

Being Human Means Being Humane

By Monica Guetre

(A warning to readers about graphic content)

A philosopher once wrote “the only relevant criterion for establishing legal rights against cruel treatment is the capacity to experience suffering. The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, 1789, Ch 17. n.122.)

We know that research has shown there is a direct link between animal cruelty, domestic violence, child and elder abuse... crimes against our most vulnerable. Those who abuse animals are more likely to commit other violent crimes causing harm to all of us.

Animal abuse normally doesn't happen in isolation. When an animal is abused, the likelihood a person will also beat on or kill a child, a woman or a senior has a high probability. There is decades of evidence called the “human-animal violence link”, suggesting that serial killers and mass murderers sometimes abuse animals before hurting people. 2017 data from a University of Windsor study found that 89 per cent of women in Canadian domestic violence shelters who were surveyed said the abuser threatened or actually harmed their animal. Cruelty to animals is a red flag when it comes to people's safety and is a big reason to take animals' well-being seriously.

We've indiscriminately wiped out species in the name of “fashion” and “profit”. Think of the fur trade, the loss to history forever of the Tasmanian tiger, plains bison and the carrier pigeon or the mass destruction of elephants for ivory, the slaughter of Blue whales for their blubber. There are also individuals who think it's fun to make money and watch dog fighting or baiting of animals and birds.

Unlike 10,000, or even 500 years ago, most of us don't need to hunt to put food on the table, yet we still promote the big game macho hunter tourist who's allowed to kill species that are threatened. Even in Ontario they announced an expansion of the sport that allows dogs to track down captive coyotes, foxes and rabbits in massive fenced-in pens in the name of sport and training. Our governments also sanction the extermination of species via mass strychnine poisoning or shooting wolves from helicopters.

In a recent BBC investigation they uncovered a horrific baby monkey torture ring that originated in Indonesia but also has connections to the United States. An undercover BBC reporter interviewed one of the sadistic perpetrators who videoed his brutal torture of baby monkeys for profit. These videos were originally posted on YouTube before being reported and moving onto private message groups like Telegram. This man they interviewed is more than depraved, he sounded criminally insane - no empathy whatsoever.

There's also a case in Florida where someone permanently etched on the back of a gentle manatee a former president's name and recently there's a video showing of a woman running around shooting up Iguanas with a pellet gun.

There's a recent video on the news of a rescued 29 year-old lab chimpanzee, named Vanilla seeing the open sky for the first time. The wonder and joy displayed on that chimpanzee's face was astounding. What we do in the name of research for a new shampoo or medical research is inhumane.

The Humane Society of Canada and many other domestic and international rescue organizations are trying to stop animal brutality such as those that slaughter dogs for meat (sometimes while alive) and live in appalling

conditions throughout Asia. There also the millions of animals tortured, killed and driven to extinction for their medicinal remedies or their fur.

Closer to home we've seen cruelty investigations across Canada year-after-year. In BC there was the investigation into a company and its employees working in a slaughterhouse after video showed multiple examples of animal torture, signs of consciousness even as these animals were being cut open. How about those people who faced cruelty charges in Quebec and BC with the discovery of sled dogs being mass culled, puppies gassed, frozen to death in freezers and hanging.

In our province the RCMP opened an investigation in northern Manitoba into the case of an eight-month-old dog badly burned after being thrown into a firepit; recently an animal rescue organization saved two emaciated dogs that were being sold on an online eastern Manitoba auction house; 10 golden retriever puppies were found abandoned near a rural Manitoba highway in the bitter cold and another 4 freezing emaciated puppies were saved after they were found in a box by a Manitoba highway.

A few years ago about 100 dogs were seized from a puppy mill operator in southern Manitoba. A man was charged under the Criminal Code, found guilty of cruelty to animals. He got off with a slap on the wrist prohibiting him from owning animals for two years. They proceeded to get back into business. And a former Manitoba rancher was sent to jail for 45 days in connection with a cruelty to cattle that saw many of them succumb to starvation.

In all those cases we've seen that when humans use the excuse, it's just an animal, we become unrooted from all living creatures and the wonders of nature and end up with the capability of turning into monsters.

Certainly many of these monsters need to be taken out of our neighbourhoods to face the consequences of their cruelty and perpetuation of evil. Personally, I wouldn't trust them to be around any of my family members.

