

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 for their gall bladders, which are used in Chinese medicine; these organs are in sale throughout Asia. As occurs with the animals, when the species becomes scarce the price of the product goes up and the price attracts more hunters, and the hunting becomes more relentless. Many bears are also kept alive in cramped cages with their gall bladders are 'milked' for their gall, causing them great pain and distress. Practices such as bear-baiting and making bears walk on red-hot coals, to turn them into 'dancing bears' also still go on in some extent. Today, many people are concerned about such cruelties, even if there is a relatively small number — such as those in the veal calf exporting — are beginning to take action.

Now this plight of the bear touches us deeply. Dr Konig writes about bears in an essay, 'The Bear Tribe and its Myth', going so far as to say that at the time of Atlantis, when the ice age began to set in, the bear was actually a human group. The connection to humanity can be that the bear stood upright, as we do to some extent today. Another human characteristic is that the bear can use its paws as hands. The bear is 'people', so to speak. In the legends, the ancients lived in the chilly far north of Atlantis. Then, the earth's axis tilted and the North Pole shifted towards the Bering Straits towards Greenland and the cold spread south. The Atlanteans migrated south, east and west. Some of them, 'Others, not feeling the unrest and the awakening power of thinking gods and kin, began to make ready for the coming winter of the world. These were the ancient bear family... Towards the North Pole they became polar bears, further south they developed into brown bear, grizzly bear and the other kinds we know'.<sup>2</sup>

To elaborate on this, Rudolf Steiner says that in the animals we see our nature going as far back as Atlantean times. He spoke of how a large part of present-day animals are in a certain sense human beings who were so entangled in material passions and instincts at that time that they became hardened, or densified, and could not evolve further. The consequence was that animals came into being and remained, the expressions of their thoughts (and passions) working in the great tapestry of the world's future.

# Man's Animality

by  
Virginia Gilmer

Steiner put it this way: 'The feelings experienced by an individual who looks about him with real understanding are as follows: In the course of becoming a human being I have passed through what I encounter today in the form of lions and snakes; I have lived in all these forms because my own inner being has been involved with the traits which are expressed in these animal forms'.<sup>3</sup>

We should see that true higher development means that humanity is capable of rising above animal nature in order that we can leave this inner centre intact so that there is only the possibility of these passions which are of a soul nature and that they do not erupt externally in an uncontrolled way. Thus in a certain sense in the many animals of the world, such as the present big cats, we see a genus who is a descendent which branched off from humanity aeons ago; we see our degenerated descendants who now carry, in a form of sacrifice, some of our animal qualities. These animals, in their instinctive behaviour, express passions, desires, which we are able to rise above; I say 'are able to', because it is not automatically the case; a degree of self-development is required, whether it is imposed from without, by society's norms, or by our own work.

Some serious questions could be asked in regard to our human attitude towards the animal kingdom, in light of what has been said here. We live in a times of many new ideas, and in which human consciousness is clearly changing, and on a massive scale. What is emerging as increased individuality for a growing number of people is bringing with it more awareness and feeling for human rights, the concerns for the environment and planetary consciousness, and all the organisations formed to focus attention on these problems. However, this also causes the other polarities to occur. The sense of individuality which arises from the separation of thinking, feeling and willing in human souls, can also result in highly dangerous people who, like wild, non-conformist animals, roam unchecked and without circumscription by those who might have enough authority to prevent their terrible undertakings.

Murders of dreadful proportions, child abuse, rape, terrorism and crime of all kinds remind us constantly that we are living ever more in times of tragic lawlessness, escalating despite the enhanced polarity of increased consciousness of responsi-

bility. Of course it can be argued that the world has always suffered from the violent offences mentioned above, but are we coming to a peak in these troubled times? I believe we are, and how does the increased slaughter, maiming and near extinction of our endangered animals work into the general scene of this loss of humanity? Will we experience more crime with the extinction or near depletion of tigers, rhinos, whales, dolphins etc., if they are not there to carry off our bad passions or to aid and befriend us in their helpful ways? It is also a question of what it means to the spiritual world when animals suffer at our hands. Certainly the hierarchies which have dominion over



*Vietnam, 1994, and frozen bear paw on sale at the Hoh Chi Min market; many other parts and organs are on offer*

the animal group souls and elementary beings who live within animals must be suffering with them as well. Said Rudolf Steiner:

'Consciousness... is the feeling of the ego which bears man up from below to higher things [which] speaks like a Voice of God in the sentient soul where otherwise only drives, desires and passions speak: and there it speaks with the force of a craving to do what is right, so as to pass on to the Higher Ego.'<sup>4</sup>

Rudolf Steiner has pointed to the fact that humanity presents a little world, that each one of us is a microcosm over against a macrocosm, containing all the secrets of the great world within us. Humanity, being born from nature, contains within itself the bird kingdom, lion kingdom, and those of the cows, cats, dogs and all other species. Thus the birds, which live in the element of air, the big cats in which the heart and circulatory forces predominate, and the cows, oxen, rhinos connected with the forces of weight, all these and the myriad others work to-

gether in humanity to form an harmonious whole.<sup>5</sup> It is part of our spiritual task now to wake up imaginatively in our thinking to what nature and these animal kingdoms spiritually represent. In the birds, for example, which fly through the sun irradiated atmosphere, their multi-coloured feathers correspond to what lives in humanity as a thinking capacity. We can picture the lion family, with its developed heart and breathing rhythm of the middle region as inspiring feeling and courage. We can look at the cows, oxen and rhinos as they digest their vegetation with the imagination that these animals of the depths are connected to what works in man as will forces, yet bearing a beautiful astral feeling of the cosmos in their digestive organs. This inner structural relationship to the representatives of the animal world can also be seen cosmically in the Zodiac, in the eight animal signs.

Bearing in mind that wherever we are, in the city or the country, animal kingdoms are working in us, and that we are connected inseparably with them, we human beings could wake up to the fact that we too are equally endangered, and at some future time may find ourselves close to extinction, and in a soul sense rather than that of the body. Many forces are obviously working to diminish people's sense of self-awareness and arouse passions – television, drugs, alcohol, sport and certain kinds of music. If we are in any way interested in protecting ourselves, and I stress 'our selves', perhaps we should also take more interest in the rights of animals.

'Creatures are ours to handle as we would touch the strings of a lyre, to intone a melodious song to God'.<sup>6</sup> ■

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1 *Penguins, Seals, Dolphins, Salmon and Eels*, Karl Konig, Floris Books 1984

2 *Elephants, Bears, Horses, Cats and Dogs*, Karl Konig, Floris Books 1992 pp 54

3 *Universe, Earth and Man*, R.Steiner, 'Animal Forms as Hardened Physiognomical Expressions of Human Passions,' 11/8/08, RSP 1987

4 *The Christ Impulse and the Development of Ego Consciousness*, 2 May 1910, AP, 1976

5 *Man as Symphony of the Creative Word*, lecture 1, Rudolf Steiner, RSP, 1970

6 *Fruits of Paradise, A Vegetarian Year Book*, Rebecca Hall, Simon & Schuster, London 1993

**Pictures courtesy of the Environmental Investigation Agency, London**