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## **(R)Evolution From Within? New Directions for the Humane Society**

The *Satya* Interview with Wayne Pacelle



Wayne and Grace. Photo: Hilary Schwab

Founded in 1954 by a handful of activists dissatisfied with the ineffectiveness of the national humane movement, the Humane Society of the United States was established to address the surplus breeding of companion animals, the humane treatment of farm animals, and the investigation of animal cruelty. Some people may be surprised to learn that in addition to supporting local humane societies and low-cost spay/neuter programs for companion animals, throughout the mid to late 1950s and '70s, HSUS directed much of its resources into the humane slaughter of farm animals and was a leader in the passage of the Humane Slaughter Act in 1958.

The past half century has seen the HSUS grow into the largest animal protection organization in the country, and one of the most influential worldwide. Last June, after years working as Senior Vice President of government affairs and communications, Wayne Pacelle became the Chief Executive Officer of HSUS. With his promotion came a revamp of the organization's mission, the development of a new campaigns section with a focus on farm animals, and the establishment of a company-wide vegan policy. The vision is to consolidate forces. Early this year, the Fund for Animals formally merged with HSUS, and the leadership of one of the most successful grassroots animal advocacy groups, Compassion Over Killing, joined its ranks. Tireless vegan activist MD, Michael Greger, also moved to HSUS. With an operating budget of over \$95 million and roughly nine

million members and constituents, people are taking notice.

Wayne Pacelle has built a career trying to keep animals out of harm's way. A vegan for two decades, Pacelle has worked with many animal protection organizations, including the Fund For Animals. He is credited with leading efforts at HSUS in the passage of more than a dozen federal laws, 15 statewide ballot initiatives, and countless state statutes to protect animals. Catherine Clyne spoke with Wayne Pacelle about his new role at HSUS, his vision for the movement, and his personal objective of creating "a National Rifle Association of the animal rights movement."

**You've been CEO of HSUS since last June. What is your overall vision for the organization?**

I want to achieve greater effectiveness and create an even more powerful organization to advance major social changes. One of the greatest difficulties we face at HSUS is the sheer number of issues we confront. I've tried to focus the organization on a few key reforms because I believe the only way we are going to achieve change is by putting enough muscle behind specific campaigns—to change the views of policy-makers, corporate decision-makers, and get issues into the media—and to create a grassroots movement to drive these issues forward.

So we're first focusing on factory farming, the greatest of all animal abuses as measured in terms of animals involved and the duration and acuteness of their suffering. Second is to have a zero tolerance policy for animal cruelty, to have all 50 states have felony level penalties for animal cruelty, and also to eradicate particularly barbaric spectacles of cruelty, such as dog fighting, cock fighting, and hog-dog fighting. Third is reviving our campaign against the fur industry, and closely linked to that is our effort to stop the Canadian seal kill. And fourth is combating particularly abusive hunting practices, such as canned hunts, bear baiting, pheasant stocking, Internet hunting, and similar inhumane practices.

We have a second tier of other campaigns, dealing with puppy mills, greyhound racing, exotics as pets, and the elimination of great apes in research, and it's on these eight campaigns that we will focus a considerable amount of institutional resources.

**What are some of the changes you have already instituted since you started?**

In terms of management structure, the organization has been substantially reorganized to focus on these major campaigns. Two of the big changes relate to the creation of a new campaigns department, headed by Heidi Prescott, former national director of the Fund for Animals, who's now our Senior Vice President for campaigns, and campaign managers for each of those four campaigns. The second big change is the creation of a new animal protection litigation department, headed by Jonathan Lovvorn, with a mandate to take aggressive action in all of these campaign areas and frankly wherever swift legal action is required. We now have eight full-time attorneys doing offensive litigation, in addition to being able to call on major law firms doing pro bono work and relationships with several law schools and their law students.

