

Wild Animal Initiative's Reporting of Programs (2020)

This document contains responses written by the charity. ACE has made no content changes other than the removal of confidential information.

Program 1

Program name: Community Strategy

Date commenced: 5 Jan 2019

Description:

[We wrote a [brief introduction to our programs and impact metrics](#) to provide context for our responses below. We recommend reading it before reading the program tables.]

Our community strategy program seeks to optimize our collective impact by coordinating the actions of those who support our vision for wild animal welfare: organizations working on wild animal welfare, effective farmed animal advocacy organizations that research animal welfare, and animal welfare proponents more broadly (animal advocates, conservationists, veterinarians, effective altruists, wildlife rehabilitators, etc.).

Under our community strategy program, we:

- Hold monthly calls with leaders of Animal Ethics (AE) and Rethink Priorities (RP) to share updates and discuss common challenges.
- Organize the sharing of quarterly research updates between WAI, AE, and RP.
- Co-organize an annual Wild Animal Welfare Summit that includes WAI, AE, RP, and effective farmed animal advocacy organizations that conduct or support animal welfare research.
- Solicit feedback from and give feedback to AE, RP, and effective farmed animal advocacy organizations on relevant research publications.
- Present our work and host discussions at conferences and events hosted by allied communities.

Through these efforts, we hope to:

- Select complementary research projects that allow each group to play to their strengths and avoid redundancy (except where replication is useful and intentional).
- Pursue complementary messaging strategies that appeal to different audiences.
- Foster a diversity of approaches while avoiding unilateral actions that have major preventable consequences for the rest of the wild animal welfare movement.
- Grow the pool of potential collaborators, employees, and donors with a deep understanding of our approach to wild animal welfare.

Although we generally hope to broaden our coalition as much as possible, we decline to work with individuals and organizations who fail to uphold our high standards for ethical interpersonal conduct. Please see our [Collaboration Policy](#) for details on what we ask of collaborators and when we decline to collaborate.

How do you measure the outcomes of this program?

Our primary measure of success is the absence or minimization of negative outcomes such as:

- Allied organizations unknowingly conducting redundant research or pursuing redundant programs (that is, without deciding that replication, diversity, or scale would be worthwhile).
- Wild animal welfare organizations reporting that the messaging or strategy of other wild animal welfare organizations is damaging their own efforts.
- One organization executing a project or program that an allied organization would have done predictably better and on a similar or shorter time scale.

Our general goal is to minimize resources spent on this program while eliminating such negative outcomes. Once that is achieved, we may choose to increase resource allocation to this program proportional to the value of positive outcomes we observe:

- As a result of a community strategy conversation, WAI, AE, or RP undertake new projects, shift our/their messaging, or pursue different strategies.
- As a result of a community strategy conversation, an animal welfare or conservation organization undertakes a new project relevant to wild animal welfare that they would not have otherwise.
- WAI updates our approach to a research project because of what we learn from a community strategy conversation.
- Talks we give lead to new donors, job applicants, or collaborators.
- Talks we give lead to community spread of our preferred messaging and ideas around wild animal welfare.

We track outcomes such as those listed above through annual calls with our community partners and through feedback surveys sent out after events organized by Wild Animal Initiative. Our [Impact Measurement Plan](#) further details the particular metrics and processes we plan to use to track the success of this program. Like all our programs, we will hold an annual meeting and produce a program reflection document to review the successes and failures of the research program and guide our strategic planning and investment for the next year.

Do you collaborate with other organizations in this program?

Organizations in parentheses are organizations we have worked with in this program so far. We expect to work with other similar organizations in the future.

