

CENSAS

Centre for Sustainable Animal Stewardship

Animal Assembly 2019: Whose backyard is it anyway?!

General report



Veterinary Medicine



Colophon

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Foreword

Animals are everywhere. There are millions of animals in the Netherlands, and we encounter them throughout the country. Often we see them in places where they are to be expected, such as in the wild or in a zoo. But we also encounter them in unexpected places: wild pigs in a residential area, mice in the garage or a sperm whale on the beach. These instances are often what spark discussion and debate.

Some of these discussions have been going for decades, such as the issue of how to care for injured seals. Other animals raise new concerns, such as the raccoons and wolves that have made their way into the Netherlands. Sometimes it is the choices made by humans, not the animals themselves, that give rise to discussion: the construction of a new residential park in an area with a badger population, for example, or how to deal with moles on a golf course.

At first glance, these discussions seem very diverse. In terms of their reach, one may go no further than the newsletter of the local golf club; others make the national news and can only be resolved via parliamentary debate. The substance of the debates also varies considerably. Discussions about rats or geese (which are seen as pests) very quickly turn to the most effective methods for eradication, while talks on large grazing animals in natural environments also examine the potential benefits or necessity to feed or relocate animals.

This is all good reason to include these animals – those that we do not ‘keep’, but do regularly encounter – on the agenda of the second CenSAS Animal Assembly held on 28 November 2019. With over 100 participants and facilitators, we spent an evening discussing the best way to govern our interactions with muskrats, raccoons, seal pups and many other animals.

It should not surprise you that we did not solve all of these problems over the course of one evening. But this report does outline the discussions that took place, how they were run, and that concrete ideas did emerge about alternative and better ways to deal with mice, moles, muskrats, and all of those other beautiful animals.

I hope that this report serves not only to inform readers about what happened on that evening, but also as inspiration to continually engage in the discussion about our relationship with animals.

Franck Meijboom
Head of CenSAS





About CenSAS

CenSAS is the Centre for Sustainable Animal Stewardship, and is a collaboration between the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Utrecht University and the Animal Sciences Group at Wageningen University & Research.

In the Netherlands, many people and animals live together in a very small space. People keep animals for production, companionship and research, and there are also animals that live in the wild. In addition to its 17 million human inhabitants, the Netherlands also has 120 million farm animals, 30 million pets (not counting ornamental fish), one million laboratory animals and countless animals living in the wild.

The welfare of animals and how we treat them is the topic of widespread discussion in society, and one that is close to many people's hearts. But what *is* the best way to co-exist with animals, and how should we treat them? Social debate on these questions is ongoing, with a variety of positions adopted by individuals and organisations alike. The issues of separating dairy cows from their calves, animal management in the Oostvaardersplassen region, the use of monkeys as laboratory animals, or pedigree dog breeding are but a few examples. What do we, as a society, wish to do about these issues?

There are as many individual opinions and views as there are individuals. While some believe it is permissible for animals to be farmed and killed for food, others find that humans should not be using animals for any purpose whatsoever. The wide range of views makes finding simple answers difficult, let alone solutions that everybody can agree on.

Time for discussion

CenSAS aims to foster dialogue on the treatment of animals: an atmosphere where all parties can participate in a constructive manner and where all of the interests at play (including those of animals) are given due consideration. The dialogue is intended to unite the fields of science, industry and broader society, and to accommodate and respect wide-ranging views.

The CenSAS Animal Assembly is an annual event for anybody wishing to contribute ideas on guidelines for the treatment of animals. Whether your interest in animals is personal or professional, all are welcome. During the Animal Assembly, participants form groups to discuss various situations in which humans and animals encounter one another. The dialogue is an inclusive space for all views, opinions and fields of expertise. It is a form that promotes genuine communication, and supports the common goal of finding long-term, well-considered solutions to societal questions.





Animal Assembly 2019: Whose backyard is it anyway?!

Do animals live in human habitats, or is it the other way around? Can we even draw a distinction between separate living spaces? The 2019 Animal Assembly focused on the cohabitation of humans and animals living in the wild, and was held in Koninklijke Burger's Zoo for the second year running.

