

## Case 6: Destroying Wildlife To Save It

In the Pacific Northwest and Northern California, which is the habitat of the rare spotted owl, the Fish and Wildlife Service has authorized the shooting of 3600 barred owls. The barred owl is not a threatened species and is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.<sup>26</sup> These more aggressive owls are believed to be the cause of the spotted owl's near-extinction. Though the Fish and Wildlife Service came to its decision with the help of biologists and an ethicist, Friends of Animals (an advocacy group) is suing to stop the killings. According to Michael Harris, Legal Director for Friends of Animals, it is preferable to "allow these species to either figure out a way to coexist or for nature to run its course."

A similar quandary has arisen in New York. The mute swan - a majestic bird that glides on many of New York State's lakes and ponds - may be intentionally exterminated by 2025. Though visually striking, the mute swan is an invasive species and has altered the native ecosystem. The proponents of eliminating the swans claim the birds destroy the vegetation on which other species feed, and may be responsible for the dwindling population of black terns. Still, the State of New York has had to face several critics. David Karopkin, founder of GooseWatch, explains that in 1970 there were 1000 swans in New York, while today there are 2200 - hardly the explosive growth that one might expect of a species labeled "invasive."<sup>27</sup> Though Karopnik is not a swan-fan (he notes swans' aggressive nature), there are many who are. Defenders of the mute swan have collected signatures to keep the swans in place and have argued that, if the State of New York wants to prevent habitat-destruction, it should focus its energies on human development.

However, the most strident outcry over the destruction of wildlife as a means for conservation was elicited by the auctioning of a permit to kill a black rhino.<sup>28</sup> The highest bidder was an American hunter, who paid \$350,000 to kill one of the last 5,000 remaining black rhinos in the world. The purpose of the auction was to raise a large sum of money for rhino conservation in Namibia, whose national commitment to wildlife conservation is inscribed in its constitution. Though it is clear that a large influx of cash could positively impact the preservation of black rhinos, the auction has encountered widespread criticism. Anthropology professor Barbara King has called for "compassionate conservation," which stresses the intrinsic value of each individual member of a species. Likewise, Dr. Mark Bekoff, an expert in animal emotions, criticized

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<sup>26</sup> Eliabeth Shogren, "To Save Threatened Owl, Another Species Is Shot," NPR, January 16, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/15/262735123/to-save-threatened-owl-another-species-is-shot>

<sup>27</sup> Margot Adler, "A Plan To Eliminate Wild Mute Swans Draws Vocal Opposition," NPR, March 11, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2014/03/11/288751372/a-plan-to-eliminate-wild-mute-swans-draws-vocal-opposition>

<sup>28</sup> Barbara King, "Why We Need Compassionate Conservation," NPR, January 13, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2014/01/13/261230612/why-we-need-compassionate-conservation>

the philosophy underlying these conservation efforts: "Killing animals to save others sets a bad example and a regrettable precedent and is not the way to foster peaceful coexistence."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Marc Bekoff, "Black Rhino Auctioned in the Name of Conservation," Psychology Today, January 12, 2014, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/animal-emotions/201401/black-rhino-auctioned-350k-in-the-name-conservation>