



the voice for all animals

October 1999

ISSN 1171-6320

editorial



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SAFE Publications

Published bi-annually in between two Campaign Reports produced by SAFE's Christchurch office. SAFE welcomes contributions of letters, articles, news, photographs, illustrations, poems etc. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of SAFE Inc.

What is SAFE?

Founded in the late 1930's, SAFE is New Zealand's leading national organisation campaigning for the rights of all animals. SAFE undertakes a diverse range of educational programmes that help educate the public about how they can help stop animal suffering and exploitation.

With over 2,000 members and a small group of dedicated campaigners, SAFE undertakes public stalls, displays, protests, meetings, educational visits, research, promotional and publicity events to help the cause. The more people become aware of how our lives affect the lives of animals and take action, the less likely animals and the environment will have to suffer.

To join SAFE or to renew your membership, complete the order form on the inside back page.

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Anthony Terry



Changing the *status* of animals

**"THEY ARE NOT OUR
PROPERTY, WE ARE
NOT THEIR OWNERS"**

THROUGHOUT HISTORY it is language, together with action, that has stood at the forefront of progress and victory. It is undeniably an influential and powerful medium of communication. Many liberation movements, in their struggle for equality, have challenged society's views and language; arguing both can be equally oppressive. It is easy to overlook the implications of our language and this is no more profound than in the animal liberation movement.

Many common terms and references we use to refer to animals, as innocent as they may seem, continue to reinforce negative connotations towards them. For example, "owner", "ownership", "master" and "pet" are all fairly demeaning and encourage people to consider animals as property rather than sentient beings. To quote Ingrid Newkirk, President of *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*, one of America's most notable animal protection organisations; "As long as people treat animals as toys, possessions and commodities, rather than as individuals with feelings, widespread neglect and abuse is destined to continue."

SAFE has recently joined a coalition of over 120 international animal protection organisations supporting a campaign derived from the notion that our language is causing incalculable harm to animals. The "They are not our property, we are not their owners" campaign is being co-ordinated by US-based group *In Defence of Animals*. It is based on the premise that virtually all animal abuse and exploitation can be linked to the universal status of animals as property.

In fact, even our legal system regards animals as exactly that — property. As the "owner" of a dog, for instance, the law upholds your legal right to kill the dog so long as it is done humanely. If your neighbour took the dog to a vet and had it destroyed, the likely charge would only be theft. Our justice system fails miserably on moral or ethical considerations for animals. Animals without "owners" not deemed

"protected" or 'endangered' have even less protection. In an unprecedented case in the US, a judge overturned instructions left in a will that requested the owner's two horses be killed upon his death. The "owner", it seemed, was sparing the horses from any possible pending inhumane treatment. The judge ruled in favour of the horses, citing the request was more a death sentence, which might be perceived cruel in its own right. This landmark judgement gave consideration to the horses over the "owner's" rights.

Judge Susan Fowler cited this statement in her ruling: "In the Seventeenth century, Africans brought into the United States were bought and sold as chattel. During the same period, women, once married, became the property of their husbands. Possibly the biggest barrier to the exertion of rights by either group was their status as property. By definition, this categorisation relegated both slaves and married women to a position with few legally cognisable rights."

As part of a global mission to change the status of animals, SAFE has pledged to replace 'oppressive' terms with words like guardian, companion, friend, or caretaker. In doing so we will help promote that animals are individuals with needs, wants and rights. Please join SAFE in supporting the "Animals — They are not our property" campaign. It is time we acknowledged humans are more closely related to non-human animals than we are to our worldly possessions, and they should be treated accordingly.

Finally, we are delighted to offer you another exciting SAFE magazine crammed full of diversity, insight and know-how. Make sure you check out our main feature story on genetic engineering and why animals pay the highest price. If you haven't already ordered some raffle tickets for SAFE's national fundraising raffle, then now's your chance. There are some great prizes and if we're to sell all the tickets we need you. Until next edition, watch your language!

Terry, Anthony. *Changing the Status of Animals*. SAFE Magazine (formerly Safeguard). October. © 1999.