The talks centred on animals in nature reserves, in and around homes, and in cities. Examples included mice in houses, wild pigs in the Veluwe national park, city pigeons, and seals on the Wadden islands. How do we plan to live alongside these animals in the future? What do we do if these animals need our help? And how should we handle any emergent conflicts between humans and animals?

The evening began with a screening of the trailer of 'Wild Port of Europe', a new film by the makers of *De Nieuwe Wildernis* (The New Wilderness, EMS Films). Next Constanze Mager, biologist and head of education at Burger's Zoo, gave a presentation on the treatment of 'unwanted' animals in zoos, and the associated dilemmas. Why is it that some animals are welcome in zoos, and others are not?

After the presentation, the nearly 100 participants split up into sixteen groups of seven, and engaged in discussions under the guidance of facilitators. Eight of these groups were also observed by students of applied psychology from Fontys University of Applied Sciences in Eindhoven.

Over the course of two rounds of dialogue, three different topics and associated cases were discussed (see the sections below for a detailed report). During round one, the case was presented to the group by the facilitator. Each one consisted of a brief description of the situation (see below), and the following questions:

- Do you think this action/decision was appropriate? Why/why not?
- What would you yourself have done in this situation? Why?
- Is this acceptable? Why or why not?

During the first round, the participants discussed these questions, shared their responses with each other and tried to pinpoint the underlying principles and origins of their own and others' opinions.

During round two, the participants took the results from round one and went in search of sustainable and well-considered ways to manage the future cohabitation of humans and animals. Questions addressed during this round included:

- How can humans and animals live together in such a way as to prevent, minimise or effectively resolve conflict (and what is considered 'effective')?
- Are we allowed to kill animals that are causing us problems?
- What should we do with animals in trouble, who need care?
- How should we design future cities, and deal with animals living in natural habitats?



CenSAS Dierendialoog

Stadsdier of natuurmens?!

28 november 2019
Koninklijke Burgers' Zoo



Three topics

The Animal Assembly presented groups with three topics for discussion and sixteen cases (one for each group). The three topics were: animals and human activities, animals in need, and conflicts between humans and animals. The questions raised under each topic during the discussions are given below.

Animals and human activities

- How can we prevent animals from becoming the accidental victims of our actions (e.g. traffic on roads, the construction of homes or logging in forests)?
- Should we modify our behaviour by lowering speed limits, for example?
- Should we implement additional preventive measures (such as wildlife tunnels and wildlife bridges), even if extra investments are required? For example, should it be mandatory for all roads to be fitted with wildlife tunnels and bridges?
- Should recreational fishing be allowed in the future?

Animals in need

- How should we treat animals that are in need or in potential danger?
- Should we lend our aid, or take preventive action? When should we do so?
- How do we decide?

- When do we let nature take its course, and when should we intercede?
- If we find animals that are sick or in trouble, should we end their suffering or take them into our care for treatment? How do we choose?
- Who should regulate and fund these activities?
- Does the type of animal matter?

Conflicts between humans and animals

- How can we cohabit in such a way as to minimise or prevent human/animal conflict?
- Should we be trying to prevent conflicts between humans and animals, and if so, how?
- What should we do if conflicts emerge? How do we resolve them?
- Are we allowed to kill the animals? When is this permissible, and how does animal welfare factor in?
- Does it matter what animals are involved, and where they appear?
- Should we treat native and exotic animals differently?





MNT KENIA LODGE
KILIMANJARO LODGE

KILIMANJARO LODGE
MNT KENIA LODGE



The cases and dialogues

Over the course of two rounds of dialogue, three different topics and sixteen associated cases were discussed. Each group of participants discussed its own case. In this section the introduction text (which was read at the beginning of round one) is described for each of the cases. In eight groups observers were present and of those cases, a general description of what was discussed by the participants is also given. Click on an animal to go directly to the description of that case.

