

Care-full stories: Story 6: Wild thing

November 2022



Instructions

Aim:

To explore the complications around translating care for animals in the lab to a wildlife context; the cultural, institutional, and international differences that play a role in that; how welfare is measured differently.

Setting:

Two friends meeting together in a café after an extended period apart.

Characters:

Two researchers. One works with monkeys in a lab, the other conducts research in the field with baboons.

Set up:

In person:

Two people sitting in chairs in a relaxed fashion.

Zoom:

Maintain the in-person scenario.



2



Script

Lab Researcher: Hi!! I'm so excited to see you! I can't believe it's been a year already! So happy to have you back, even if it's just for a week!

Wildlife Researcher: You too! Sorry it's such a flying visit! Just have time for the conference and then heading back to the baboons. How are things here? All your monkeys doing ok? What's your project on again?

Lab Researcher: Alzheimer's. It's going really well. I'm finally a Licence Holder and I'm in the new lab facilities now. The housing for the macaques is excellent. But tell me about you! You've talked about doing wildlife research since our undergrad and now you are, it's so exciting.

Wildlife Researcher: It's very different to lab work, that's for sure! I love it. I will tell you all about it but first could you help me look at a part of my presentation for the conference real quick?

Lab Researcher: Of course!

Wildlife Researcher: Great, thanks. So, it's just Slide 5.

Lab Researcher: Hang on – maybe you could just give me an outline of your project first?

Wildlife Researcher: Sure. The work I do is partly ecology and species observation, so age structure, sizes, spatial ecology, social elements and so on. But also conservation, which goes along with handling conflicts between the baboons and the local population, finding ways of stopping them going into urban areas, raiding, causing injury, that kind of thing.

Lab Researcher: Wow, I didn't realise that was a thing.

Wildlife Researcher: It's a big problem actually. And they can be very aggressive. We apply several different measures to deter them, but if a baboon continues repeatedly to cause issues or harm, then we have to euthanize it. Anyway, on slide 5 I outline -

Lab Researcher: Wait, just a second, if an animal is healthy, should you euthanise it? I mean, I know I'm not exactly in physical danger from my monkeys, so perhaps I can't relate but...



3



Wildlife Researcher: There are several procedures in place to reach that decision. It's not taken lightly. There's a slightly different balance to be struck in the wild that doesn't exactly exist in the lab. So, slide 5 -

Lab Researcher: I guess it would be different if the animal was sick...

Wildlife Researcher: We can't always interfere in that situation, from an ecological perspective.

Lab Researcher: Really? That feels a bit contradictory. So you can kill them if they're a nuisance but not if they're ill? Don't you have to do welfare assessments? I'm sure legally even in the wild you have an obligation not to let an animal suffer ...

Wildlife Researcher: Look, you have to think of the context. It's a balance between looking at the individual animal versus looking at the species as a whole. Welfare assessments require you to take responsibility for individual animals. You can't easily apply that in the wild.

Lab Researcher: I mean, I understand that you can't have a vet on call 24 hours a day, like we essentially do with the macaques -

Wildlife Researcher: No, exactly. You have that in the lab and you can monitor the monkeys' welfare and intervene as necessary, to alleviate pain or suffering. But you can't do that with wild baboons ... that's what being wild means, doesn't it - going it alone? If we start intervening too much it can ruin the research.

Lab Researcher: I just think it's important to protect any animal from harm, wild or not. You know, care for them. Isn't that a big part of the 'culture of care' thing? Like they talked about in our undergraduate ethics course?

Wildlife Researcher: Of course, and we do care for them as best we can. At home, we'd legally have to do something if we caught a sick or injured animal. As it was we had to get our project approved by our local ethical review body because we are anaesthetising the animals and taking blood samples. But what you have to remember is that 'culture of care' will mean different things to different people and in different contexts.

Lab Researcher: It just seems very different from how things are done back here in the lab!

Wildlife Researcher: It is. It's just very layered. We are working for the good of the species and it means we have to work differently.

Lab Researcher: Mmmm.



Wildlife Researcher: Ok, right, putting Slide 5 to the side for a minute, let's put it this way: your whole department is all about the culture of care. You have guidelines and procedures set up that everyone is on board with. But out in the field, abroad, we can't always impose what we think is the right way of doing things. Our collaborators on location, they've been working with baboons for years and have ways of doing things and their own perspectives, and knowledge that we don't have.

Lab Researcher: But surely it's better to do whatever causes the animal the least suffering? That's the right thing to do.

Wildlife Researcher: Depends on what you mean by right. For example, I had an idea for refining the way we collect the blood samples, a quicker one, reducing the time we needed to put the animals under. But we couldn't do it. Our collaborators explained the reasons they did it their way, and the complications with getting the right equipment on location and stuff like that.

Lab Researcher: Can't your managers help change anything?

Wildlife Researcher: Often it's just me and one other junior researcher from our team out there. It's not like I can just wander down the corridor and share my concerns with my Principal Investigator. Actually, it can feel pretty isolated sometimes.

Lab Researcher: Oh. That sounds tough.

Wildlife Researcher: Yeah, it can be challenging and upsetting, but listen, can we please just agree that things work differently and look at slide 5?

Lab Researcher: Of course, sure, I'm sorry to have got stuck on this! I didn't mean to imply that it's lab versus wildlife and that one is better than the other, I was just curious and-

Wildlife Researcher: No, it's fine, it's an interesting point. And I know you love a good discussion, it's one of the things I've missed most! I'll explain more later, I promise, but for now -

Lab Researcher: Slide 5!

Both exit / turn off screens

****End of script****



5



Discussion prompts:

1. Can a culture of care be applied universally? What are your experiences of this?
2. What different pressures exist in different research environments?
3. How might elements such as gender, culture and experience influence how a culture of care is applied in different settings?
4. What is the role of the ethical review body in promoting and supporting a culture of care?
5. What is the role of the Principal Investigator in promoting and supporting a culture of care?
6. Who else is responsible for promoting and supporting a culture of care?



6



Acknowledgements

The Care-full Stories Project was led by Prof Beth Greenhough (beth.greenhough@ouce.ox.ac.uk), with assistance from Hibba Mazhary and Dr Manuel Berdoy, and supported by the University of Oxford's KE Seed Fund (KCD00043), ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (2105-KICK-666) and the Wellcome-Trust funded Animal Research Nexus programme (WT205393/A) www.animalresearchnexus.org. We would also like to thank the following collaborators who have helped to guide and facilitate this work: Angela Kerton (The Learning Curve Development Ltd.), Sally Robinson (CRUK, Animals in Science Committee AWERB Hub Subgroup Chair), Lucy Whitfield (OWL Vets Ltd.), Sara Wells, Mark Gardiner and Jackie Harrison (Mary Lyon Centre, MRC Harwell), Jordi Lopez-Tremoleda (QMUL), Penny Hawkins (Animals in Science Department, RSPCA), James Bussell (University of Oxford) and Ida Berglöw Kenneway.



7

