

Foreword

I have had the good fortune to work on a diverse range of animals, from large mammalian carnivores to tiny passerines and much in between, using all manner of techniques to catch, tag, track and sample, in several states and territories. Many different animal ethics committees have therefore guided the proper consideration of this work and its methodological detail, and the reckoning of the work's outcomes against the costs to the individual animals involved. The oversight of animal ethics committees is critical for aligning the practice of wildlife research with community expectations, and embedding respect and care for living things.

And yet – animal ethics committees can seem idiosyncratic and confusing. I recall one committee that preferred me to voucher animals rather than pluck a few hairs for genetic analysis to determine the species. They considered the discomfort and stress of hair plucking more detrimental to the animal's welfare than humanely killing it, and were less concerned about the moral issue of causing death. (I recall thinking that the small mammals probably had the opposite view, and therefore did neither hair sampling nor vouchering.) Years later, a different ethics committee refused an application to estimate the population density of invasive black rats using kill traps, in a situation where these pest animals were causing native species to decline to extinction, and where managers were therefore killing them in large numbers with poison bait. Here, the committee considered that the welfare and rights of the individual rats prevailed over the potential benefits of the research.

Many of us who work in wildlife conservation have experienced decisions like these, that challenge us to think deeply about ethics and morality. The first section

of this book sheds light on these perplexities – explaining that committees need to operate in differing state- and territory-based legislative contexts, grapple with the tension between different ethical theories, and also represent rapidly changing community perspectives. The second section of the book is an astonishingly thorough and up-to-date compendium of wildlife survey, monitoring and research techniques, even covering emerging techniques, such as drones, guardian dogs, thermal cameras and acoustic monitors. The book goes so much further than a methods manual, because it integrates this information with the specific welfare considerations each method evinces. New approaches for data gathering, such as wildlife selfies, and various citizen science initiatives, which may cause novel impacts on wildlife, are also discussed. The third section of the book comes from a different angle again, now organising methods and welfare issues into bundles that are more relevant to different animal groups. The combination of the three main book sections makes the material extremely accessible and well-structured.

The opening chapters talk about the importance of open and frequent communication between wildlife biologists and ethics committees; this book is an invaluable resource for that dialogue. It is essentially a two-way dictionary between committee members and field biologists, and will support greater consistency and higher standards across ethics committees and researchers alike. An incredible piece of collaborative work!

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