No observation

1. Pigeon in trouble



2. Rabbits with myxomatosis



3. Moles on the golf course



4. Badgers and construction



5. Raccoons: capture or shoot?



6. Wild boars and swine fever



7. Control of muskrats



8. House mice



With observation

9. Rat in a fix



10. Seal pup



11. Feeding animals in winter



12. Recreational fishing



13. A hedgehog in the garden



14. Animals and traffic



15. The wolf is back!



16. Urban goose-nest management



Click on the animals to go directly to the relevant case.
Click on me to return here.



1. Pigeon in trouble

A pigeon is attacked by several crows, and sustains a head injury due to pecking. Passers-by see it happen, and chase the crows away. Then they notice the wounded pigeon. One of the passers-by is a vet, she examines the bird and deems that its chances of survival are very low. She decides to end the pigeon's suffering by breaking its neck then and there.

Do you believe this was the right decision? Why /why not?

What would you yourself do if you noticed a wounded pigeon without any other animals nearby, and not knowing the cause of its injuries?



- How should we treat animals that are in need or in potential danger?
- Should we lend our aid, or take preventive action? When should we do so?
- How do we decide?
- When do we let nature take its course, and when should we intercede?
- If we find animals that are sick or in trouble, should we end their suffering or take them into our care for treatment? How do we choose?
- Who should regulate and fund these activities?
- Does the type of animal matter?

2. Rabbits with myxomatosis

The myxomatosis virus causes serious illness in rabbits, and is nearly always fatal. The disease originated from wild rabbits in Central and South America, where the animals suffer only mild symptoms. In the second half of the 20th century, however, the disease was introduced into Australia, France, and other countries in order to reduce the rabbit populations. It is now common in the Netherlands, and there is a vaccine available for rabbits (including those kept in captivity).

An animal welfare organisation believes that the suffering of wild rabbits due to myxomatosis is so severe, the government should issue a subsidy to allow vets who have time – alongside their regular practice work – to locate and euthanise sick animals in the wild.

Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?



3. Moles on the golf course

A golf club has suddenly become infested with moles. They are leaving molehills in large parts of the course, much to the frustration of the golfers and the club owner. The owner is unsure of what to do. The golfers will leave in search of another club if he does nothing.

What should he do? Should he deal with the moles?



- How can we prevent animals from becoming the accidental victims of our actions (e.g. traffic on roads, the construction of homes or logging in forests)?
- Should we modify our behaviour by lowering speed limits, for example?
- Should we implement additional preventive measures (such as wildlife tunnels and wildlife bridges), even if extra investments are required?
- For example, should it be mandatory for all roads to be fitted with wildlife tunnels and bridges?

4. Badgers and construction

A new housing estate has been planned, and over half of the homes have already been sold. During an assessment of the property, a badger's burrow is found that is home to two badgers. The project developer does not wish to halt the project because of the badgers, and plans to ask a wildlife organisation to rehouse the badgers in a different location.

What do you think of this idea?

Suppose that badgers in the Netherlands spread disease, as they do in England (such as bovine tuberculosis). Should it be allowed to kill them pre-emptively, in order to prevent transmission?





5. Raccoons: capture or shoot?

The provinces of Limburg and North Brabant are having to deal with raccoons coming in from Germany and other Dutch provinces. Raccoons are not endemic to Europe, and are considered an exotic species that could have a negative impact on the native animal species. They must therefore be removed from natural areas, in order to prevent the species from gaining a foothold. North Brabant now wishes to permit raccoon hunting. Limburg initially also planned to do so, but eventually decided to have the raccoons captured and moved permanently to special facilities and zoos.

Which solution do you favour? Or should we do nothing at all?



- How can we cohabit in such a way as to minimise or prevent human/animal conflict?
- Should we be trying to prevent conflicts between humans and animals, and if so, how?
- What should we do if conflicts emerge? How do we resolve them?
- Are we allowed to kill the animals? When is this permissible, and how does animal welfare factor in?
- Does it matter what animals are involved, and where they appear?
- Should we treat native and exotic animals differently?