- Wild animal welfare nonprofits (Animal Ethics and Rethink Priorities): WAI, AE, and RP share research plans and organizational updates, discuss messaging and strategy, and solicit and give feedback on research.
- Effective farmed animal advocacy nonprofits with research activities (Animal Charity Evaluators, Aquatic Life Institute, Charity Entrepreneurship, Farmed Animal Funders, Faunalytics, Fish Welfare Initiative, The Humane League, Open Philanthropy): At the Wild Animal Welfare Summit and in ad-hoc meetings, WAI shares our perspective on wild animal welfare issues and we collectively coordinate research plans when working in related areas.
- Effective altruism groups (Center for Effective Altruism, EA Brown University, EA Durham, EA MIT, EA NYC, Effective Environmentalism [an online discussion group], the Impact Fellowship [an EA-aligned seminar for computer science undergraduate students]): WAI gives presentations and hosts discussions on wild animal welfare at events hosted by these groups.
- Other wildlife groups (Botstiber Institute, Conservation Optimism, Society for Ecological Restoration, American Veterinary Medical Association Convention, and others): We attend conferences and webinars, share our research and approach, and call attention to common ground.

What are your top 5 biggest outcomes for this program prior to 2019?

Because Wild Animal Initiative was founded in 2019, this program does not have any outcomes prior to 2019.

Program 2

Program name: Research

Date commenced: 5 Jan 2019

Description:

Our research team conducts and publishes original wild animal welfare research in order to launch conversations we would like to see continued in the wild animal welfare research community, and to provide proof-of-concept for the publishability of similar work.

Our research projects have included literature reviews, modeling articles, theory articles, and opinion articles. We publish our research in peer-reviewed journals when it fits clearly within existing disciplines or methods. We self-publish our research when it is highly interdisciplinary or speculative.

The goals of our research program are to:

- Demonstrate the diversity of possible research directions in wild animal welfare.
- Highlight key themes and methods that we expect to be important to identifying programs that can help as many wild animals as possible.
- Connect wild animal welfare research to better-known research areas.
- Attract and identify researchers that have high potential for our outreach program.

In keeping with our focus on field-building, direct impact on wild animals is rarely a primary consideration in our research prioritization. We believe the quickest way to improve the lives of wild animals at scale is to accelerate the growth of the wild animal welfare research community, so we prioritize a project's potential for field-building over its potential to help wild animals in the short term.

How do you measure the outcomes of this program?

Each year, the research program manager will update bibliometric data for each of our published papers. Our broader sense of each research project's impact will rely more on staff's qualitative assessments of its successes and failures, but will also be informed by formally and informally surveying our audience on the counterfactual impact of our research on their engagement with wild animal welfare. After publication of a particular research project, a few metrics pertaining to the research project itself will be assessed and the research group will meet to discuss how the project went, as well as how similar projects can be improved in the future.

Our [Impact Measurement Plan](#) further details the particular metrics we plan to use to track the success of this program. Like all our programs, we will hold an annual meeting and produce a

program reflection document to review the successes and failures of the research program and guide our strategic planning and investment for the next year.

We hope to launch such a survey later this year.

Do you collaborate with other organizations in this program?

We consider our research collaborations to be part of our community strategy and outreach programs. Please refer to those sections for details.

What are your top 5 biggest outcomes for this program prior to 2019?

Because Wild Animal Initiative was founded in 2019, this program does not have any outcomes prior to 2019.

Program 3

Program name: Outreach

Date commenced: 5 Jan 2020

Description:

Our outreach program cultivates relationships with external academic researchers.

To do this, we:

- Give talks, present posters, attend workshops, and network at academic conferences.
- Reach out directly to academics with expertise relevant to our research projects.
- Solicit input or manuscript review from academics.
- Co-author papers with academics.
- Invite academics to serve on our [Advisory Panel](#).

The goal of our outreach program is to:

- Discover academics who have the potential to contribute to wild animal welfare research and community-building.

- Build mutually beneficial relationships with academics by offering them low-cost ways to contribute to wild animal welfare research and become familiar with its goals and methods.
- Identify competent and mission-aligned academics who have potential for our grant assistance program.

How do you measure the outcomes of this program?

