

UPF-CAE Guidelines

Towards an ethical news coverage of nonhuman animals



CC Dzvinleku brivba

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UPF Centre for Animal Ethics



Writing: These recommendations have been prepared by members of the scientific council of the UPF Centre for Animal Ethics (UPF-CAE), with the collaboration of researchers from animalsandmedia.org

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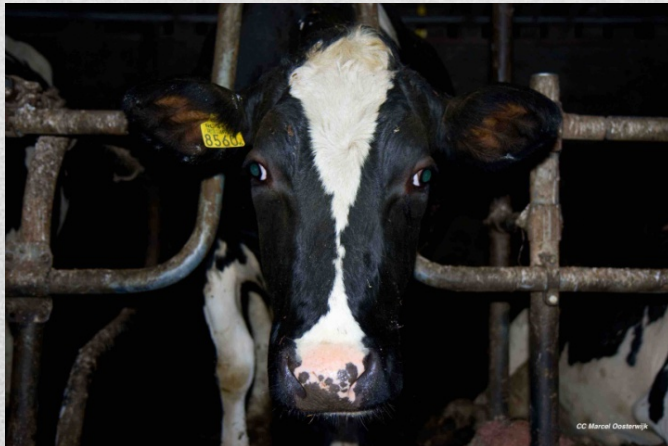
Nowadays, the idea that human interests are above the interest of animals of other species is no longer defensible. The fact that animal suffering is important and that the interests of individuals cannot be disregarded simply due to their belonging to a different species is one of the most significant moral progresses of humanity. The notion that other animals deserve ethical consideration because they have their own interests is not only a widely accepted philosophical idea but also a scientific one, maintained since Charles Darwin. More recently, it has been overwhelmingly backed by research in the fields of neuroscience, evolutionary biology, ethology and animal cognition – where it has been proven that the other animals also feel physical and psychological pain, emotions and sensations. In 2012, a large group of prestigious scientists signed the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, which recognises that a great number of non-human animals are sentient. In addition, the Treaty of Lisbon acknowledged the legal relevance of non-human animal suffering for European Union legislation in 2009.

Goals of these guidelines:

- a.** To increase human respect for individuals of other species in order to promote their representation in the news and media in a more precise, fair and objective manner;
- b.** To break the false human/non-human dualism, substituting it for the following inclusive visions:
 - The vision of inclusive diversity, that allows us to represent reality in a non-domination frame (human beings as hierarchically superior to the other animals), but instead of a full inclusion of all sentient individuals in the sphere of moral consideration, whatever their species, ethnicity, culture or origin.
 - The vision of inclusive social justice, which allows us to represent reality in a frame of respect, help and solidarity that does not discriminate because of species membership and in which the interests and the rights of animals and of human beings are not seen as mutually exclusive.
- c.** To unveil the speciesist power relations that legitimate the relationships of oppression imposed on other species due to the supposed superiority of the human species, which are structurally analogous to the oppressions we are already fighting against (sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, cultural discrimination, ableism, etc).
- d.** To serve the public interest and social progress in order to promote a global reduction of violence on the planet, with the consciousness that, where there is suffering, one cannot be neutral.

Guidelines

- 1. Report about the lives of individuals from other species consistently (not just occasionally and in negative contexts).**
- 2. Avoid anthropocentric perspectives by using non-human animals as sources.**
- 3. Report about organizations that defend non-human animals.**
- 4. Use neutral and objective language.**



1. Report about the lives of individuals from other species consistently (not just occasionally and in negative contexts)

Non-human animals are usually covered in the news only in a secondary manner, in accordance with our interests and needs. To compensate for this, we can:

1.1. *Consistently dedicate time and space to coverage of the interactions between human beings and other animals with the intention of raising awareness of animals from other species as a matter of interest and attention.*

1.2. *Acknowledge and include non-human animals' perspectives in the stories in which they are involved (accidents, wars, crimes, food, energy, politics, science, lifestyle). In other words, stop including them only from the human perspective and one that benefits us.*

1.3. *Investigate the exploitation of the other animals in today's society, including the consequences of this use, especially the psychological and physical suffering that legal and common practices cause (exploitation on farms, hunting, experimentation or captivity in zoos or circuses, etc.), as well as illegal ones (hunting of endangered species, illegal fights, religious rituals, etc.). Create an ethical approach to these investigations by asking ourselves if they are really necessary and if we have the right to use the other animals in the way we do. Also, investigate the reality and the viability of those practices deemed as "more humane".*

2. Avoid anthropocentric perspectives by using non-human animals as sources

Since it is human beings who consume news, stories are generally more focused on the individuals from our species. To avoid this anthropocentric perspective, in the same way we should avoid racial or sexist prejudice, we recommend that journalists:

2.1 *Identify and acknowledge the interest of the animals of other species (in relation to their habitat, territory, food, security and with the absence of pain, suffering and anxiety).*

2.2. *Represent other animals as individuals who feel (companions with whom we share the planet) and not with a perspective centred on human beings. We should avoid stereotyping species: not defining them with regard to how they are used (as food, pets, in captivity, skins, toys) nor with metonyms (farm animals, milk cows, laying hens, etc.), but in regard to what they are (individuals, beings exploited for their meat/skin/fluids, as companions, etc.).*