6. Wild boars and swine fever

Wild pigs can transmit a fatal disease to domestic pigs: African swine fever. To stop pig farms from becoming contaminated and to prevent the death or premature slaughter of countless animals, wild pigs are currently actively kept out of regions with high pig populations. Where necessary, it is also permissible to shoot the wild pigs on sight.

Do you find the preventive killing of these wild pigs acceptable? Why or why not?



7. Control of muskrats

The muskrat, an animal originating from North America that was once farmed for its fur and now lives in the wild (due to human action), is considered a pest in the Netherlands, as muskrats dig passageways in dikes. Drowning traps are one of the methods used to combat muskrats. The national strategy is aimed at killing all muskrats in the country, and at driving back the populations to the German and Belgian borders.

Do you believe it is acceptable to kill muskrats? Why or why not? Does the method matter?



- How can we cohabit in such a way as to minimise or prevent human/animal conflict?
- Should we be trying to prevent conflicts between humans and animals, and if so, how?
- What should we do if conflicts emerge? How do we resolve them?
- Are we allowed to kill the animals? When is this permissible, and how does animal welfare factor in?
- Does it matter what animals are involved, and where they appear?
- Should we treat native and exotic animals differently?

8. House mice

The residents of a house have seen a mouse. Because they don't want it in the house but don't wish to kill it either, they purchase a trap-cage. Before going to bed, they set the trap with a piece of cheese and put it down where they saw the mouse. The next day, the mouse is caught inside. They take the mouse to the edge of the woods about a kilometre from their home, where they release it.

Do you feel that this is a wise course of action? Why or why not? What would you yourself do? What if there were several mice in the house? What would you do then? What if they were rats instead of mice?





9. Rat in a fix

The case

A rat is stuck in a drain on the street, and is squeaking loudly. A passerby notices the situation, and calls the animal ambulance to help. The ambulance people can't set the rat free, so they call the fire brigade, who come to free the animal from the drain.

Do you believe this was the right decision? What would you yourself have done?

The next day, the rat scurries around looking for food. It arrives at a petting zoo, and ends up caught in a trap-cage. When the zoo operators see the rat in the cage, they kill it by holding both the rat and the cage underwater.

What do you think of this?



The dialogue

In this group, the discussion did not revolve so much around whether the rat should be saved, because the participants all agreed relatively quickly: an animal in trouble should always be helped. No animal should ever be left in distress. The discussion turned mostly to the increasing rat populations in cities, and about how to deal with them. All participants agreed that humans were the ones responsible for urban rats becoming an increasing 'nuisance'. Humans lure the animals into the city through the irresponsible disposal of food and other waste. In this sense, the participants believe there is more of a 'human' problem than a 'rat' problem. Due to its poor historical reputation, humans are quick to label rats as 'vermin'. The participants found this attitude unjustified, as proportionally very few people get sick relative to the number of rats. There are also many other animals that can transmit diseases, including domesticated animals.

The participants agreed that the 'rat problem' could be reduced in future by means of prevention and education, and that humans and rats could cohabit more harmoniously. The growing urban spread means it is important for humans to share living space with animals, and not to claim everything for themselves. Preventive measures (such as the effective disposal of food and waste) can help to establish a healthier balance in population numbers.

10. Seal pup

The case

Some beachgoers find a seal pup on the beach. The mother is nowhere to be found, and there are no other seals nearby. After an hour, no other seals have turned up. The beachgoers decide to call the seal help line, who come to collect the seal and take it into temporary care. As soon as the seal can survive independently, it will be released back into the wild.

Do you believe it was right for the seal to be taken into care? Why do you think so? What would you yourself have done?



The dialogue

The participants in this group all believed it was the right decision to call the animal ambulance, and to leave decisions about care and treatment to the experts. 'Laypeople don't know what's best for animals, but experts do.' One of the participants did say they thought it was important that seal pups only be taken into care on the condition that they can be released again afterwards. The participants also found it important not to get too stuck in a human mindset, but to focus on what is best for the animal. It might be normal for a seal pup to be left alone for some time, while its mother is off hunting. The participants also said it was important to look at the seal population in general. Helping weak animals can ultimately weaken the population. And if the population is doing fine, perhaps it's best to just let nature take its course. One person did note that if an animal is in trouble due to human influence, there is no question that help should be offered.

