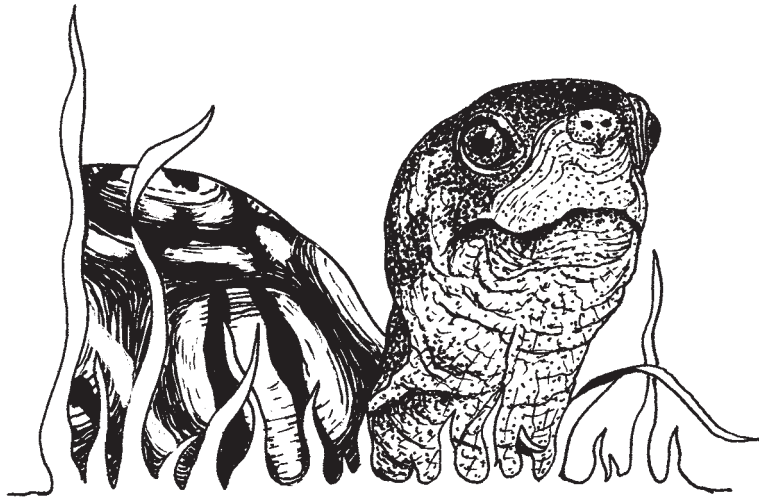


Part 1

Living with Our Wild Neighbors



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THE HUMANE APPROACH

HUMAN BEINGS MAY NEVER HAVE a better chance to live in harmony with wildlife than they do now. For most of the time we have spent on the North American continent, we have used (and often abused) the wild animals who live among us. Today, we no longer depend on them for food or fur, and the notion that they exist solely to provide recreation and diversionary pleasures for our kind is discredited. Once-decimated populations are recovering and on the move into what common sense would argue are the least likely places to offer hospitality—our cities and towns. To wild animals, an opportunity is an opportunity, and if we grow plants they like to eat or offer shelter in uncapped chimneys, that is fine by them. We now meet them again, after so many years of estrangement and unfamiliarity, hoping that it is with the understanding and the will to harmonize our lives with theirs.

Once we viewed wildlife as a “resource” there for the taking; now we see wild animals as members of living communities to which we also belong. These communities work in complex ways to form ecosystems, about whose well-being we have become urgently concerned. In acknowledging that concern, we are encouraged to reject an anthropocentric perspective (the idea that humans are the center of the living world) and accept a biocentric one (embracing the idea that we are a part of, not apart from, other living things). In turn, this leads us to give ever greater moral consideration to the animals and the environments that sustain us all.

Still, our lives are not likely ever to be free of conflicts with wild animals. In fact, as our population grows and expands, conflicts are likely to continue to arise. This does not mean, however, that we must choose lethal solutions in seeking to resolve them. It is not right to kill problem-causing wildlife simply because it is within our power to do so.

This book is about humane solutions to conflicts between humans and wild animals. It advocates humane solutions as morally and ethically correct concepts, grounded in logical, durable, and environmentally responsible tenets. The approach we advocate rests on three organizing principles:

- Respect for the environment
- Tolerance and understanding of living things
- Intent to resolve conflicts using nonlethal means.

The term “environment” means different things to different people. To us at The Humane Society of the United States, it means a community of living things and the processes that sustain it. Respect for the environment tends to encourage us to intervene less often with natural processes and practice more often the art of patience in allowing natural laws to resolve conflicts. There are great powers in natural systems that human beings cannot control at all, and lesser ones that we can, but should not. The foundation of the humane approach is in working with natural processes rather than against them.

Tolerance and understanding are necessary prerequisites to fostering respect for the environment. Respect is essential to fostering the intent needed to commit to nonlethal conflict resolution. People are insatiably curious about the world, and this curiosity can be used in many positive ways. A small start would be to reject irrational fear of wild animals. No life should ever be taken out of ignorance and misunderstanding.

For many reasons human beings cannot currently resolve every human-wildlife conflict using nonlethal means. It is possible, however, to address each conflict intending to do so. We really have only just begun to investigate and understand the considerable arsenal of ideas, tools, and techniques at our disposal to resolve conflicts with wild animals without causing them, us, or the environment harm. Voices ranging from Walt Whitman's to Albert Einstein's have spoken with concern

that human beings' technological capability seems to outstrip our ability to grasp the moral implications of its use. That is certainly true with respect to how easily, and how completely, we can use lethal methods against wild animals. The ease and expediency of lethal controls demand that a much greater effort be expended to advocate and adopt the nonlethal.

We have gathered the information in this book to help argue that point. Humane approaches to dealing with wildlife will not be created because we compose and publish books, brochures, or videos on the subject. They will only come about from the intent of a majority to adopt change. Some of the signs pointing toward this possibility are encouraging, others are not. It is our commitment to our wild neighbors to continue working to create a world in which we all can live in harmony.

Excerpted from *Wild Neighbors: The Humane Approach to Living with Wildlife*.
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