**As you know, many animal activists have been abuzz with the recent hiring of the Compassion Over Killing leadership—Miyun Park, Paul Shapiro and Josh Balk. What's your strategy behind this?** One of the most important things you can do to be effective is hire the most talented people. Miyun, Paul and Josh—and COK's former general counsel Carter Dillard—are enormously talented. We wanted to work with talented and energetic advocates who could build our capacity to make a difference for farm animals. It's not so much about orthodoxy; I was trying to find people who have the energy, the passion and the smarts to effect major changes in public and corporate policies when it comes to animal agriculture. And I do believe that with major retailers—whether it's Safeway or fast food chains like McDonald's and Burger King—their decisions in terms of the products

they purchase will have enormous implications for animals.

**With regard to Humane USA, the Political Action Committee you started, you've been quoted as saying your ambition was to create "a National Rifle Association of the animal rights movement." What do you mean by this and how has it done so far?**

The way things work in Washington and in state capitols across the country is that logic and humane sensibilities can only go so far. You need them in order to be effective and the merits of an argument do mean something in this culture, but you also need to amass political power and that comes from working the political system in a way that achieves results. There's no substitute for being able to deliver votes and having an informed constituency. The key goal for us is to help organize the universe of passionate animal advocates across the country who understand the political process and can plug into that process to achieve public policy goals. Combined with raising the political and electoral awareness of animal advocates is our focusing on a few key goals, so that lawmakers and the general public can understand the larger agenda. And third, given the role that money plays in political campaigns, is to be able to play in that theater to some degree by directly supporting candidates who care about animal protection and to work against candidates who are hostile to these values. A lesson you learn from watching how laws are made is that you have to bring the full set of capabilities and tools to the task of building a body of law to protect animals.

So Humane USA is growing. We had a really important win in the last election in helping to defeat Chris John for the U.S. Senate seat opening in Louisiana. He was the leading cock fighting advocate in the House and a leader on a whole range of anti-animal causes. Humane USA implemented a major television advertising campaign and a direct mail campaign, in addition to activating grassroots activists, to help tip that election. It showed that if we could do this in Louisiana, which is a rough state for animals, we would have the capability to do it in almost any state.

We also continue to be even-handed in terms of our approach to issues. As worthy as other important issues may be to us personally, we zero in on animal issues. We look at a legislator's or candidate's record on animal issues only and we strive to be bipartisan. Humane USA is backing a very substantial number of Republicans and really is more balanced than the NRA, which is heavily Republican, or the labor or environmental movements, which are heavily Democratic. We truly have the potential, like the Israel lobby, to be comprehensively bipartisan.

I find the NRA's views on hunting and other issues to be really at odds with my own, but I admire the fact that they train thousands of activists across the country to achieve so much working through the system. I do think that is a model for us, because we have the potential to activate many more people than the NRA does. There are a lot of people in this country who care about guns, but I think many more people are passionate about protecting animals. If we organize them, we can achieve enormous gains and victories for animals.

It's really a failure on our part: it's not a structural or economic circumstance that inhibits our success, it's our failure to provide leadership and organize the millions of people who care passionately about animals.

**Given that the Bush administration is no real friend to animals, a lot of people are really disappointed after all of the energy that went into the last presidential election. Why should animal activists care about politics and get energized to really do anything?**

Well there are an enormous number of opportunities in Congress and in the states to establish new and better standards for the treatment of animals in society. Right now we have opportunities to: make animal fighting a federal felony, ban the slaughter of horses for human consumption for export, ban the keeping of primates as pets,

protect bison in Yellowstone National Park, include poultry in the Humane Slaughter Act, strengthen the law related to puppy mills—there are enormously important issues that can be pushed through Congress and signed by the President.

Matthew Scully just wrote the cover story [“Fear Factories,”] in [the May 23rd] issue of the American Conservative arguing why conservatives should care about animal cruelty. It’s an enormously important essay, and a strong case. We should not write off conservatives. There are tens of thousands—millions—of conservatives who care about animals, and we need to continue to reach out to them as well as to liberals and moderates. Every person is a potential advocate for animals in some way.

**You’ve had an impressive track record with getting state ballot initiatives passed. Can you give a brief overview of some of the initiatives you’ve worked on?**

It has certainly been a major team effort, especially benefiting from the involvement of Mike Markarian, former President of the Fund for Animals and now Executive Vice President for external affairs at HSUS. We’ve been able to engage and activate tens of thousands of people to qualify ballot measures and to work to pass them. We’ve orchestrated more than 20 measures since 1992, and had a win rate of 70 to 75 percent. We’ve banned cock fighting in three states, hound hunting in four states, and bear baiting in four states, banned the use of gestation crates in Florida, banned leg-hold trapping and other forms of body gripping traps in five states. So it’s been a very successful means of changing laws.