For the future, the participants believed that animals need to be assured of enough space and a healthy habitat. People should give animals space, share their living environments and prevent their activities from causing problems for animals. Balance and natural selection are important, and animals should only be taken into care when absolutely necessary. If necessary, animals that are suffering can be euthanised. The participants believe that the government has a responsibility to design living spaces accordingly, and to ensure effective care facilities where necessary.



11. Feeding animals in winter

The case

These days, almost all discussion on wild animals inevitably turns to the Oostvaardersplassen nature reserve. We will not raise the full debate here, only one specific recurring aspect. Some people have made a case for providing additional food for the animals during winter. Others are steadfastly against the proposal, saying that the populations will only grow larger and lead to new problems the following spring.

Do you believe in feeding wild animals during the winter in general? Do you draw a distinction between animals in nature reserves and the birds in your garden?



The dialogue

All of the participants in this group agreed that it is better not to provide additional food. 'We should let nature take its course, instead of meddling with it or the animals. We should assume that nature will sort itself out.' The participants also believed that thought and action should be based more on the animals' perspective. Currently the debate is centred far too much on human emotion. Based on our feelings, feeding

the animals would seem like a good solution, which is not so in the long term. So it's better to let nature take its course. Some participants said the Oostvaardersplassen should be linked to other nature reserves, to allow the animals to search elsewhere for food. They believe the government is responsible for putting the animals in a situation where they have nowhere else to go.

In a more general sense, the participants felt that humans are steadily encroaching on animals' liveable habitats. Urban and town gardens are becoming 'stonier', for example, threatening the food supply of birds. For this reason, one participant thought it was a good idea to feed garden birds. Another participant did not agree, and said that the birds could look for food elsewhere.

In the future, the participants agreed that nature and the animals in it will ultimately survive, provided there is enough space for them. Humans don't need to intervene all the time, with an urge to control and manage everything. Humans should also avoid encroaching any further on the animals' space. 'We should adapt by putting fences around ourselves, for example, instead of fencing in nature.' The desire for ever-increasing growth, according to the participants, comes at the expense of the environment. Humans should look more at quality, not quantity. People and nature must co-exist. 'We mustn't push nature away.' There needs to be greater awareness; education can help here.

12. Recreational fishing

The case

Recreational fishing is permitted in many municipalities, and plenty of recreational anglers make use of the available permits. One municipality wishes to hold a youth fishing contest, stipulating that the fish will be re-released, and both fish and their habitats will be treated with respect. The municipality believes this is a good way to introduce children to nature, and to teach them respect for the environment.

Do you think this is a good initiative? Why/why not? Do you believe that fishing should be allowed?



The dialogue

Opinions differed in this group, both about the specific scenario and about recreational fishing in general. All participants felt it was a good idea to teach children greater respect for the environment, and agreed that fishing negatively impacts the welfare of the fish. However, the group did not feel that organising a fishing contest was a good way to

instil respect for the environment and get children outdoors. Several of the participants believed that recreational fishing should be banned entirely; another person said that the competitive element was the only thing wrong with the idea, but that fishing should be allowed even though the welfare of the fish is affected. Someone else said that children (who have never been fishing before) should not be allowed to do it, and that only experienced anglers should be permitted. And a few others felt that fishing with a hook and line was the problem, and that using nets was no issue. Several participants drew a comparison to equestrian sports. 'If fishing isn't allowed, then what about horse riding?' Some objected to the fact that a prohibition would leave people without their hobby.

Looking to the future, some of the participants thought that recreational fishing might well be prohibited one day. Others thought it would never happen.

Participants made several suggestions for more responsible fishing practices. One said that anglers should complete a training course before being permitted to fish; another proposed fishing for robotic fish. Another participant said that instead of fishing or hunting, people could start taking nature photographs underwater or on land – a different hobby that still involves interacting with nature.



