

Centering animals in climate change adaptation



Headline Issues

- > Climate change will create and amplify threats for both human and nonhuman populations.
- > We have a responsibility to include both humans and nonhumans in our adaptation efforts.
- > If we consider our needs holistically, we can identify many mutually beneficial adaptations.

The Center for Environmental and Animal Protection (CEAP) aims to provide academic leadership for research policy-making and addressing critical social issues at the intersection of environmental and animal protection.

Summary

Animals are central to climate change. Many accept that animal agriculture contributes to climate change, and so we should reduce animal agriculture as part of our mitigation efforts. Climate change also contributes to animal suffering, so we should also support animals as part of our adaptation efforts.

Our actions are causing massive and unnecessary harm to humans and nonhumans alike. Insofar as we can reduce or repair these harms, we should. Moreover, reducing and repairing these harms will not require as much sacrifice as we might think. But insofar as it does, we should do it anyway.

I propose six steps that we can take to build resilience for humans and nonhumans alike. For example, we should research how to improve animal welfare; we should expand parks, sanctuaries, and veterinary care for animals; and we should create animal welfare offices in governments.

Human-caused climate change will harm and kill trillions of animals per year.

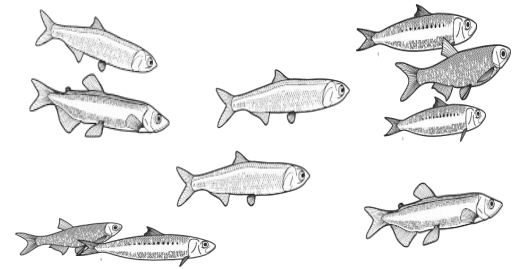
Human activity is harming animals directly as well as indirectly

Humans already harm and kill trillions of animals each year. Industrial fishing kills an estimated 1-3 trillion animals per year. Industrial animal agriculture kills an estimated 100 billion animals per year. Deforestation and the wildlife trade kill countless animals as well.

Human-caused climate change will harm and kill trillions of animals per year as well, if not more. Climate change will cause rising sea levels, flooding coastal areas, an increase in extreme weather events, regional conflicts over land, water, and food, and more. And while some species will adapt, many will not.

These harms are already occurring. The Australia bushfires killed more than 1 billion animals. Aardvarks in the Kalahari are starving because of drought. Black bears in the U.S. are unable to hibernate because of heat. Aquatic animals everywhere are dying because of ocean acidification. Unless we act now, these harms will increase over time.

“When our influence extends across nations, generations, and species, our responsibilities to vulnerable others do as well.”



We have a responsibility to support animals in adaptation

We have a moral responsibility to support animals as part of our climate change adaptation efforts for two reasons. First, climate change-related animal suffering is massive, neglected, and tractable. Second, we are complicit in this harm, we benefit from the activities that cause this harm, and we can do something about this harm.

Many people rightly accept that we have duties to members of other nations and generations for these reasons. We should accept that we have duties to members of other species for these reasons too. When our influence extends across nations, generations, and species, our responsibilities to vulnerable others do as well.

We can support animals in adaptation without too much sacrifice

Some might worry that supporting animals as part of our adaptation efforts would involve too much sacrifice. We would have to accept that we have fewer rights and more responsibilities than we might have hoped or expected.

But many ways of supporting animals do not involve much sacrifice. For example, when we add animal overpasses to roads, add bird-friendly windows to buildings, and vaccinate wild animal populations, we benefit humans too.

Also, even when supporting animals involves some sacrifice, we should still do it. The burden of reducing the harm that human activity causes is nothing compared to the burden of being a nonhuman animal in a human world.

- ***We must increase our support for animals as part of our climate change adaptation efforts.***
- ***These efforts must include protection from direct effects of climate change, such as fires and floods.***
- ***They must also include protection from indirect effects of climate change, such as resource scarcity.***

Six steps we can take to support animals in our adaptation efforts

Climate change programs like The Green New Deal aim to mitigate the effects of climate change, adapt to the effects of climate change, and expand access to basic goods such as food and economic security. The reason is that climate change will harm us directly as well as indirectly, by amplifying ordinary threats that we already face. Thus, increasing resilience against ordinary threats is part of increasing resilience against climate change.

Since climate change will have these impacts on animals too, we must increase our support for animals as part of our adaptation efforts. These efforts must include protection from relatively direct effects of climate change, such as fires and floods. They must also include protection from relatively indirect effects of climate change, such as resource scarcity.

The idea of helping animals adapt to climate change might seem daunting, but if we consider everyone holistically, then we can identify adaptations that benefit both humans and animals, as well as adaptations that benefit animals without harming humans. Here are six steps that we can take to start developing a multi-species climate change program.

1. We can research how to promote animal welfare. Through humane science, we can learn more about what animals are like and how our activity can help and harm them.
2. We can advocate for promoting animal welfare. Through humane education, we can show people what animals are like and how our activity can help and harm them.
3. Since life in captivity and life in the wild can both be harmful, we can pursue middle-ground solutions, such as expanding sanctuaries, parks, and reserves.
4. We can consider animal welfare when making infrastructure changes. For instance, we can build habitats, corridors, and buildings that reduce the risk of collisions with animals.
5. We can consider animal welfare when making policy changes. For example, when we expand public works programs, we can invest in work that involves caring for animals.
6. We can consider animal welfare when making institutional changes. For instance, New York City is now opening an Office of Animal Welfare. Other governments can do the same.

In general, our climate change adaptation efforts will be more effective and efficient if we consider humans and nonhumans together. For example, we can make infrastructure changes more affordably if we upgrade buildings once, with human and nonhuman needs in mind, than if we upgrade them separately with each set of needs in mind.

Climate change is both a threat and an opportunity. It will amplify many threats, but it will also reveal the need for new ways of living together within and across nations, generations, and species. As we work to create a more just and sustainable future, we have a chance to make the world a safer place for everyone impacted by our activity. We should take it.

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