Even more importantly, it’s shown that our movement has the capacity to win tough fights and expose people to the political process. I don’t believe there are any short cuts to this form of sweeping social change and I don’t believe that breaking the law—except in a nonviolent and civilly disobedient way—is the path for us to pursue. We want society to play by the rules we are seeking to establish and then to observe these laws, but then if it doesn’t suit us, we flaunt the laws. I think that hurts our credibility, and it’s a contradiction that cannot be logically reconciled.

**That’s a good point and you’ve brought me to my next question, which puts you in the hot seat a little. You and HSUS staff have distanced yourselves from certain animal rights activists and tactics. Can you talk a little more about this?**

I have great respect for people who are self-sacrificing and who question prevailing orthodoxy in order to advance important ideas. But I do not support breaking the law for animals, even as I recognize the commitment these individuals exhibit. And I don’t question the commitment of people who are willing to break laws and engage in acts that we wouldn’t engage in. I think though there are two issues here. One is: the public likes animals. People have an intrinsic connection to animals and it’s evidenced by the fact that 90 million American households have companion animals; 100 million people go bird-watching; 200 million people go to national parks to see animals. There is this incredible connection.

So most people like animals, but a lot of people don’t like animal activists because they think they’re too strident and hypocritical. I think it’s important for us, as the ambassadors for animals, to be ethically consistent and to embrace mainstream values. I don’t think we need to resort to illegal tactics to achieve change, I am ultimately confident that our views can prevail. It’s a mark of desperation to resort to illegal actions. It’s important for the public to realize people in the animal protection movement will stand up and say it’s wrong to engage in certain tactics when we are offering all sorts of ideas on how people should be living their lives and how corporations and lawmakers should be deciding on policies. So we’re quick to call for standards to be adopted on animal issues, as we should be, but then to

claim that any and all tactics are acceptable when it comes to advancing animal protection goals is a contradiction.

Second, resorting to such tactics also seems to undermine the core principles of respect that we talk about. Ultimately, we're talking about an ethic of mercy and compassion and respect, and if we don't treat people with that same level of attentiveness and respect, it undercuts our credibility. That's not to justify what people who are harming animals are doing, but again, there's no short cut to the sort of fundamental social change we are envisioning. And I guess that's the third point: I just don't believe it's effective. I think that we've got to educate middle America, build a powerful political movement to effect public policy change, and build a strong grassroots movement to effect corporate change and inform consumers about their choices in the marketplace. Resorting to illegal tactics, whether it is petty vandalism or threats, achieves almost nothing in terms of lasting reforms for animals. And it turns animal abusers into victims and gives our political opponents the moral high ground. The most important thing that we have is our self-sacrificing, other-centered approach and concern for animals, and when we turn down the path of illegal conduct, we allow our opponents to transform us from self-sacrificing people to simple scoundrels.

**You just finally got to the nitty gritty of what we're talking about: basically, petty vandalism and threats and such. We're not talking Weather Underground or Black Liberation Army tactics. So far, no one has been murdered or seriously injured by these individuals or tactics. Why make such a big deal out of it?**

I wouldn't say that we're making a big deal out of it in the sense that we're crusading on it. We comment on it when asked. And when the matter comes up in public discourse we don't hesitate to offer our view.

But I don't believe that threats and intimidation are a small matter. These actions are counterproductive and they undercut the values of respect and compassion that we're trying to instill in the public. And in terms of vandalism, these acts are sophomoric, and I just do not see the point. You do not topple billion-dollar industries by breaking a few windows. It may be psychologically satisfying to people who do it, and it may be true that at this time it doesn't feel like there are many options. I understand this sense of urgency and impatience, but I just don't think there's any other way we can get to a more compassionate society than by doing the grassroots organizing and making our case to the public.