We maintain records of each external researcher with whom we are in contact. As part of these records, we estimate qualities such as a researcher’s ability and disposition to contribute to wild animal welfare research, their current or future standing in their field, and their alignment with viewpoints we think could be important for wild animal welfare. We also keep track of how many new connections we initially made through our other programs — for example, did any researchers make unsolicited contact with us after reading an article we published? We evaluate the impact of our outreach program primarily through seeing how contacts’ level of engagement with wild animal welfare changes over time, but we also keep track of how many contacts we have made (both unweighted and weighted by expected contribution of that contact to improving wild animal welfare).

Our [Impact Measurement Plan](#) further details the particular metrics we plan to use to track the success of this program. Like all our programs, we will hold an annual meeting and produce a program reflection document to review the successes and failures of the outreach program and guide our strategic planning and investment for the next year.

Do you collaborate with other organizations in this program?

This program involves collaborating with researchers from a variety of academic institutions. Occasionally it also includes researchers at non-academic nonprofits, such as Workshop For All Beings (Poland).

What are your top 5 biggest outcomes for this program prior to 2019?

Because Wild Animal Initiative was founded in 2019, this program does not have any outcomes prior to 2019.

Program 4

Program name: Grant Assistance

Date commenced: Trial phase started in June 2019. Officially launched in February 2020.

Description:

Our grant assistance program helps promising researchers secure funding for wild animal welfare research projects.

As part of this program, we:

- Work with researchers to develop or tailor proposals that fit their expertise, answer questions relevant to wild animal welfare, and conform as much as possible to anti-speciesist research methods.
- Connect researchers to funders interested in wild animal welfare research.
- Advise researchers on applying for wild animal welfare research funding from mainstream science funders.
- Launch crowdfunding projects on behalf of researchers participating in the program.
- Help funders evaluate wild animal welfare research funding proposals.

The goals of this program are to:

- Leverage external expertise to conduct wild animal welfare research.
- Leverage other funding sources to fund wild animal welfare research.
- Demonstrate the viability of wild animal welfare research to funders.
- Demonstrate the sustainability of careers in wild animal welfare to researchers.
- Lower the barrier to participation in wild animal welfare research.
- Build a large diverse funding environment that can sustain a thriving wild animal welfare research field.

How do you measure the outcomes of this program?

Our grant assistance program collects data at five stages throughout a project's lifecycle, through five Google forms. We use this data to estimate how our program improved the quality and expected impact of researchers' proposals, and any counterfactual effect we had on the funding researchers obtain. We also record how animals or stakeholders are affected by assisted projects. Upon publication of assisted projects we ask researchers to optionally disclose information pertinent to their identity to us, which allows us to look closely at how our grant assistance program affects people belonging to different identity groups.

Our [Impact Measurement Plan](#) further details the particular metrics we plan to use to track the success of this program. Like all our programs, we will hold an annual meeting and produce a

program reflection document to review the successes and failures of the grant assistance program and guide our strategic planning and investment for the next year.

Do you collaborate with other organizations in this program?

We help academic and other nonprofit researchers apply for grants. In the future, we plan to experiment with facilitating crowdfunding through Experiment.com. Collaborators to date have included Dr. Samniqueka Halsey at the University of Missouri (grant won), Dr. Davide Dominoni at the University of Glasgow (grant won), Dr. Steven Juliano at Illinois State University, and the Polish nonprofit Workshop For All Beings.

We also advise funders on the usefulness and scientific validity of wild animal welfare grant proposals.

What are your top 5 biggest outcomes for this program prior to 2019?

Because Wild Animal Initiative was founded in 2019, this program does not have any outcomes prior to 2019.

How does your organization's work fit into the overall animal advocacy movement?

We share a common cause with everyone working to change human behaviors, institutions, and technologies for the greater good of nonhuman animals.

