



B.E.A.R. @ WORK

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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LIVING WITH WILD ANIMALS.



I purposely use a period at the end of the above sentence. A question mark should not be there. It is not a question whether it is possible, but rather how we can achieve this. I therefore fully support the idea of really looking for possibilities to learn to **live together** with wild animals. And not relying on traditional methods, including (more) fences, culling, or placing traps. However, I am also pragmatic in the sense of exploring together (with the animals) what would be preferred by each group in a certain area. So assessing and balancing all desires; where would it possibly be better to prefer certain animals (also people are animals!) over others, according to what arguments? Such questions are tough, but not impossible to answer.

So, not a period, but an exclamation mark at the end of the above sentence?! For me, an exclamation mark symbolizes that '**living together with**' should be the first approach in any discussion that concerns our encounters with wild animals. That is still not common practice. In fact, only after thinking in that line, a second thought should arise in line of conventional thinking as to whether the domination of wild animals by humans through certain management strategies is still applicable. This stepwise approach is particularly required if you want (and dare!) to include wild animals as allies in future 'cohabitation strategies'.

In other words:

Living Together WIT Wild Animals!

In this E-book I discuss the four underlying pillars (or key principles) of how you can learn to live with wild animals. These also indicate the position of Bear at Work in the sense of where she stands for.

Learning to live together with wild animals is possible on the basis of the four following key principles:

Behaviour

Education

Awareness

Response-able-practice





PROBLEMS, PROBLEMS, CONFLICTS

Before I describe the four pillars about **'living with'** in more detail, it is important to understand the origins of this call for "co-existence" (the most common English term for "humans and wildlife living together").



Around the world conflicts between humans and wild animals are increasing. Also in the Netherlands. Several causes can be identified to explain this increase. At a global scale, the human population is still growing, while territories of wild animals are shrinking. This means that people will have more and more encounters with wildlife. And, it means that the amount of habitat for various wild animals, as well as their connectivity decreases as well. These declines are problematic in many ways. The "sixth mass extinction of wildlife" is one of them. However, in this E-book I will focus mainly on the use of space. That is, as said, when we continue to claim more and more habitat from the wild animals around us, it won't be a surprise that encounters (and conflicts) between humans and wild animals become more and more likely. In the end, both humans and wild animals need space to live. And, both humans and wild animals need food. And, both need places to hide, rest, etc. In short, living space. With a scarcity of space, encounters between both become more frequent and both humans and wild animals will "compete" for available living space and available food sources. These kind of competitions, when humans and wild animals come too close to each other, might eventually end up in dangerous situations for humans or animals. Dangerous in the sense of literally dying (by lack of food for example), and dangerous in the sense of direct - unexpected - confrontations resulting in rather unpleasant situations, or even injuries or death.

Not particularly desirable.





Additionally, we can also discern other ongoing processes that have an impact on the movements and whereabouts of humans or wild animals. And this might result in nasty confrontations sooner or later. Examples are climate change (wild animals move to areas where you wouldn't expect them) and large-scale use of pesticides (specific animals are killed, as well as other animals in the food chain, or these animals move on and go searching for other food sources, such as in urban environments...).



By now, it becomes evident that conflicts between humans and wild animals are looming...

In fact, all these spatial movements by humans and wild animals result in all kinds of encounters, including conflicts. These situations are often widely and 'vividly' reported in the media. You will often find the term 'human-animal conflicts', or rather in short 'problems with wild animals'. Or even more succinctly: Problem animals.

It is exactly at this point to remain alert when you "read or hear" about a particular problem(animal):

“Are we talking about conflicts between humans and wild animals or conflicts between humans about wild animals?”

These two perspectives seem similar, but are – in my opinion – worlds apart.





I argue that both "type of conflicts" shouldn't be framed as similar. That is, you should view the conflicts in their appropriate perspective. For example, you have literal conflicts between people and wild animals. And you have human-human conflicts that play an important role around human-wildlife conflicts. Those human-human conflicts then relate, for example, to how each person experiences wildlife and what someone perceives as the best course of action to resolve the 'conflict'.



