Bat Research and Ethics . . .

An outline of issues for discussion: ABRS Meeting / EH-S 25 April 2005

Approaching Ethical Issues

- Start with ontology – What are bats?
- Then epistemology – How do we discover and find out?
- Next to ethical principles – What does this tell us about the principles which we might establish?
- And only then can we usefully discuss ethical methodology or actions!

Some Basic Questions about Bats

- Do bats feel pain?
- Do they have emotional feelings?
- Are bats self-conscious or self-aware? (Griffin)

How do bats relate?

- What about relationships with other bats?
- Or with other species of bats?
- What about relationships with other species? (or subspecies like *Bat Researchers)* ?

As another perspective . . .

- How do the Aboriginal people perceive and think about bats?

Given all this . . .

- Do bats have rights? Or perhaps more to the point, what rights might (or should) we assign to them?
- On what evidence?

What then are the implications . . .

- Research strategy and methodology?
- Bat population strategies and management?

Looking further at Bat Research:

- Are there any ethical issues in research which are specific to bats?
- Or do we rely upon the general ethical guidelines for biological or ecological research?

And what about research results?

- How soundly based are our results? So they really stand up logically?
- What are the issues in utilisation of our results by either ourselves or others?
- We all have a regrettable tendency to not be sufficiently self-critical and adhere to outmoded ideas!

Utilisation is a problem?

- A recent discussion of quality in science and the question of what is good or bad science; pointed to the science of environmental impact analyses as the epitome of bad science
- Neville Michie once said to me “Many scientists are like a dog that chases cars – if he caught one, he wouldn’t know what to do with it!”

So what about EIA?

- Part of the problem is the very rules that govern EIA in Australia (and most other countries)
- The proponent is responsible for the impact assessment process
- Can we expect that they will be objective or neutral?

Hence, what about scientists?

- Can we face up to being the bearer of bad news
- It is no longer customary to shoot the messenger, but he/she may not get many more contracts?
- So, what safeguards should (or can) we offer?

Finally, there is sustainability?

- Is sustainability an ethical issue?
- So, does this enter into the obligations of the ethical scientist?

Given our commitment to bats . . .

- What might we learn from them? N.B., from bats, not from our research on bats

For instance . . .

- How and why do they cope so well with ageing?
- Can they really sense and predict changes in weather?

Examples in other species

- Elephants foreseeing the Tsunami
- Relationships between tigers and humans, especially in the Sariska

Some References . . .

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