A. What we have gained from the rest of the animal advocacy movement

We're grateful for the emotional, operational, and programmatic support we have received from other effective animal advocacy (EAA) organizations. Here are just some of the ways we've benefited from that support:

- Many animal advocacy organizations have actively participated in our community strategy program (see Community Strategy program description above).
- Although Encompass is focused on supporting the farmed animal advocacy movement, they have made a clear effort to share diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) knowledge and opportunities with us whenever it wouldn't detract from their core mission. For example, they invited WAI Executive Director Michelle Graham to their 2020 DEI Institute and included her [reflections](#) in their series "Encompass Essays: Pursuing Racial Equity in Animal Advocacy."
- Staff from many animal advocacy organizations (including but not limited to Animal Charity Evaluators, Compassion in World Farming, the Good Food Institute, The Humane League,

Open Philanthropy, and Rethink Priorities) have shared their operations, communications, and development expertise to improve the efficacy of our work.

- As soon as it became clear that our staff was better positioned to complete a research project Animal Ethics had received a grant for, Animal Ethics promptly regranted us the remainder of the funds to support our work on the project. (See their initial work [here](#) and our continuation of it [here](#).)
- Animal Care Sanctuary, a shelter in East Smithfield, Pennsylvania, executed a field experiment on our behalf as part of the Compassionate Cat Grant project.

B. What we contribute to the rest of the animal advocacy movement

At every opportunity, we aim to reciprocate the emotional, operational, and programmatic support that other animal advocacy organizations have so generously given us.

To the extent that we are successful in our mission, we will also contribute to the rest of the animal advocacy movement in the following ways:

1. **Wild animal welfare research normalizes anti-speciesism.** By targeting academics, our outreach encourages concern for animal welfare in a community that has not historically prioritized the topic. By supporting highly rigorous research, we increase the chances that this concern can be translated into public policy. It may even be the case that people are more open to anti-speciesism in the context of wildlife management than in the context of food production, because their personal habits and identities are less strongly tied to management practices than they are to diets.
2. **Wild animal welfare research can be useful to other areas of animal advocacy.** Some of the field's major research questions are how to measure animal welfare, how different experiences affect animals of a given species, and how to compare experiences across species. This knowledge can directly inform which reforms will most reduce farmed animal suffering. For example, Wild Animal Initiative Research Fellow Dr. Will Bradshaw researched the potential use of aging biomarkers as an objective metric of cumulative welfare, and has highlighted [the relevance of this approach to layer chicken welfare reforms](#).
3. **Wild animal welfare research creates an opportunity to extend EAA principles to parts of the broader animal movement that have yet to maximize the effectiveness of their efforts.** Animal Charity Evaluators has helped spearhead the movement to optimize the impact of animal donors' dollars and animal organizations' operations. These efforts have focused on farmed animal welfare for good reason. However, there remain donors and organizations who are exclusively positioned to work on wildlife or environmental issues. Wild Animal Initiative's work offers a framework for wildlife stewardship based on the EAA principles of prioritization, evidence-based action, and counterfactual reasoning. The research we support will also lead to the identification of novel programs that could be at

least comparably cost-effective to farmed animal welfare programs and appeal to actors positioned to work exclusively on wildlife.

4. **Accelerating wild animal welfare research immediately is essential to making informed decisions about how to repurpose land formerly used for animal agriculture.** Ending animal farming seems like a necessary step to orienting human society toward anti-speciesist action over the long term. However, it is not yet certain whether the net effect of ending animal farming will be positive in the medium term (that is, over the next decades or centuries). As we transition away from animal agriculture, huge portions of the earth's surface will be transformed to different land uses: away from pasture, feed production, and feedlots and toward urban development, cash crop production, carbon sequestration, or unmanaged wildlands[1]. We know that different habitat types support vastly different types and quantities of wild animals, but we do not yet know which land uses are most conducive to wild animal welfare. Because wild animals are so numerous (especially if invertebrates are included) and their lives can be so challenging, it is possible that the land uses replacing animal agriculture could contain more suffering than currently exists in the factory farming system. Even if the net effect is positive, the magnitude of that effect will be highly dependent on land use changes that may lock in during the transition period and be hard to change later. For example, if abandoned pasture gets immediately designated as a national park, we may lose the opportunity to restore it or transition it to a novel ecosystem that better supports wild animal welfare. Wild animal welfare research will therefore help advocates clarify their vision for what a world without animal agriculture should look like and what kind of transition we should support in order to help the greatest number of wild animals.

