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ONLINE COLUMN – *The Animal Angle* – Shirley Bell

Asking the right questions

Every generation thinks the world is topsy-turvy, and we are no exception. We wonder at the excesses of human nature and often imagine things could never have been quite this bad. Yet, despite the violence and the tragic events conveyed to us by a global media network, there has actually never been more compassion and more concern for other living creatures than there is in the world today. Thousands of organisations throughout the world exist to help humans and animals in need of help or protection. Yet there was little evidence of much public concern until about a century ago.

Little is hidden from us in today's world. We are learning, often somewhat painfully, that we can't just turn our faces away from what we would rather not know about. We are getting better at facing up to what is unacceptable, even though we have a long way to go. Animal welfare organisations and the media thrust evidence into our faces.

Only in the 18th century did some social reformers begin to write about the exploitation of animals and the need for greater concern about the way they were treated.

The British political philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, wrote: "The right question for animals is not 'Can they reason?'... 'Can they talk?', but '**Can they suffer?**'" It was this last question that provided the basic philosophy of the animal welfare movement.

Over two hundred years ago, Bentham was pointing out that legislators "ought to interdict everything which may serve to lead to cruelty". "The day may come," he said, "when the rest of the animal creation may acquire what never should have been withheld from them were it not for the hand of tyranny."

In 1892, humanitarian Henry Salt published *Animal Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress*. This enlightened book included most of the animal rights promoted by welfare organisations today.

Prior to World War II, farming was almost entirely free range. After World War II, animal farming began to move from free range "into the sheds of the factory farm". Humanity went down the drain because the public could not see what processes produced the meat on their tables. Animals were reared out of sight. For most people, there was little connection between living creatures and the neatly packaged raw meat sold in supermarkets. It is time we began to care more about the means of production.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in England in 1824. Sixteen years later it became the Royal SPCA, and in 1835 protection was extended to include dogs and cats and all other domestic animals.

Today more and more small animal welfare organisations are being set up by local people to aid the work of major organisations like ours. The SPCAs depend on the generation of donors and rely heavily on the devotion of volunteers who love animals and give generously of their time. Facing up to disturbing acts of cruelty to animals is part of the work of full-time staff members, something that should not be under-estimated by the rest of us.

Creating the meat of the future

Yuval Noah Harari, whose brilliant books, *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*, are causing readers to think about our species in the context of what we know about our history and to face

up to the distinct possibility that we are becoming a different species owing to medical and information technology, among other things, says that animal farming might be “the worst crime in history”.

Although an increasing number of people are becoming vegetarian, we are a meat-eating species. However, continuing to be a meat-eating species might increasingly not necessarily require the farming and killing of animals. The answer is cellular agriculture or “clean meat”. Clean meat is flesh created from cells and not from animals bred and slaughtered for that purpose.

It sounds really beyond belief that a steak can be grown from cells. However, it’s not science fiction, because it is already a reality. It is now three years since the first hamburger meat was created from cells. Owing to the vast research and experimentation that preceded it, it cost \$300,000! That suggests that large-scale production is still a long way off, but now, in 2017, the cost of the clean meat for one hamburger has fallen to \$5 and, with continuing research and resources, it is estimated that within a decade the price could fall to less than what it is likely to cost then for a hamburger made from meat from a slaughtered animal.

It is mentioned that some meat eaters are likely to find it distasteful to eat meat that has been created from cells, because they will regard it as ‘artificial’, even though it will be ‘real meat’ in every sense, except that no animal has been through the dreadful transport and slaughterhouse process. But it will be strange to us, and humans are creatures of habit.

Read up about “clean meat” online. It seems that it will be part of the future and will contribute hugely towards the regeneration of the environment, as well as to the reduction of cruelty often perpetrated against farm animals, especially in factory farming where the treatment of intelligent, feeling creatures has been lost in the processes of mass production.

Only one in a thousand beats the odds

Otto is a female hawksbill turtle that was found dehydrated, suffering from hypothermia, and in seriously weak condition on the rocks at Yzerfontein by fisherman Koos Otto and his wife, Sanet, in June 2014. They contacted the National Sea Rescue Institute for assistance, and the Two Oceans Aquarium sent a rescue team to take Otto into care for nurturing and rehabilitation.

She was one of the largest hawksbill turtles to have been recorded and was already elderly, since she was estimated to be between 60 and 80 years old.

When she was rescued, her digestive system proved to be too weak for normal feeding, and she initially had to be fed by tube before going onto a diet of special food discs made from vitamin and mineral supplements.

Rehabilitation took over 18 months. Fitted with a satellite-tracking device so that her journey could be mapped, she was released 30 nautical miles south of Cape Point on 1 December 2015.

She immediately headed east towards the warm Agulhas current, which carried her northwards. By New Year’s Day 2016 she was off East London, and only 77 days after being released off Cape Point she had travelled an incredible 3,540km, which is about 45km per day.

She crossed the Mozambique Channel and continued up the west coast of Madagascar, swimming round the island at the northern tip and then slowly down the east coast of Madagascar. The tracking device has a battery life of two years, so her movements can be followed until the end of 2017.

Hawksbill turtles are critically endangered. The rescue of Otto by Koos and Sanet Otto and the long rehabilitation process undertaken by the Two Oceans Aquarium are therefore of seminal importance. It is estimated that only about one marine turtle out of every one thousand baby turtles hatched survives to breeding age.