% of intentional animal abuse cases involve domestic violence.**

1. <http://www.all-creatures.org/ca/>
2. Ibid.
3. Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) no. 2416.

Coordinator's Note Continued...

with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals.³

This does not mean, however, that as stewards we cannot use animals for clothing and nourishment. Animals may be trained for labor and as companions. Additionally, animals may be used for experimentation to care for and save human beings; however, this experimentation must be within the ethical norms of reason. Surely it "is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly." St. Thomas Aquinas adds that our pity and care for animals is an action that motivates humans to pity and care for one another. The actions that we take toward all life need to be consistent across the board and reflect a Christian ethic of care and respect for what God has made. [See article online](#)



Photo by Anna Cervova



Photo by Brunhilde Reinig

Catholic Teaching

[Click the link](#) to read what the Catholic Catechism has to say about respect for animals. (see #2415-2418)

Mistreatment and Cruelty Towards Pets in the United States

Close to two thirds (63%) of all households in the United States have a pet. Tragically, some people intentionally harm pets. For instance, a person who abuses others may harm a family pet to control or punish their victim(s).

Mistreatment and cruelty towards pets takes many forms. Animal hoarding is another example of cruelty towards animals. Hoarding is a complex issue and often the people involved don't realize that they are not actually able to care for all the

animals they have. An estimated 250,000 animals are victims of hoarding each year.

Other forms of cruelty towards animals include dog and cock fighting, as well the exotic pet trade. While it is nearly impossible to know how many people in the United States are involved in dog fighting, (since it is an illegal, underground activity) estimates are in the tens of thousands. Illegal trafficking in exotic animals is a global business, with hundreds of millions of animals entering

the trade each year. In the United States, the profit made from illegal trade in wildlife is second only to the trade of illegal drugs. Wild animals are not meant to be pets, and besides being taken from their native environment, such animals are often transported and kept in cruel conditions in an attempt to control them.

Tethering or chaining dogs for long periods of time is also a problem because it can cause neck injuries and lead to negative changes in behavior.

Ways We Can Help Prevent and End Animal Cruelty

Know the signs of cruel treatment

Extreme thinness, weakness, untreated conditions or injuries and being left outside in bad weather (without adequate shelter) are a few signs that an animal might be being abused. For more signs, visit APSCA's webpage for "[How to Recognize Cruelty.](#)"

Get to know the animals in your neighborhood.

If you know the animals in your area, you will be more likely to notice signs of possible abuse, such as rapid weight loss.

Report suspected abuse

If you see signs of abuse, report it promptly to the appropriate authority. If you aren't sure who to call, contact your local police station, animal control or animal shelter and ask them how you can report suspected cruelty.

Model a good example

Treat the animals in your life with respect. Children learn by example, so make sure that your pets not only have enough food, shelter and clean water, but also plenty of positive attention and play time.

Teach your kids to respect pets and other animals

Talk to your kids about treating animals properly in an age appropriate way. For ideas, check out [ASPCA's tips for talking with children of different ages](#). You might also want to check out the [ASPCA Kids' website](#).

Don't buy exotic animals online or from dealers or pet stores, and refuse to patronize stores and websites that sell exotic "pets."

Do your research before you adopt a pet

If you rent, make sure you know what your lease says regarding pets, and if you have or are planning to have children, be sure to look for animals that are good with children.



Image for illustration only

Helping People and Pets

Concern for a pet's safety often makes it more difficult for victims of domestic violence to escape because they worry about what the person who abuses them will do to their animals once they leave. Find out whether the shelter near you has any program for caring for the pets of those leaving violent home situations, and if not, consider getting a group together and trying to start one.

Animal Cruelty and Domestic Violence

Cruelty towards animals is related to other forms of abuse and violence, such as domestic violence. An abuser may harm the family pets (or threaten to harm them) in order to demonstrate control, punish a victim for leaving or showing independence, or to prevent a victim from leaving, among other reasons. Investigations of animal abuse are frequently the first point of a social services intervention for a family experiencing domestic violence. By paying attention to how animals in our neighborhood are being treated and calling the appropriate authorities if we see signs of abuse, not only are we helping to stop animal cruelty, we may also be helping address family violence.