[1] For example, see Chapron et al. 2014 (Science) for a discussion of how the abandonment of agricultural land in Europe has led to a resurgence of wild ungulate and large carnivore populations. https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/929104.Chapron_2014.pdf

C. How we envision sharing resources with our allies

One of the concerns we have about our work is the extent to which it will compete for resources with farmed animal advocacy.

Given the scale and neglectedness of wild animal suffering, as well as the tractability of identifying “low-hanging fruit” programs to directly help wild animals, we believe that wild animal welfare research is one of the best investments any donor can make today.

However, we see the success of the farmed animal advocacy movement as immensely important in its own right and fundamentally beneficial to the success of our own mission. We also appreciate the time-sensitivity of the political, technological, and social windows of opportunity that are currently open for farmed animal advocacy. For these reasons, we are committed to growing in a direction where we are minimally reliant on donations that might otherwise go

toward farmed animal advocacy. For example, we are planning on hiring a Grant Program Director to cultivate the support of mainstream science funders for wild animal welfare research. We are also planning on hiring development staff with connections and expertise in conservation and environmental fundraising so that we can build a base of support outside the farmed animal advocacy space.

Several farmed animal advocacy organizations have tried to grow in this direction and struggled to find success. We are optimistic that we can make more progress because of the nature of our mission, the experience of our staff, and the centrality of this plan to our hiring efforts. However, we expect it will take at least three years to make substantial progress along these lines. We are deeply grateful to the EAA funders who support us in reaching the scale we need to later unlock broader support.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your organization's ability to carry out your programs?

2019 was our first year as an organization. We used it to build out our core team and demonstrate the potential for our core programs. Having accomplished that, we had hoped to make 2020 a pivotal year in which we would scale up our staff and programs and set an ambitious growth trajectory for the next several years. Because of the pandemic, however, we have shifted to a more defensive posture in which we are continuing to develop our core programs but not yet launching them on the growth trajectory we had planned for.

1. At the beginning of the year, we decided to focus on extending our outreach efforts, primarily by attending more conferences. Last year, conferences were our primary way of meeting and engaging new scientists. Because of COVID-19, most academic conferences have been canceled this year. In response, we have shifted our outreach strategy to focus on direct email outreach to a smaller number of higher-value contacts who we spend more time researching before contacting. Typically we do this in the context of our own research projects so we can make concrete requests. Our success rate is higher than we expected, and we believe this method will be fully sufficient to meet our outreach goals for this year.
2. We had planned to host an interactive workshop to give scientists already working on wild animal welfare research an opportunity to meet each other and discuss priorities for the emerging field. We chose to postpone this goal because we think most of the value of such a workshop would come from the spontaneous interactions that are common in person and that we had not yet seen replicated at virtual conferences.
3. Because of the economic damage and general uncertainty caused by the pandemic, we substantially lowered our fundraising expectations. We see multiple mechanisms by which the pandemic could reduce our fundraising success, including: (a) loss or potential loss of employment, revenue, or stock yields could leave our donors with less total capacity to

give; (b) some donors may choose to redirect their donation budgets toward COVID-19 relief and away from wild animal welfare; and (c) feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability could make potential new donors less open to explore a novel cause area like wild animal welfare.

4. Because we lowered our fundraising expectations, we also lowered our growth expectations. We had hoped to add three full-time permanent employees this year: an operations associate to reduce the time leadership spends on administrative tasks, a development director to expand our fundraising capacity, and a scientific grant writer to scale up our grant assistance program. Instead, we hired an operations associate at half time and delayed our other plans until next year or until we receive sufficient additional funding.