13. A hedgehog in the garden

The case

A couple has purchased a robotic lawnmower to keep their lawn trimmed. The robot drives around the lawn automatically. One day the couple find a wounded hedgehog in the garden – they call the animal ambulance, and it turns out that the lawnmower was the culprit. The ambulance drivers inform the couple that this is not an uncommon occurrence, and that there are now automatic lawnmowers on the market with a ‘wildlife detection system’. As soon as the mower senses an animal, it stops and drives around it.

The couple look up this type of lawnmower online, and find out that it is twice as expensive as the one they already have. They therefore decide not to buy a new one.

What do you think of their decision? How would you feel if wildlife-detection systems were made mandatory for all automatic lawnmowers?



The dialogue

All group participants agreed that it is the couple's fault that the hedgehog was injured. When faced with the same situation they said they would all take responsibility and change their behaviour, for example by only using the lawnmower after dusk. This already goes some way to reducing the risk.

Another option is to only turn it on when they can monitor it themselves. The manufacturers of the robot should also take some responsibility, the participants said, e.g. by only supplying units with a wildlife detection system, or by informing buyers of the risks. Some participants said that hedgehogs may be injured by automatic lawnmowers because they are not fit or alert enough. Another proposed solution was to fence off the grassy part of the garden so that hedgehogs couldn't get through.

Participants stated that human activity is a problem for the environment and the animals that live in it. Humans are disrupting the balance of nature. The group thought that problems between humans and animals in the wild can only be solved by looking at all the interests at play. ‘Humans, animals and plants all have interests that need to be considered.’

14. Animals and traffic

The case

A province plans to increase the speed limit on a road running through a nature reserve from 80 to 100 km/h. Increasing the speed limit will also increase the risk of running over wild pigs that are common in the area. For this reason, the reserve's fauna management unit is authorised to increase the annual quota of animals to be shot from 50 to 80 per year.

What do you think of this idea? Is this acceptable? Why or why not?

Pigs, hedgehogs, toads and other animals are regularly killed by traffic. Wildlife bridges and tunnels can be built to help them cross roads safely, however this requires additional investments.

Do you believe that authorities should make funding available to allow wildlife tunnels and bridges to be included as standard elements?



The dialogue

The members of this group said they would need access to more data and information, e.g. on roadkill/accident numbers, and the effectiveness of wildlife bridges. Without data, they said it was difficult to form an opinion. One participant said that shooting animals was not permissible under any circumstances, except as a means to end existing suffering. This person said that investments in wildlife bridges should be made, since animals are a part of society. Another participant said that hunting can be effective as a solution, and that it prevents the suffering caused by road accidents. It also contributes to road safety, as fewer traffic accidents result from drivers swerving to avoid animals. These same participants did also believe that wildlife bridges offered a good solution, however.

For the future, the participants believed that lowering speed limits could work, especially in nature reserves and at night, but that they would also need to be enforced. The participants also believed that wildlife bridges and incentivising other forms of transport (including public transport) were a good idea. Greater separation of urban and nature zones was also discussed, but eventually the participants came to the conclusion that it was neither possible nor desirable. 'Humans and animals live together, and must share living space.'

15. The wolf is back!

The case

Wolves are back in the Netherlands – hooray! Or maybe not? Sheep farmers are particularly worried about the return of wolves.

To wolves, sheep are a delicious and easy prey, and various parties have argued for legislation to be adjusted to allow wolves to be hunted.

What do you think of this idea? Why?

Are there other possible solutions?



The dialogue

The participants in this group agreed on many things. They were all in favour of the wolf's return. 'Wolves are part of the Netherlands' native fauna, and help maintain the balance of nature.'

The participants did not currently see many problems, but some did say that management would be necessary in future if the wolf population were to increase significantly.

It was unclear whether hunting represented a good solution. Some participants were against hunting and thought compensation for sheep farmers would be more appropriate, while others had no issue with hunting wolves, seeing humans as one of the wolf's natural predators.



