

Caring For Carnivores In Sanctuaries

In cases where carnivores such as lions are in human care, what is the most ethical way to feed them? This study explores the various perspectives on this question.

 FULL TEXT

 PEER REVIEWED

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Humans have the choice to avoid meat and other animal products. We can obtain nutrients from plants, and synthesize supplements for those few that we cannot. However, for obligate carnivores, the choice is different. Obligate carnivores, like lions, require meat to survive and cannot eat plant-based diets. Where these animals are in human care, what is the most ethical way to feed them?

wild game, like deer, rather than purchase commercially-available meat. This offers an alternative.

The paper begins by outlining the arguments that a pro-hunting advocate makes. Wild animals like deer live their lives in freedom, and therefore it is less harmful to raise them in captivity. In this view, captive animals are treated as resources, not as individuals. A deer that has lived a life where it was not treated of as a source of meat, while the free deer is treated as a source of meat. Furthermore, the argument goes, death from a hunter's bullet is likely quick and painless, compared to most wild animals – starvation, predation, or untreated illness. This argument is ecologically beneficial in areas without natural predators, and so killing a deer is necessary to avoid overpopulation. Finally, hunting does not subsidize the way purchasing byproducts does.

The author of this paper has several issues with the pro-hunting argument. First, if we do not treat animals as resources, the author argues the opposite. She points out that deer are required to provide multiple deer carcasses over their lifetime, and therefore the deer population must be managed the same way a cow or chicken population would on a farm. Furthermore, simply killing a single carnivore over that of multiple herbivores, the pro-hunter is viewing the deer as a resource, not as an individual animal – or anyone – for food without viewing them as a resource.

Second, the author points out that the 'overpopulation' argument is somewhat flawed. She argues that wildlife management departments artificially inflate the deer population in order to keep the industry afloat. Kill limits are imposed in order to keep the population at a 'friendly' level, rather than an ecologically sound one. The 'overpopulation' argument is a convenient excuse for their agency. They are punished for the 'sins' of their species, which does not mean that deer are not viewed as a resource. Deer populations are naturally-regulated by predators, and the health of an ecosystem rather than help it.

Regarding the argument that deer might be better off being shot than facing parasites, the author flips the argument around: why not put down the sufficient number of deer? The particular pro-hunting advocate that she is arguing against is

according to which humans must make up for the suffering that they cause, they argue that since humans caused the suffering, they have a duty of reparation. The author finds this unconvincing, as the lion likely has no idea what the source of the suffering is. The guardianship principle is human-oriented; it seeks to make us feel better about our actions rather than actually reduce harm or promote justice.

Aside from the ethical problems with the pro-hunting argument, the author argues that pro-hunting advocates believe that hunters should target sick and elderly animals to reduce the amount of suffering and possibly help the deer community. However, they argue that hunters can identify these animals and that there will be a sufficient number to feed the community. Pro-hunting advocates assume that there will be a suitable population of wild game nearby. What if there is not? How are we able to find a sustainable source of wild game?

The author argues that, rather than hunting, facilities housing carnivores should sell byproducts or directly purchase meat products. She argues that this is consistent with the demand for meat is institutional rather than individual. The entrenched animal agriculture industry makes individual abstention ineffective and difficult. Tax breaks, subsidies, and government guidelines all support animal agriculture as an institution. When an industry is so entrenched, individual choices have very little effect on its success.

According to the author, demand for animal products is forced upon us by institutions and therefore so is the supply. We should still give up animal products, but we should also challenge the demand in any meaningful way. Only by challenging these institutions can we make a difference. For example, abolitionists in 19th century America did not resist by simply boycotting animal products; they actively fought against the institutions that supported slavery.

Given the massive size of the animal agriculture industry, the author argues that the impact of participation from sanctuaries housing captive carnivores does not increase the impact of a smaller industry with less government backing. If zoos and sanctuaries were the only source of animal products, the relative impact would be much larger and create much more harm. Purchasing from sanctuaries is not as impactful, as it does not increase the amount of harm involved in the animal agriculture industry.

Avoiding participation does not actually reduce harm, especially in the fringe. Vegans should not concern ourselves purely with abstaining from harm; we need institutional support for immoral practices. This is the only way that we can end harm by animal agriculture.

**External Link:**

<http://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/vol7/iss1/8/>

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Owen Rogers is from northern Illinois, raised in the suburbs of Chicago. At a very young age, when he had several companion animals ranging from dogs to cats, he developed a philosophy with a focus on ethics, and became a vegetarian. In addition to his writing, he has volunteered at animal shelters and participated in environmental cleanups.

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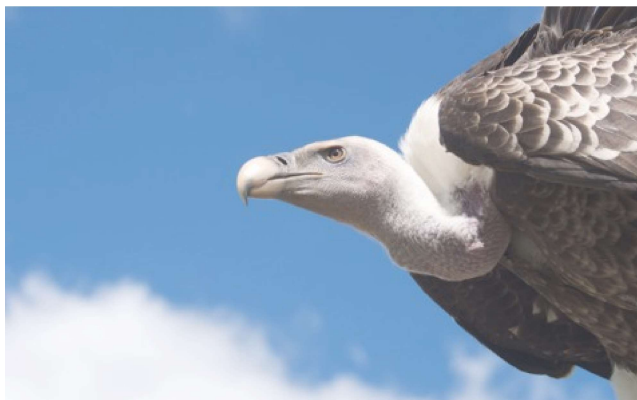
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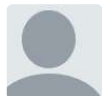


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Corey Lee Wrenn • a month ago

Owen, thank you for spotlighting my work (as well as that of my colleague Cheryl Abbate). I also that are nutritionally sound for cats (including large cats)--rather than investing so much of our re: making more appealing and accessible vegan foods for carnivorous sanctuary residents?

Thanks!

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