Among pet owners who enter a shelter, 71% report that the person who abused them had also threatened, injured or killed family pets. (*Source*). Concern for the safety of pets or livestock makes it more difficult for victims of domestic violence to escape, especially since only 12% of programs responding to domestic violence can provide shelter for pets. We can help respond to both domestic violence and animal cruelty by working with shelters for victims of abuse, animal shelters, and veterinarians in order to establish or expand a "safe haven" foster care system for the pets of victims of domestic violence.

If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence, call the National Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).

Building the Kingdom of God: Systemic Change

When we work to implement Catholic Social Teaching, we are striving to create a more just world, to help build the Kingdom of God, a kingdom based on love, justice, peace, healing and reconciliation. As Catholics, we are interested in meeting the needs of vulnerable members of society today, but we are also interested in changing society so that everyone's rights and dignity are respected tomorrow. So while it is important to give direct assistance to those in need now, for instance to give food to the hungry, we also want to work towards the day when everyone is able to feed themselves and their families. The building of the Kingdom of God will not be finished until the end of time, but we can each do our own part to *help* build the Kingdom now in our little corner of the world, both by providing direct assistance and by working to make our social systems and structures more just so that less direct assistance is necessary.

How does building the Kingdom of God and working for systemic change apply to our responsibility to care for animals? One area relates to our food supply: what we eat and how what we eat is produced. Our food choices have an impact on our health, the market/economy and on the earth, including on animals. What kind of companies are getting our dol-



Photo by Peter Griffin

lars and implicit support? What kind of practices do they use and do we think those practices are good? Do the eggs we buy come from hens that are allowed to act on natural behaviors, or from severely stressed birds crammed into a cage with several other hens? In our efforts to become better stewards of creation, we may want to take a look at our daily diet and perhaps make some changes. These pages list some ideas to get started, but remember, the most important thing isn't that we make a particular change; it is that we are mindful of the impact that our choices have on God's creation, and make an ongoing effort make environmentally-responsible and humane choices.

Certified Humane Products and Sustainable Seafood

These days, there are many labels in the grocery store. If you are interested in buying more humanely produced animal products but are not sure where to start, considering learning more about the Certified Humane Certificate Program, the only labelling program supported by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). When grocery shopping, try looking for products with the Certified Humane Raised and Handled® label.

Some fish are being over-fished or fished using methods that harm the environment and other species. You can make an effort to buy more sustainable seafood by looking for products labelled by the Marine Stewardship Council ([click for list of places you can find these products in the US](#), including stores such as Aldi, Whole Foods and Walmart). Make better informed decisions about seafood purchases by finding out the status of types of fish you usually buy on [Fishwatch](#) (a website of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).



We can make a difference through our daily choices.

Ideas for Helping to Create a More Humane Food System

Find out where your food comes from

Learn where your food is coming from and how the animals involved are being treated. Do a little research on the brands you buy most often. If you don't like how a company treats its animals, contact them and let them know. Businesses want happy customers.

Plant a vegetable garden

A vegetable garden can serve many purposes. By making it a family activity, you can help teach your kids how to care for growing things (part of respecting God's creation) and the experience may also encourage them to become more involved in food preparation or to try new vegetables (after all, they worked hard to grow them!).

Look for Certified Humane products such as chicken, beef or pork

These days, there are many labels in the grocery store. If you aren't sure which one to look for, you might take a look at the Certified Humane Certificate Program, which is the only labelling program that the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) supports. (See page 4)

Pay attention to the fish and seafood you buy

Some fish are being over-fished or caught using methods that harm the environment and/or other species. You can make better informed decisions about seafood purchases by finding out the status of types of fish you usually buy on [Fishwatch](#). (See page 4)

Consider getting some of your food from local farms

Some local farms supply eggs, cheese, chicken, beef, pork and let you tour the farm to see how animals are raised. See if there are any farms like this in your area. If you are comfortable with the conditions, a tour of a local farm might also make a nice family activity to help teach children about caring for nature and all God's animals.

