

Who Should Have Rights?

The human race has begun working to send people on a mission to Mars. A documentary on robots shown on CBC-TV, had people discussing a need to give robots rights, to prevent their abuse. My response to both of these developments is to ask what about Earth's animals? Why aren't we exploring more of the complexities of Earth? How can we give rights to mechanical creations when we don't recognize animals' rights to existence?

Why don't we care more about understanding how animals communicate, the depth of their feelings, the extent of their intelligence? A program on TVO about "supersmart" animals showed tool use among orangutans, and Night Herons who use bread as bait for fish; a jay that can solve a test problem at the level of a seven-year-old human; dolphins displaying creativity; an octopus that solved a problem it hadn't seen before; a sea lion completing a test before I understood it; and a chimp with better visual perception and memory than any human. That's right, any human known to the researchers. Yet most people think animals are dumb creatures to be used as we like.

And why should we inhabit or exploit for their resources, other places in the universe when we haven't figured out how to live on this Earth in

a just, peaceful and sustainable way? There are still places where women and minority groups don't yet have full human rights.

It seems wrong to ignore these challenges and opportunities while committing time, energy and money on outlandish projects.

Rights for Robots Before Animals?

Many people are committed to rights for animals. Nonhuman Rights Project has a Facebook page with more than 22,000 Likes. A Google search shows many sites dedicated to animal rights. And the millions of photos shared around the world on Facebook, of clever pets, soulful horses, cows and goats, human-like apes and monkeys, trusting whales and dolphins, and even clever birds, are helping people see that there is much more to animal life than we think we know. This can only be a good thing, perhaps signalling a vital evolutionary step in our presence on this planet.

I hope that a human visit to Mars is a long way off. But I believe that before we give rights to robots, we should ensure that animals have rights to natural habitats, safety, humane treatment and most of all, continued existence.



PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS

Seven Years Later

We published our first issue of this magazine in early 2008. A few copies of that issue are still available for sale. Now, seven years later, we're a valuable part of many people's lives. The time is right for a redesign of our magazine. A new version of our magazine cover logo and a revised layout of our pages were created by our new art director, Val Sanna. It's a fresh, bright look just in time for spring.

This is also the year that the Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment Plans come under review by the provincial government. Make sure your Member of Provincial Parliament knows your views on the Niagara Escarpment.

In This Issue

Our cover story by Chris Mills shows people tackling the very

rocks of the Escarpment itself, in the challenging sport of bouldering. They climb only the sides and undersides of boulders, to avoid disturbing the delicate growth that has found a niche on the tops of the rocks. And this rough activity does not attract men only. Women are prepared to risk their hands as well.

People who love getting their hands dirty will enjoy this annual special issue on gardening. We show the best of Mike Davis' photos from some garden tours from last year, as well as an in-depth peek inside a frankly gorgeous house and garden near Limehouse.

The famous conservationist John Muir loved the Niagara Escarpment before any of us were alive! Ken Haigh has written about Muir's time near Meaford along Georgian Bay in the 1860s, before he returned to the U.S. where he founded The Sierra Club and worked for the creation of national wilderness parks.

I invite you to take a break from your spring activities and draw inspiration from the newly designed pages of this issue. And as always, let us know what you think.

Alonia

P.S. As John Muir emphasized, all of us, especially wild animals, need wild spaces.

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