In short, it's my drive, in any discussion, to be very keen in pointing out and paying attention to, "What type of conflict are we talking about here?", and "What is the actual conflict? To be able to reveal that, it is necessary that all participants of such discussions will be heard, including the wild animals themselves.



Human-Animal Dialogue

Are you confronted with various questions, different views and stories about the complex social issues of human-animal conflicts and cohabitation? Deal with them during a lively conversation. And explore together the common interests of humans and wild animals in your region.





COMMUNICATING WITH A WILD ANIMAL



Starting a conversation with a wild animal. I almost hear you thinking "huh, that's not possible at all!". That's right. In part. We can't communicate with wild animals in the same way we communicate with each other: With words and our word tones (human language). With animals, indeed, that doesn't work. Many pet lovers would agree with that. In the context of engaging in a conversation or 'asking' the opinion of wild animals, obviously interviewing them doesn't work either.

So how does it work?

Many studies show that animals communicate in other ways. They have their own language, so to speak. They make use of various kinds of senses. Visual perception is not the most important sense for many wild animals, as it is for humans. But their sense of hearing is much better developed. For instance, there is a reason why it is difficult to spot wild boar or deer. As soon as they hear anything suspicious they will leave.





So, how do you 'engage' then'?

The most important thing to realize is that you communicate with wildlife through a variety of senses and your behaviour. For example, are you regularly going out feeding the ducks with left-over bread with your (grand)child? First of all that is not very healthy for the stomachs of the ducks, however you will also notice that the ducks come rushing at you when the child walks by with a bag or makes a certain movement. So, it isn't the bread alone that matters in your communication with the ducks, also the accompanying movements. Another important point is that you don't only communicate with the ducks. After all, those ducks will not be able to eat all that bread themselves. However, rats living in the neighborhood can! They feast on it. This communication through bread is not quite what you had in mind. Perhaps it would be better to collect the bread in the organic waste container...





Another aspect of communicating with wild animals is the use of all kinds of scents. Some animals have an aversion to certain smells, when you diffuse them (via particular scent panels, or manually) on the spot where – particular – wildlife is not welcome, you transmit the signal 'this is my territory, I don't want you to stay here'. An animal also often leaves behind body odors to fellow animals or other animals to mark their territory. And sometimes you – as a human – mess up with those scents. Or you have some smart animals among them that won't be fooled. Then you go on to communicate: other smell, other demarcation, other sound, other 'push', other visual encouragement to get your message (border in this case) across.



What ultimately succeeds can be anything. It's a lot of trial and error and gaining experience in communicating with wild animals. And sometimes it just doesn't work. The message doesn't get across. What choice do you make then? Remove humans/remove animals/modify the landscape? How do you deal with ethical dilemmas in the (stagnating) communication with wild animals around us?

These questions, maybe a lot of questions, are important questions, because the answers help to make deliberate choices.





LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER WITH WILD ANIMALS

The call for "coexistence" is growing and arises from various directions of our society – from scientists, policy makers and all kinds of other groups. And this call becomes louder and louder. Despite – or perhaps because of – the increase in disputes among humans and wild animals.



So how can we learn to coexist WITH animals? I write 'WITH' in this question with capital letters for a reason. Because 'with' doesn't mean side by side. It doesn't mean that the environment is arranged in such a way that there is a sharp boundary: wild animals live over there and people live here.

My approach to "learn how to live WITH", is that we literally together seek a way to share the same space. Does that sound as idealistic? Probably. Does that sound spiritual? Maybe, but it's not. In fact, it's not impossible. Throughout the world, you can find examples. Wild animals tell their own stories in their own way. The question is whether we – humans – can or want to learn to understand these wild animals. And subsequently, when we learn to understand them, we can respond to them by expressing our boundaries as well (in an animal-friendly way). So, engage with wild animals. And perhaps also reflect on your own behaviour.