Be Bee Friendly

According to the website of the U.S. Agricultural Research Service (ARS), there is currently a "Colony Collapse Disorder" among honey bees in the United States. In other words, there is a relatively low number of adult honey bees. The cause is not known yet, but the health of honey bee colonies in the US has been deteriorating since the 1980s. Honey bees pollinate crops, and according to the ARS, "About one mouthful in three in the diet directly or indirectly benefits from honey bee pollination." The good news is that we can all help honey bees by planting a garden that includes good sources of nectar (such as red clover, fox glove and bee balm) and by limiting our use of pesticides, especially by avoiding spraying pesticides at midday when bees are most likely to be out. ([Source](#))



Photo by Vera Kratochvil

Planting a garden can help care for one of God's smaller creatures: honeybees. Just be sure to look up the kinds of flowers before you plant them, since some, like fox glove, are toxic to livestock and humans if ingested.

Selected Resources

- [How to Plant a Family Vegetable Garden](#)
- [Savor the Seasons](#) (Tips and recipes for seasonal produce, from Eat Better America)
- [Learn more about Certified Humane Raised and Handled](#)
- [Some ideas for Getting Your Child to Eat Vegetables](#) (from Disney Family's website)
- [Family Fun Recipe: Vegetable Flowers](#)
- [Map of Overfished Stocks in the US as of March 31, 2011](#)
- [FishWatch](#) - US Seafood Facts

The above items link to external resources. The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart are not responsible for the content of these websites and offer these links for informational purposes only, and not as authoritative sources.

Endangered Species

While extinction does sometimes occur in nature, the current rate is unnaturally high. Millions of acres of tropical rainforests are destroyed each year, causing many species to be lost as their habitats are destroyed. Poaching also threatens many species. Since all animals give glory to God through their presence, we must manage the earth's resource in a responsible way that does not cause the extinction of a species. Interestingly, by protecting other species, we may also end up helping ourselves. Some medicines are discovered by studying plants and animals. For example, a protein from an Asian pit viper is being studied because it appears to inhibit the spread of melanoma cells.

The bad news is that in the United States alone, more than 500 species, subspecies and varieties of plants and animals have become extinct since 1620. The good news is that we can make a difference. The actions taken in the United States under the Endangered Species Act have successfully prevented extinction for 99% of the species that are listed as endangered or threatened. (Source: [Why Save Endangered Species brochure](#))

Some Ways We Can Help

- We can be mindful when we buy gifts or souvenirs, avoiding certain products such as those made from ivory or turtle shell or that come from a tiger. ([World Wildlife's Holiday Guide](#))
- We can help fight destruction of habitats by buying wood products from forests that are well-managed. Look for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) logo.
- Learn more about endangered species by visiting the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's website](#)



Photo by David Pape

Tigers are threatened by poaching (including illegal trade of tiger parts) as well as by human-tiger conflict and habitat loss. Tigers' habitat has decreased by 45% in just the past ten years.

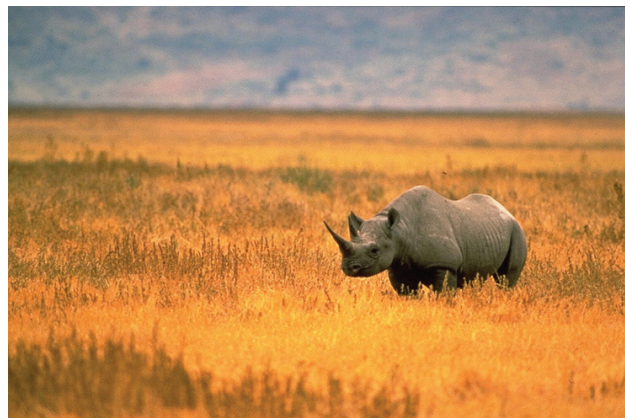


Photo credit: John and Karen Hollingsworth, US Fish and Wildlife Service

There are only about 3,725 black rhinoceros in the world today. The population of black rhinos decreased by 96% between 1970 and 1992 due to poaching. The good news is that most populations are increasing (not by much, but steadily).

Tell us what you think!

How can we help prevent cruelty towards animals?



Email Br. Warren at jpica@misacor-usa.org.

Please Join Us in Prayer

Please join us in prayer that we may strive to be good stewards of creation and to treat all animals with gentleness, following the example of St. Francis of Assisi.

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Publisher: The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart
Provincial: V. Rev. Raymond Diesbourg, MSC
JPIC Coordinator: Bro. Warren Perrotto, MSC
Editors: Fr. E. Michael Camilli, MSC
Lindsay Marcellus, Harini Riana

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