Have you taken any steps to improve programs that you deemed less successful (due to COVID-19 or otherwise)?

1. Community Strategy program: One of our core research projects last year was a report on [improving pest management for wild insect welfare](#). This project took longer than expected in part because Rethink Priorities was conducting related insect research and we had not sufficiently coordinated who would investigate which areas when. This led to the duplication of some efforts and an unexpected need to choose new research directions. In response, we started meeting with Rethink Priorities and Animal Ethics monthly, and we started sharing detailed quarterly updates both on our recent progress and our anticipated next steps. Both because of these communications themselves and because of the closer relationships they've facilitated, we now have much higher confidence that we're pursuing complementary research and replicating research only when it's beneficial to do so.
2. Research program: Because there was so much to explore when we first started, we chose research projects largely based on our researchers' level of interest and expertise in the subject. We think that was the right decision at that stage, and we continue to think that extensive prioritization efforts are not worthwhile given the openness of the research space. However, we knew we would benefit from [a more systematic process](#), so we developed and executed one. One of our goals was to intentionally replicate the diversity of approaches that we happened to achieve last year, so we made sure to include projects that span theory, methods, policy, and applications.
3. Outreach program: As discussed above, because of COVID-19, we shifted the focus of our outreach program from conferences to in-depth email communication. Our approach has also been informed by lessons we learned from the two organizations that preceded Wild Animal Initiative: Utility Farm and Wild-Animal Suffering Research. Both organizations cold-called academics with relevant expertise to ask them about their interest in wild animal welfare. As discussed in this [Utility Farm blog post](#), this approach was largely

unsuccessful. In response, we: (a) make concrete requests of researchers so there is an obvious next step to continue the relationship (e.g., ask for their input on our research, ask them to join our Advisory Panel), (b) emphasize the intellectual merit of wild animal welfare research, (c) emphasize the common ground between wild animal welfare and conservation, and (d) hire staff with scientific credentials that allow them to access more typical networking channels (e.g., attending conferences, publishing in journals).

4. Grant Assistance program: We created the grant assistance program in response to a limitation we observed in the course of our outreach efforts. We believe that scientists will be more likely to engage with us if we can offer them a concrete and self-evident value-add. The Grant Assistance program will do that by increasing their likelihood of securing research funding while decreasing the barriers. Specifically, it will offer grant-writing expertise, administrative support, and connections to funders.

Have you cut off any unsuccessful programs to make room for other ones (due to COVID-19 or otherwise)?

Wild Animal Initiative was founded in 2019, and we have not yet eliminated any programs started since then. However, as we were founded out of a merger between Utility Farm and Wild-Animal Suffering Research, we had the opportunity to assess which of these organizations' programs to continue. We discontinued three programs that had originated at Utility Farm.

Nature Ethics was a website that featured articles from guest writers on topics related to wild animal welfare. Wildness was a podcast that explored foundational concepts in wild animal welfare and interviewed relevant experts. Both were aimed at a general audience, but when Wild Animal Initiative was founded, we decided to focus on building the community of academic researchers. After trialing Nature Ethics and Wildness, we decided to discontinue them because they weren't sufficiently tailored to our core audience of academics. Neither had developed a large enough following to be worth sustaining or transferring to another organization. However, we got enough positive feedback on Wildness that we would consider restarting the program in a way more tailored to our mission.

The third program we decided not to continue was the Compassionate Cat Grant. This was a field experiment to test the efficacy of informational pamphlets at convincing cat adopters to keep their cats indoors. The data collection was carried out by our grantee, Animal Care Sanctuary. We are currently finalizing a report on the results of that experiment. We decided not to do more work in this area because (1) we are uncertain that keeping cats indoors is good for wild animals on net, (2) neither the intervention nor our approach to studying it were sufficiently novel to plausibly contribute to the growth of welfare biology as a field, and (3) our results suggest that the pamphlets did not affect cat adopters' behavior.