Join forces

Do you want to think, act, discuss about dilemmas, challenges and solutions around human-animal conflicts and living with wildlife? Or do you want to accept the challenge to reflect on your own relationship with wildlife? Check out my offer of interactive workshops.





Perhaps this still sounds too cryptic?

As a matter of fact, it isn't. It is very basic, practical and involves a bit of framing.

For example, consider the following quote:

"It's not the deer that crosses the road, it's the road that crosses the forest"



In other words, when you are driving on the Veluwe, a nature area in the Netherlands with lots of forest and heath, and you see a deer wandering on the road you can simply think 'oh there is a deer on the road. That deer doesn't belong there, it belongs in the forest. We need to prevent that the road is being used by that deer'. Or, you can turn it around 'oh there's a deer walking on the road. That road crosses this deer's home. Actually, that road I'm driving on shouldn't go through his home. I will have to pay careful attention to crossing deer and adjust my (driving) behaviour'. Of course, you don't need to remove the road, but this thought experiment helps you to consider wildlife issues differently.

Another example; quite frequently the question pops up in media or otherwise:

"Something must be done about these "problem animals" around us!"

A change of perspective can provide a very different perception and a very different understanding of a given situation. From what particular pair of eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch, experiences, history do you look at a given situation?

That matters.





If you combine all these perspectives, you can together – with the wild animals – explore feasible solutions for a particular way of living together. A way in which the wild animals are included – and thus acknowledged – as allies. A way in which various human perspectives are included. A way in which the relationship with the environment is central. And a way in which the starting point is to look for non-lethal ways of living together.

That is living together WITH wild animals.



And of course I can tell you much more about that!



Be challenged

Do you want participants to broaden their view, to be stimulated to think differently about wild animals? In short, provide them with a different vision on living together with wild animals? Have a look to see if one of my thought-provoking presentations would fit.





MISSION

"It is my mission to enable a sustainable relationship between people and wildlife, in which wild animals are acknowledged as serious allies."





DANGEROUSLY AUTHENTIC – RESEARCH WITH A BITE

How I will achieve this challenging mission is a way I describe as 'Dangerously Authentic'. It all started with my research on how to deal with human-wildlife conflicts. And how one could subsequently learn to live together with wild animals. Really learning to live together, with wild animals as allies. That type of research was relatively new the time I started with the research. And still it is certainly not common (research) practice and there are a lot of hurdles to take. In other words, this was and still remains 'Research with a Bite'.



It is also a subject that I cannot ignore. I keep working on it, because it is my contribution to connect people, connect humans to animals, and to make people think about both fellow humans and fellow wild animals. A dear friend and colleague expressed it beautifully just before I was going to defend my research (and I was full of nerves):

“It's a topic to stand up for”

And so I did. And I still do. Indeed, the various types of interactions between humans and wildlife are very topical and important to identify. Positive, negative and everything in between. My challenge is to show people that there are other ways to 'manage'. Different than the traditional ways we have known for centuries. By now we know more and more about the knowledge and skills of various wild animals. Such as, wild animals to be regarded as sentient beings. Increasing awareness that we can think differently with wild animals, with each other, and really start the dialogue to arrive at creative innovative ways to cohabit:

It is possible.





And that is what drives me. There are examples that it is possible. This is, for instance, shown on an international platform in which I participate to share knowledge on how we can live together with wild animals. We can – if we want to – really re-think in terms of strategies. In doing so, I am not claiming that it is an utopian dream that we are pursuing. Both wild animals and people may sometimes cause quite a havoc and create dangerous situations (for both humans and animals!). After all, not everything is very peaceful in the natural world around us. However, at a local level it is certainly possible to learn to live together with wild animals in other ways than based on the well-known – standard – ways of management (think of population management, fencing off areas with miles of fences, setting up zero-tolerance zones). And along these other lines of thinking, ideas of fencing and equally ideas of killing animals may well be a part of it, however, it shouldn't be the starting point. Or, regarding the latter strategy as Haruki Murakami points out:

“Death is not the opposite of life, but a part of it”

In the case of both humans and wild animals and the aim for cohabitation, this mainly concerns 'the way in which' humans or animals are killed. That raises ethical questions. I have had wonderful conversations about this topic with hunters and wildlife managers who also ask these questions themselves.





