

# Animal ethics and animal behavioral science—bridging the gap

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The moral status of animals is an important emerging topic for society, one that is leading to significant changes at academic, political, and legal levels in both wealthy and developing nations. However, some fields, such as animal behavioral science, have remained relatively aloof, despite producing evidence that is deeply enmeshed in animal ethics arguments.

Writing in the journal *BioScience*, an interdisciplinary group of scholars urges animal behavior scientists to position themselves more actively in the growing ethical conversation. The authors maintain that a greater integration between animal ethics and behavior communities will be valuable for both ethical and pragmatic reasons.

Coauthor Christine Webb, an animal behavior scientist at Harvard University, explains that "while it is commonplace for animal behavior scientists to emphasize the conservation implications of their work, other broader impacts related to the moral standing of animals are emphasized relatively less in their public outreach. However, scientists have a [social responsibility](#) to proactively engage with the ethical debates that are informed by their evidence." To highlight how such engagement may benefit ethical theory and practice, coauthor Peter Woodford, an assistant professor of religion, science, and philosophy at Union College, said, "Greater scientific understanding of [animals](#) has and undeniably will continue to raise some of the most important questions for us today regarding the scope and nature of morality."

Coauthor Elise Huchard, a behavioral ecologist at the University of Montpellier/CNRS adds that more integration between science and philosophy in turn "may encourage scientists to embark on new research about the nature of animal minds, question the anthropocentric legacy of behavioral studies, and enrich other aspects of their scientific practices through a more careful consideration of animal interests and subjectivity."

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