16. Urban goose-nest management

The case

A municipal wildlife manager sees to the management of urban geese populations. Without any management, the geese grow too numerous and become a problem that the municipal authorities wish to avoid. The wildlife manager is against killing animals, and so she uses a nest management system: 14 days after the eggs have been laid and the geese is brooding, the manager covers the eggs in a layer of oil. This prevents the flow of oxygen through the eggshell, causing the embryo to die. The oil is not dangerous to the geese, other animals or to the environment.

Do you find this acceptable? Why/why not?

In the future, the problems caused by birds in cities (e.g. geese, pigeons, seagulls) may be combated through the use of 'gene drives': a form of genetic modification that increases the likelihood of an animal passing on certain gene to its offspring. In this case, the relevant gene would make the offspring infertile, and could be transmitted through sexual reproduction until the population decreases, possibly even dying out completely.

Is this a good way to combat the problem?
Why or why not?



The dialogue

The participants in this group found nest management to be an acceptable solution, but did say that because it needs to be repeated

every year, it is not a permanent solution. They acknowledged the need for some kind of management, to prevent animal numbers from growing out of control. 'Whereas population numbers are usually limited by the capacity of the habitat itself, this principle may apply less in cities.'

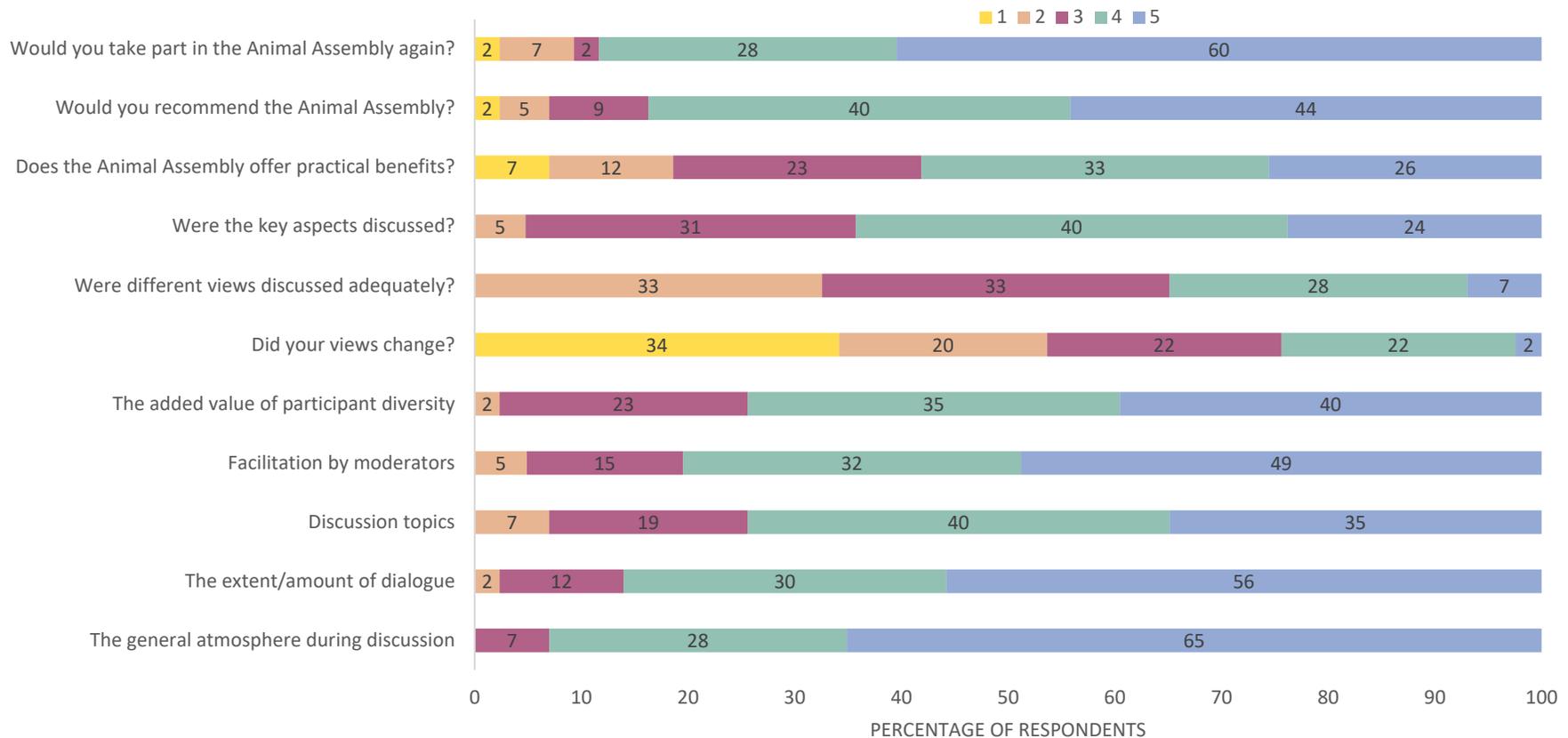
From an ethical standpoint, the participants found nest management a good solution as it causes the animals no pain. However, an embryo is destroyed (how painful is this for geese?) and the parents are denied the opportunity to rear their young. The participants did realise, however, that there are still some geese that are permitted to raise their young. Another option, according to the participants, would be to treat a certain number of eggs in each nest, so that all geese can still raise some of their young. This also approximates a more natural situation. The participants also believed that the geese's food supply should be limited. When the discussion turned to the nature of the problem itself, some participants wondered what actually constitutes a 'problem', and found the answer to be very subjective. They wondered whether the 'problem' was something humans should just accept to a certain extent, as something they could get used to.