**Why did you and HSUS and a number of other groups decide a few years ago to no longer support the annual animal rights conference organized by FARM?**

For one simple reason: there were a number of invited speakers who advocated violence and other illegal activities beyond civil disobedience, and we did not feel comfortable supporting a conference that gave a platform to those voices. We recognize that these people have a right to speak their views. We just didn't want a major national animal rights conference, which the public would be taking as a statement of the beliefs of the cause, to have those voices if we were going to be associated with it. I don't want to give our political opponents the opportunity to brand us as a lawless or terrorist organization, that we support people who are engaging in those practices, even if it's exaggerated for their political bent. I don't want to spend time fending off those arguments when I have a limited opportunity to talk in the press. I want to talk about issues, not tactics. The battle will not be won on the margins with those tactics. The battle will be won when we can convince regular Americans in Michigan or Iowa or Alabama that animals deserve respectful treatment.

**Still, people who have broken the rules have achieved results. Meaning, technically the COK open**

rescues broke the law, and JP Goodwin, who works with you at HSUS, used to be quite the radical direct-action animal liberationist as founder of the Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade.

Well, number one, the open rescues I would view as an act of civil disobedience. People were taking responsibility, they weren't damaging property, they were simply recording the cruelty that was going on and letting the owners of the companies take action if they wished. In terms of JP, he has renounced his past views on illegal activities. Again, in this issue of personal transformation, we want to embrace people who are thinking about the long term strategic benefits of organizing and influencing corporations and the government to adopt animal protection policies. JP has, in my view, changed his views for the better. And I want to embrace that change.

**So, HSUS split from supporting the FARM conference. Now you're sponsoring a major conference in DC the weekend after FARM's conference in LA with a bunch of groups that used to be with the FARM conference. What do you think this says to animal activists—both newbies and veterans?**

It says there is a major core of the animal movement that wants effective action but is not going to countenance the rhetoric of violence and vandalism and other illegal tactics—we're taking a stand in that respect. I don't think every event can have every voice. We're a cause that talks about values and ethics and we cannot suspend that thinking when it comes to tactics. I think it's important to us to reclaim the core values of the movement. When we speak of vivisection, we say the ends cannot justify the means. Well, that same line of thinking should apply to our tactics. I want to go back to some of the things that formulated your ideology.

**What helped you make the connections between animals and your decision to go vegan?**

I had a real empathy for animals ever since I was a small child, and that was never drummed out of me. In my college dining hall, I remember talking about animals and how it was wrong to hunt or use them in research. I had people saying, 'Well, you're eating them.' There's a logic there that cannot be denied. So I became vegetarian and then a month later vegan in my sophomore year and started an animal rights group. I think it really empowered me to take action because the mantle of inconsistency that had kind of been on my shoulders was lifted off.

**In terms of making changes for animals, what are some of the real obstacles that we face?**

Several. One is that the oppressed group cannot speak for itself and we are ambassadors for them; and the people who are trying to thwart this change and continue the status quo can invoke their own livelihood and their own values. So you have a disparity in that we're advocating for others, where our opponents are essentially advocating for themselves. That is a real impediment.

Second is the sheer diversity of issues. It's really hard to succeed if you're drawn in truly a hundred directions. The panoply of abuses is enormous. It's easy to see your energy dissipated by focusing on too many things.

Third is the economic might of the industries we're confronting. These are not fly-by-night operations. In some cases these are multi-billion dollar industries that are leveraging their money and influence to maintain the status quo.

I think fourth would be the historical and cultural inertia: this is the way things have been done for a long time. Those are a few.

**With regard to farmed animals, realistically what are your hopes for the future?**

We have to understand that people are in different places and we cannot have a one-size-fits-all solution for every

American. I've been a vegan for 20 years, but my parents aren't completely there. And people who are friendly to the issues often don't demonstrate the same level of commitment as those of us who are really active in the movement. I think it is important to give people more eating options. That's why we're now doing a guide to vegetarian eating, to really make the case for it and try to make that transition easier.

