

The human relationship with non-human animals is damaged. This breakdown between humans and the natural world can be evidenced by the current COVID-19 pandemic which has devastated the human race in many different ways (Goodall 2020, as quoted by Diprose and Neal 2020). Fundamentally, pandemics occur due to the diversity of microbes on the planet and how humans relate to nature determines how we encounter these microbes (IPBES 2020). One of the factors driving emergence of zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19 is the exposure to these microbes through wildlife (IPBES 2020).

The Wildlife Act of 1975 predominantly serves the interest of those who can 'use' wildlife as though they are some property and not living/breathing/thinking/feeling beings. This can be seen by the inconsistency of penalty units for breaches of the legislation. When harming wildlife is seen as less of a crime than being on a state game reserve before 10am during the duck shooting season, you can see how obvious this is. However, another point to consider is that when we allow humans to take from nature, to serve their own interests, we place those humans in the way of potential harm for issues such as exposing them to zoonotic diseases. Further to this, there are examples where wildlife has been shown to be toxic and are still able to be killed for consumption. An example is that duck shooters are allowed to kill and consume native ducks who have been shown to have high levels of PFAS in their system with the potential to cause serious health concerns for those that ingest the animal.

It is predicted that it is just a matter of time before the next novel zoonotic disease will emerge (Iseron 2020). We are yet to learn what issues humans will face as urbanisation continues to destroy habitat and drive wildlife into closer proximity to each other, reducing diversity. Further to this, it increases the proximity of wildlife to humans. Humans have a great opportunity to learn from COVID-19 and take proactive measures in planetary and human health, as well as through changes in our relationship with nature and animals. These preventative measures would not only improve the outcomes of human health in the advent of any future pandemic but would also have considerable positive impacts on other aspects of planetary health such as biodiversity, ecosystem conservation and climate change.

The recommendation is to just leave wildlife alone! When there are cases where humans need to intervene, make sure it is by trained individuals for the purpose of protecting and conserving wildlife, not harming them for their own sake. The legislation should seek to actually protect and conserve wildlife like it states that its purpose is, rather than protect wildlife abusers. This will ultimately reduce the exposure to potential zoonotic diseases.

## References

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