Our animal cruelty laws and our justice system don't reflect the link between what makes us human and how we treat our domesticated animals along with paying lip service to how we embrace Canada's legacy of nature. We say we're proud to be Canadian, so the hope is we take this amazing privilege of where we live and guard it rather than let others pillage it.

By turning a blind eye to abuse and insulating ourselves from our own empathy, compassion and caring for those around us and Mother Nature, we end up treating our most vulnerable, our land, and our planet as something that is measured in dollars.

Instead, if you stop and think about it, we all crave community. What some of us don't get is that we are already part of something much bigger than one community, much bigger than ourselves. A "Just Society" is one that lives alongside the natural world, not separate from it.

The attitude of having "dominion" over every living creature is not sustainable and by promoting these inhumane actions as a society we'll no longer recognize what it means to be human. Some may say we would turn into a bunch of animals.

Laws are made by humans for humanity to keep all of us safe. In Canada our Federal animal cruelty laws were originally codified in the Canadian Criminal Code back in 1892. Provinces have also been given the power to create regulations and municipalities' given the power to enact by-laws.

Federally, the Criminal Code makes it an offence when the act is a deliberate killing, wounding, maiming, injuring, or poisoning of an animal, as well as acts of deliberate cruelty can result in a prison sentence of up to 5

years or a fine of up to \$10,000. Also those who abuse marine mammals, of the order Cetacea such as a whale, dolphin, or porpoise may be punished and liable to a fine, but not exceeding \$200,000. An exception to the law is those doing research.

Many provinces including Manitoba make it a regulatory offence but not a criminal code offence when an animal is abused, in pain or in distress when deprived the basic need such as food, water and hygienic shelter, pain or and/or neglect, let alone how we treat our family companions.

Manitoba's regulations under the Animal Care Act state that animals need to be provided adequate medical attention when the animal is wounded or ill; reasonable protection from injurious heat or cold; not confined to an enclosure or area with inadequate space, in unsanitary conditions, inadequate ventilation or lighting, or without providing an opportunity for exercise, so as to significantly impair the animal's health or well-being unless it falls under an accepted activity such as agricultural uses of animals; exhibitions and fairs; zoological displays; animal slaughter; medical care, animal discipline and training; sporting events; fishing and hunting; trapping; research and teaching involving animals; pest control; control of predators, etc.

In this province people caught abusing animals for the first time can be fined no more than \$10,000 and spend no longer than six months in jail, or both; and for subsequent cruelty no more than \$20,000, or imprisonment no more than 12 months.

Woefully Federal and Provincial animal cruelty convictions are rare and any penalties meted out are insubstantial. There is way too much wiggle room that should be closed and yes, abusers should go to jail much longer, and considering there is a direct link to how they will be around your loved one, they should also be banned for life from all contact with any animal under care.

According to Manitoba's "Animal Welfare Dashboards", since 2016 there have been 7,094 reported cases of animal abuse, of those cases 4,762 were for dogs and 1,638 for cats. The yearly inspections that took place have dropped from 1,635 back in 2017 to 926 in 2022 and after investigation 792 were found to be non-compliant. In 2023 so far (June), there have been 225 inspections and of those there were 160 cases that have been found to be non-compliant with Manitoba's animal care legislation.

It begs the question who we are really helping when the animal cruelty and protection laws are not enforced.

There are many advocates of our humanity when they help to stop animal abuse and cruelty through their volunteer action locally and internationally.

Humanity shines a bright light with its support for actions taken by Diane Fossey Gorilla Fund, Greenpeace Canada, The David Suzuki Foundation, World Wildlife Fund Canada, Ducks Unlimited, Soi Dog Foundation and with advocates of protecting our pollinators such as bees and the Monarch butterfly and all of our local animal rescue's like the Steinbach & Area Animal Rescue, Manitoba Underdogs Rescue, the Winnipeg Humane Society or our wildlife rescues like the Wildlife Haven Rehabilitation Centre, or advocacy and educational groups that connect us with what it means to be part of something so much bigger than just being human, like The Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve we owe gratitude for their advocacy efforts and dedication – because this is humanity that makes us better humans.

I encourage you that if you suspect an animal welfare concern is occurring in Manitoba, please contact the Province's Animal Care Line at 204-945-8000, Toll Free 1-888-945-8001, email animalcare@gov.mb.ca or connect with your local animal rescue organization.