2.3 *Dedicate time and space to exploring the complex interactions between human beings and other sentient beings on the planet, questioning the cultural prejudices that cause us to have unjustified preferences for some species above others (e.g., preferring dolphins over fish, horses over cows, dogs over wolves, nightingales over chickens, vertebrates over invertebrates, etc.).*

2.4. *Reproduce (in an audiovisual form if possible) how we communicate with animals, whether they are in captivity or in freedom, in order to familiarize ourselves with their ways of expressing themselves and in order to educate the audience about their lives.*

2.5. *Interpret the communication of the other species when it is evident (showing happiness, curiosity, fear, sadness, anger, care, anxiety, boredom, playfulness, ... etc.). In some cases, it may be necessary to consult professionals in order to interpret the specifics from a non-anthropocentric perspective.*

2.6. *Make sure that quoted sources always include a balance of voices that show the perspective and interests of other animals. They may be biology, ethology or veterinary professionals; activists; animal rights advocates, people who take care and look after them; vegans (people who for ethical reasons do not consume or use products from an animal source), etc. Verify that these voices are independent and that they do not work directly or indirectly for industries linked to the exploitation of animals.*

2.7. *Avoid defining other animals by appealing to arbitrary stipulations that favour their negative representation as a species that are "invasive", "aggressive", "pesky", "pests", "dirty", etc.*

2.8. *Unless the information reports on animals in captivity, always show images of animals in their natural state and environment, that is, in their natural habitat.*

2.9. *Avoid falling into the idealization of life in the wild and the celebration of natural processes when they imply the death or suffering of animals.*

3. Report about organizations that defend non-human animals

To guarantee inclusivity and justice, we recommend that journalists:

3.1. *Find a balance between government/industry sources and activist sources in all those topics that affect the other animals.* The subjects that concern non-human animals must not be addressed as simple economic, regulatory or environmental topics, and they must be approached also from the perspective of the groups that work in the defence of non-human animals.

3.2. *Avoid reporting only on cases of protest or animal liberation actions on farms in the coverage of organizations devoted to the defence of non-human animals.* It is important to provide the full context and history of these organizations, including coverage of their less spectacular campaigns. The aim is to cover the essence of what they do, not only the spectacle.

3.3. *Be ready to broadcast non-authorized images which have been proven to be true and accurate and that show the reality of our relationship with other animals.* In other cases, also be ready to obtain such images. This will create a debate in society, but citizens have a right to be aware of this reality.

3.4. *Avoid confusing environmentalist organisations (whose aim is to preserve ecosystems and species) with organisations working for the defence of non-human animals (whose aim is to alleviate the suffering of these individuals and their species inside ecosystems).*

3.5. *Avoid confusing animal welfare organisations (who do not call for the abolition of non-human animal exploitation but instead the increase of “welfare” in the frame of their exploitation) with abolitionist organisations (who fight for animal rights and call for the eradication of the exploitation of other animals).*




4. Use neutral and objective language

In the same way that we can denigrate, devalue, and belittle certain human beings on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, etc., with the language we use, speciesist language is also a way of enlarging, consolidating and perpetuating anthropocentric prejudices. This happens when a false dichotomy is promoted, by placing human beings in a separate dimension that is superior to other members of the animal kingdom in order to justify the use of these other animals. To avoid this kind of language, we recommend that journalists:

4.1. *Strive for maximum accuracy in their terminology.* This includes the term *animal* and the use of expressions such as “non-human animals”, “other animals” and similar. The aim is to promote inclusivity and to acknowledge that human beings are also part of the animal kingdom. It is important to strive for precision in the category of animal we refer to, for example: animals exploited on farms, companion animals, free animals, non-human primates, sea animals, endangered animals.

4.2. *Avoid objectifying animals when we refer to them.* Avoid using expressions that blur the character of individual animals that have consciousness and sentience: avoid using terms such as: “it”, “units”, “genetic material”, “specimens”, “catches”, “heads of cattle”, etc.



4.3. *Avoid euphemisms and metaphors (war metaphors, hunting metaphors, etc.) and strive for objectivity.* We strive for objectivity when we avoid saying some humans “are disabled” and instead say they “have a disability” or “a functional diversity”, or when we say someone is “being enslaved” rather than “is a slave”. Likewise, the euphemisms used by industry regarding nonhuman animals should be avoided. For example, it is more accurate to say that the other animals are exploited, used, abused, etc. than it is to soften the killing with a euphemism. As when a nonhuman animal escapes from confinement and humans kill it, softening the killing by saying the animal has been “destroyed” or “put down” should be avoided; after all, the other animal that escaped had not committed any crimes nor had it given consent to die; in reality it was “shot dead” or “executed”.

4.4 *Avoid false neutrality.* Human beings use millions of animals in many cruel ways, exploiting them for our interests, leaving them homeless, using them for entertainment or experiments for our health, or in most cases, for much more trivial reasons (cleaning products, cosmetics, toys, etc.). The pain and suffering we inflict on them is tremendous. It is a situation in which one species uses individuals from other species for its own interest. There is a clear unbalance of power between human beings, who occupy a position of strength, and other species, who cannot oppose this force. Journalists must reflect on whether a neutral attitude is ethical in this situation.



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