

Animals, Man's Best Friend

They say a dog is a man's best friend, but this is too narrow a definition. Dogs aren't the only animals that people have strong connections with. Animals bring a great deal of joy to many people. Deep connections and relationships have formed as people and animals bond and care for each other. Beyond mere pleasure, it is our responsibility and God-given right to care for our planet and all of its creatures. We have real power to make a positive impact on animals, and it's an investment that will pay off in benefits to both animals and mankind. It is both our right and our responsibility to own and care for animals, whether domesticated or exotic.

People and animals have a special connection. Our entire world is one big planetary ecosystem, and to remove ourselves from that ecosystem and become outsiders, rather than participants in the system, is unhealthy. Throughout time people have studied, observed, interacted with, and immersed ourselves with animal species. Dogs, horses, cats – all once considered wild – are now our everyday companions. This positive relationship came about because we made them an integral part of our lives. Jane Goodall, a globally respected animal scientist, made her home among wild chimpanzees in Africa. They adopted her as part of their family. She said, "You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of a difference you want to make." When we connect our lives with our planet and the animals who share this global home of ours, we can make a positive difference. We can be their voice, their caregivers, and their protectors, as well as their companions. That companionship, in turn, provides people with happiness, fulfillment, and positivity.

Taking away your right to choose what pet you will own is an infringement on your inherent, God-given freedom. Our freedoms are precious, and we must

continue to stand up and fight for them. When we start dictating every decision of peoples' lives, we take away their independence, their reasoning skills, and their natural consequences. Dictating animal ownership is far beyond the scope of government power. Soon the same people taking away this right will be governing your right to purchase Doritos chips or Oreo cookies, both potential health hazards, or creating a law that enforces you to install a peephole in your front door to protect you from answering the door to a potentially dangerous stranger. Taking away our rights through the guise of ensuring our safety is a slippery slope. Our federal, state, and city governments are in place to protect our freedoms, not infringe on them by telling people what pets they may or may not keep in the name of keeping us safe.

Many good people have made a positive impact on animal species that many would call fierce, wild, or unlovable. We can't assume that just because a person wants to keep a wild animal, they are incompetent and irresponsible. In fact, there are many good, capable animal lovers who have devoted their lives to protecting wild animals. Many private individuals have created safe facilities that enhance the lives and health of a huge variety of species, including some that are considered wild. One such facility, Cat Tales of Spokane, Washington, was created by a family who wanted to create a safe place for wild cats who would've been otherwise killed in the wild or put down. They care for tigers, lions, bobcats, cougars, and other big cats. Beyond that, it is an educational facility that teaches people about wild cat species and raises funds for helping protect them and their habitats. Clearly, this family's ownership of wild cats and devotion to animals has been a benefit to animals and humans alike. Opponents of wild animal ownership would lead you to believe that everyone who owns a tiger, zebra, or monkey is keeping them in a New York City apartment and feeding them on hot dogs and soda, but this couldn't be further from the truth. In truth, many individuals and organizations have spent their time and money providing safe havens for both tame and wild animals.

Zoos, aviaries, rescue shelters, wildlife sanctuaries, farms, and private animal advocates have all made huge positive differences in conservation and animal protections efforts.

Animals and people share this planet. We, as human beings, have not only the right, but also the responsibility to care for and interact with animals. Anyone who has had a loving pet can testify of the happiness that relationship creates. Beyond our own happiness, we can make a difference to the varied and amazing species that we share this earth with. I have seen people teach raccoons to do tricks, have watched monkeys communicate through sign language, and seen a baby elephant born who would have had no opportunity at life if her mother hadn't been rescued when injured in the wild. There is no doubt in my mind that whether it is a dog or an elephant, the relationships between men and animals should be protected if we are all to thrive together.