



## a voice for the animals

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## Life's pleasures

“PLEASURE is central to animal existence ... but pleasure has a deeper meaning and significant implications for humankind’s relationship with other animals. Pleasure adds intrinsic value to life.”

I have absolutely no argument with that statement written by Jonathan Balcombe in the introduction to his book *The Exultant Ark: A Pictorial Tour Of Animal Pleasure*, a theme he expanded on when he attended the 22nd New Zealand Companion Animal Conference as its keynote speaker (see page 8).

Some of the happiest moments in my life have occurred as a result of animal pleasure, as I’m sure they have for many others, which is one of the ingredients that creates the unique bond we have with animals.

Those pleasurable moments manifest themselves in many ways ... the expression of ecstasy and bliss displayed by the purring cat in the lap; the unadulterated joy of a dog at play and the expression of adoration at your presence; the sweet songs of the birds communicating with each other at twilight; graceful ducks with their ducklings on the water; the courting gestures of so many species in the springtime when flights of fancy occur; and the sheer contentment displayed by animals at rest together. These pleasures, and so many others, surround us in our world if we take time to look.

In the perfect world, the knowledge that such pleasures exist in the entire animal kingdom should influence the manner in which we treat animals. But if animals feel pleasure it is logical that they also feel pain.

It was Jeremy Bentham who alluded to this when, in 1785, he wrote: “The question is not can they reason nor can they talk, but, can they suffer?”

Jonathan Balcombe answered that question and delivered it to a meeting of animal welfarists, most of whom have experienced first-hand the neglect and

abuse animals endure at the hands of humans. Its delivery was even more poignant in the realisation that it is the humans on this earth who deprive animals of their natural pleasures.

“In the United States alone,” Jonathan said, “300 chickens are slaughtered every second for human consumption. This is not just a matter of concern because the chickens’ lives are ended. There’s also the fact that they’ve lived cramped, miserable lives in battery cages and broiler sheds.”

As sentient beings we should be utterly ashamed that we inflict such abject suffering on these and other sentient creatures rather than focusing our attention on sharing the pleasures we are all capable of experiencing.

Again, logic tells us that if we are proficient in inflicting such misery to animals, we will be equally adept at doing the same to each other. A cursory glance at the world around us soon reaffirms that reality.

I’ve always been a “glass half full” person, the eternal optimist, and have accordingly lived life in the expectancy that good will eventually prevail. In spending time with Jonathan Balcombe, and in learning from him the reality of the joy and pleasure animals can and do experience, my optimism is greatly enhanced.

If the animals can teach us more of the simple pleasures of life and we focus our attention on those elements in their interests as well as our own, our future relationships with them, and each other, will most surely improve. One day it may even end the pain and suffering we inflict. As humans we have that responsibility.

Keep believing!

