

The Ethics and Practicality of Compassionate Conservation

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Introduction:

- The phrase ‘compassionate conservation’ was first used in 2010 by a wildlife charity as the title for a symposium. Three years later, the University of Technology created The Centre for Compassionate Conservation and Marc Bekoff — an advocate of the approach — published a collection of essays advocating for the approach.
- Compassionate conservation is a relatively new proposed approach to conservation science. This approach is focused on the animals as individuals, rather than populations as a whole
- It seeks to extend animal welfare to wild animals — rather than just domestic animals and livestock — and merge animal welfare with conservation efforts.
- Since its creation, compassionate conservation has gained many supporters — and many critics.

Ethical Basis:

- Compassionate conservation takes a deontological approach and is based on Aristotle’s philosophy of virtue ethics.
- It posits four main principles:
 - First, do no harm
 - Individuals matter
 - Inclusivity
 - Peaceful coexistence
- Criticizes underlying nativism and collectivism in traditional conservation and seeks to turn away from these values, viewing them as “problematic” and unethical.
- It has a basis in the knowledge that non-human animals experience emotions and physical sensations — including fear and pain — just as non-humans.
 - For this reason, compassionate conservation is concerned with the well-being and inherent worth of *individuals*. Its primary first and principle, “do no harm”, advocates against methods that would be lethal, distressing, or invasive to wildlife.

Lack of care and intervention from following rewilding attempts resulted in mass deaths of animals in Oostvaardersplassen.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jul/08/landscape-of-fear-what-the-rotting-carcasses-of-reindeer-taught-scientists>



<https://finding-voices.blogspot.com/2018/04/experimenten-met-de-natuur-op-de.html>



Criticisms:

- There have been many critiques of compassionate conservation. Some prevalent ones include:
 - Goes against the goal of conservation to promote biodiversity
 - It would result in more harm than traditional approaches
 - Does not take into account or prioritize “unseen” effects that would come from applying compassionate conservation’s approach
 - Fails to provide guidance on situations where harm to wildlife is inevitable
 - Impractical
 - Too extreme
 - Would not allow for invasive and introduced species populations to be controlled to protect other species — even rare, endangered, or native species

The red fox, an invasive species in Australia, poses significant threat to Australian wildlife.



<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3966616/Stunning-photographs-feral-animals-wild-Australia.html>

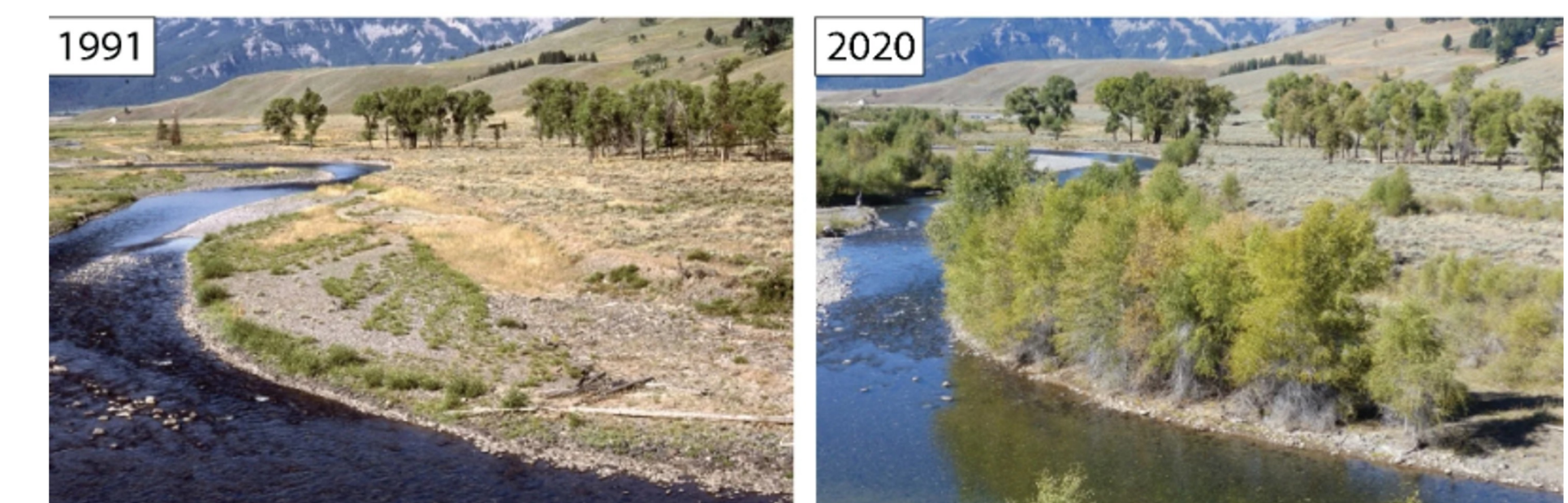
www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/article/wild-horses-part-two



Due to lack of intervention and management from humans, the wild horse population in Nevada grew to greatly exceed what the habitat could sustain, leading to depletion of necessary resources, leaving many horses to die due to dehydration, starvation, and resulting weakness.

Conclusion:

It is necessary to consider the ethical implications of conservation decisions. Although compassionate conservation, in its current iteration, may not be conducive to conservation goals, its principles could offer important ethical guidance in our efforts to manage wildlife and conserve nature.



<https://www.popsoci.com/environment/wolf-beaver-reintroduction-west/>

Wolves in Yellowstone National Park were killed by humans in the name of protecting other species, which caused ecological imbalance and had negative effects on the entire ecosystem (left), which began to repair itself following their reintroduction (right) in 1995

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