The participants also shifted the scenario to the management of geese in rural areas. One participant believed that the geese are more of a problem in the countryside than in the city, and that shooting them there is therefore more acceptable since nest management is simply not viable with such large numbers. The participants ran out of time and did not discuss the possibility of genetic modification.



What did the participants think?

After the 2019 Animal Assembly, we issued a short online survey to ask participants about their experiences. Participants were asked to rate various aspects of the Animal Assembly on a scale of 1-5 (where 1 is low/poor/no and 5 is high/good/yes). The survey was completed by 43 respondents, and the results are given below.



Acknowledgements

We were very happy with the 2019 Animal Assembly! Once again, we saw that it is possible for people from different backgrounds and with a wide range of differing views to engage in productive discussion on (sometimes very delicate) animal issues. Focusing on the future allows us to take a step back, focus on the possibilities and opportunities, and not dwell too much on what is wrong or laying the blame.

A very common view among participants was that we should let nature take its course, and not intervene too often. Animals in need should be helped, especially if humans are the ones responsible for their predicament. Humans should give the environment and the animals living in it more space, instead of claiming and managing all of it for ourselves. Wildlife bridges and tunnels are effective ways of helping animals, and if the animals are causing a problem, humane solutions should be sought wherever possible. This approach will ensure a balanced coexistence between humans, animals and the environment. Habitats therefore belong to both humans and animals – we cannot draw a line between separate living spaces.

At CenSAS, we believe that it is crucial in society to engage in dialogue at an early stage on matters pertaining to the coexistence of humans and animals. Postponing discussion until problems become acute will only hinder the search for widely-accepted solutions.

Engaging in dialogue early and with an open mindset will allow for a variety of ideals and viewpoints. It is also important for a broad cross-section of society to participate in the discussion. Input from those who give thought to the cohabitation of humans and animals from outside a professional context is also highly valued.

We wish to thank all participants for their enthusiasm and openness, as well as the group facilitators for their preparation and efforts during the Animal Assembly. Without them, the discussions would not have been such a success.

Our gratitude also goes to the students of applied psychology from the Fontys University of Applied Sciences for observing the discussions. Without their help, we never could have produced the summaries of what transpired during the sessions.

Lastly, our thanks goes to Royal Burger's Zoo for their warm welcome, and their service both before and during the Animal Assembly.

We hope to see you at the next Assembly, which has been scheduled for late 2020!

Kind regards,
The CenSAS Team



