

# Endangered Species &

The killing and torture of a variety of animals and their species in the world today makes a long list, one which may either bore one or incense one enough to wake up and join the battle to protect them. Tigers, rhinoceros, elephants, great apes, bears, albatross, tortoises, whales, porpoises, dolphins, leopards... this critical roster goes on and on: endangered species which face extinction, in some cases within only a few years.

*'Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright  
In the forests of the night'*

may then be no reality, but only a myth. If so, it may be a devastating inner blow to the soul life of humanity and the environment. The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), which works for protection of endangered species, explains why we must save the tiger:

'The tiger stands at the pinnacle of its ecosystem and is a barometer of the well-being of the environment it inhabits. Its survival indicates a flourishing network of plants and animals. For this reason alone, the conservation of the tiger is a major contribution towards the conservation of the biodiversity on earth.' The EIA claims that the tiger would probably win the human vote for being the most magnificent animal on earth.

The EIA estimates that there are fewer than 5000 tigers left in the wild, although the remoteness of some areas makes it impossible to be certain.

Already now the Balinese, Javanese and Caspian tigers have become extinct. In India, home to two-thirds of the world's tigers, poachers kill one or two tigers a day. The driving force behind this is the trade in tiger bone and other parts used in traditional Chinese medicine.

About animals, Rudolf Steiner spoke from several standpoints and brought the revelation that they have an important purpose in relation to humanity (and not merely to be our food). Animals, he said, have the task to take into their nature, and thus remove from human beings, the animalistic passions and violence which would remain there if they did not fulfil this function. Surely this is a profound thought, that animals are connected to us in a non-physical, behavioural way. If this is so (and we shall consider this more deeply), what might happen when the tiger and other ferocious creatures are no longer on the physical plane? Will these qualities then turn back into hu-

manity, resulting in people, some people, becoming more vicious and violent? The ultimate answer to this may be 'yes'.

With regard to the rhinoceros, five species exist and all are close to extinction, again killed for their horn, for Chinese medicine and dagger handles. Asian rhino horn is now five times as valuable as gold. Another well-publicised example: 68 species of cetaceans are threatened today. Whales, dolphins and porpoises are killed all over the world in unregulated catches. In the Faroe Islands alone, where thousands of whales are killed yearly, the waters turn red while whales writhe in agony with harpoon blows. Some are still alive when they are



*The Siberian tiger: now threatened with extinction due to the relentless hunting for body parts*

hauled to the shore and hacked to pieces. In an essay entitled 'Dolphins, Children of the Sea', Dr Karl Konig, founder of the Camphill movement for people with special needs, states that the dolphin brain in its form and structure, also its convolutions, is remarkably similar to the human brain. The friendly and gentle dolphins are helpful and often assist man, having a close and special relationship to him. They also live in close relationship and co-operation with one another. 'Here lies one of the greatest tragedies of existence, in the destruction of creatures like the dolphin. In killing them we appear also to destroy an essence of ourselves. Others besides Konig have noted that in our willingness to kill and exploit the world's creatures, we learn behaviour which is all too often turned on other beings. As Indira Gandhi put it: 'Everything is related. Whatever happens now to animals will eventually happen to man'.<sup>6</sup>

The bear is another animal seriously vic-

timised, and many are killed by poachers for their gall bladders, which are also used in Chinese medicine; these organs are on sale throughout Asia. As occurs with other animals, when the species becomes rarer, the price of the product goes up, the rising price attracts more hunters, and the killing becomes more relentless. Many bears are also kept alive in cramped cages while their gall bladders are 'milked' for their bile, causing them great pain and distress. Cruel practices such as bear-baiting and making them walk on red-hot coals, to turn them into 'dancing bears' also still go on in the Orient. Today, many people are concerned about such cruelties, even if only a relatively small number – such as with the veal calf exporting – are prepared to take action.

Now this plight of the bear should touch us deeply. Dr Konig, writing about bears in an essay 'The Bear Tribe and its Myth', gave evidence that at the time of Atlantis, when the ice age began to set in, the bear was actually a human group. This relation to humanity can be that at one time the bear stood upright, as it still can to some extent today. Another near-human characteristic is that the bear can use its paws as hands. Long ago, 'people', so to speak, called Akkadians lived in the chilly far north of Atlantis. Then, the earth's axis moved and the North Pole shifted from the Bering Straits towards Greenland, and

the cold spread south. The Akkadians migrated south, east and west. Says Konig: 'Others, not feeling the unrest which the awakening power of thinking gave to their kin, began to make ready for the oncoming winter of the world. These were the incipient bear family... Towards the North Pole they became polar bears, further south they developed into brown bear, grizzly, and all the other kinds we know.'<sup>2</sup>

To elaborate on this, Rudolf Steiner said that in the animals we see our own past, going as far back as Atlantean times. He spoke of how a large part of present higher animals are in a certain sense human beings who were so entangled in their passions and instincts at that time that they became hardened, or densified, and could not evolve further. The consequence of this was that animals came into being and were, and remain, the expression of such thoughts (and passions) worked into a great tapestry of the world's fauna.