Also, just reducing meat consumption can be a tremendous benefit to animals. Because it's 10 billion animals killed a year—if 50 million people reduce their meat consumption by half, that can save hundreds of millions, if not more than a billion animals. Some people are going to continue to eat meat so we want to see the worst abuses in factory farming eliminated and at least see that animals reared for food are not tormented during production, transport and slaughter. That speaks to having the existing agricultural systems made less inhumane. Some people may say, 'Well, the animals are still being killed.' Well, those animals I am quite sure want to be better treated and they don't want to be tormented, and if we can lessen the pain and suffering they endure, then we have achieved something tangible.

**I want to hear a little more of your message to animal activists. HSUS has been criticized for being a rather conservative, wealthy, dog and cat-oriented establishment that, until you came along at least, still served dead animals at its events. Can you talk about your vegetarian vision and what motivated you to move from more animal rights work, like at the Fund for Animals and the Animals' Agenda, to HSUS?**

On the issue of HSUS and what we do with our resources, I think it's important at our events, whether it's the Genesis Awards, Animal Care Expo or Congressional Awards, that we reach for the highest standard. I don't want the dollars of any HSUS supporter going to support any harming of animals, and that's why I decided, with the chairman of the board's support, that we would have all-vegan events and that any purchasing of food products would be done with that principle in mind.

In terms of my own personal transformation, for many years I was on the 'front lines'—at demonstrations and protests—and I was arrested many times during my years of activism. I believe there's a really important place for demonstrations and civil disobedience and other 'front line' activities. At the same time, I recognized that we have to amass political power and apply that power in the broadest sense in order to save animals' lives. I felt HSUS was an entity that was doing good work but had enormous potential to effect even more meaningful and lasting social reforms. It was not marginalized by the media or viewed as an extremist or radical organization by mainstream Americans. It had a good, patriotic name [laughs]. At the same time, I felt there was leadership here and people who were willing to go beyond traditional notions of humane treatment toward companion animals, to work on wildlife, agriculture and animal testing issues. I just felt this group had more potential to effect change than any other. I had worked closely with and have had friends in almost all the other groups—it's not a denigration of any of those groups.

It's great that there are so many animal groups—it shows all the passion and excitement there is. But I think for the public and policy-makers, it's confusing. That's why I am trying to achieve some consolidation and bring more individuals and groups together so we can focus more resources on the big problems. We're in a period where I think we need to see some consolidation in order to become more effective. I can't script what's going to happen over the next year or two or five, but I do hope that we can recognize synergies and bring people and groups together so we can reach new levels of effectiveness.

**Because of its history, some animal activists are mistrustful of HSUS. What would you like to say to them?**

I would say: Take a look at us now. If you're mistrustful, leave that aside or chalk it up to a healthy skepticism. Don't focus on the past, but examine what our capacity is now and take a step back and look at what we as a social movement really want to achieve. Do we want to see factory farming turned around? Do we want to see every state with strong animal cruelty laws and proper enforcement? Do we want to see an end to the fur industry? I think HSUS offers the best potential to get us there, if we come together. We have a powerful staff with many experts, but we have to have millions of volunteers involved. If every person who cares about animals was participating in a strategically focused effort to achieve specific reforms that we are seeking, I can guarantee they will be pleased they invested the time and energy in such an effort.

**Animal advocacy is notoriously hard work and people can get discouraged. What do you recommend to activists to help them cope?**

I think it's very important for people to celebrate the victories. It's very easy to get frustrated that the pace of change is not faster, but this is not an all-or-nothing game for animals. Every individual animal saved or protected is a 100 percent win for those animals. And there's change occurring all around us: whether it's companies moving away from animal testing, new vegan products in the marketplace, new laws being passed, animal issues prominently discussed in the media—whatever it is—celebrate those and use them as fuel to continue to drive your passion. And do not allow yourself to get too disillusioned or disheartened. We have lost too many people to a feeling of hopelessness. To that end, it's important that people pace themselves and try to achieve some balance in life. It's vital to take time for yourself in order to maintain your long-term participation in the cause.

**Can you tell us about some of the nonhuman animals you share your family with?**

Rose is half German shepherd and half husky and was rescued at the age of just a few days. She's a great dog. And there are three cats, Molly, Ellie and Buffalo, and they're all great and constant reminders of the wonder of animals and how they're their own independent, fully-conscious little creatures. And once you accept that they have these capacities and characteristics, it is so tough to deny the same privileges and protections to other creatures.

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