Everyone should ask him/herself these questions in order to reflect on why you do what you do and say in certain situations involving wild animals.

In short, there are enough topics to discuss about people and wildlife, including a taboo topic like 'death'.



Broaden your mind

Do you also want to broaden your mind and perspective on human-animal dilemmas and tackle current dilemmas and challenging questions related to humans and wildlife? If so, I would be happy to help you select the format that suits you most. (Check my website www.bearatwork.org for the most up-to-date offer of presentations, workshops and debates).





LOGO

Have a look at the logo and you see a bear climbing up some books. In these books all sorts of questions, background knowledge, possible answers, suggestions, and numerous stories about encounters between people and wild animals are hidden. In this particular case, it's about a bear, as an example. In this way you learn more and more about bears and their behaviour. The knowledge about bears or people accumulates and so we can better learn how to interpret certain behaviours, how to anticipate certain behaviours and in a general sense how we can live together. And conversely, the bear who climbs this pile of books also learns more and more – while passing all these books (read: in space and in time) – about people in their surroundings and their behaviour. Also those stories eventually end up in those books.

As with conflicts between humans and wild animals, multiple interpretations of this logo are possible. This logo also reflects multiple stories. You could also see in this logo, that we – humans – already have a lot of knowledge, are super smart and intelligent. This is symbolized by the stack of books. Then again, a bear (or other wild animal) does walk his/her own path. That raises the question: Can we still keep up with the wild animals around us? Or as Frans de Waal (ethologist, primatologist) states in his book with the same name:

“Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?”

The former interpretation of the logo is about the continuous interaction between humans (depicted here through books) and bears (depicted here as one bear, but also symbolizes all kinds of wild animals).



To conclude, I'll add another interpretation: We – humans – communicate primarily through spoken or written language (symbol of books). Bears and other wild animals who don't do that, who 'write' in their own way their own story, such as through their way of navigating through the landscape (here climbing a 'staircase'). This brings up the question whether we can also learn to read the signals of this bear and then communicate – in the bear's language – to the bear, so that the bear does not climb further up, for example, but halts at the bottom of the pile of books?



In a general sense, this logo mainly portrays that preventing or dealing with potential conflicts between humans and wild animals is not so much about being clever enough to outsmart animals. It is about whether we can learn to understand animals, listen carefully and observe how they react to our behaviour and how we react to their behaviour. And then responding to them accordingly. And again, it is the interaction that matters. I have summarized all of this in the term 'B.E.A.R.'.





B.E.A.R.

And what does 'B.E.A.R.' actually refers to? I'll address this one by one in detail.

The terms I use are derived from my research on cohabitation (a slightly different phrasing of coexistence, with slightly different nuances, which is too much to explain in this E-book). Cohabitation includes coexistence between humans and wild animals. Therefore, I investigated two situations dealing with human-animal conflicts: wild boars at the Veluwe and black bears in Colorado, USA. In doing so, I zoomed in on the complexity of activities and interactions between humans, animals, and the landscape. The following key principles of 'learning to live together with wild animals' emerged from this:

Behaviour

Education

Awareness

Response-able practice

Not surprisingly, all these principles are related to each other. The most prominent key elements are that each principle focuses on human-animal-landscape interactions, the use of various methods of communication, and includes a focus on the actions of each participant. When reading these elements, you will understand that the central point is that each pillar of B.E.A.R. includes wildlife as allies.





BEHAVIOUR

The behaviour of humans as well as the behaviour of animals are decisive to achieve a way of cohabitation. When you examine an ongoing conflict between humans and wild animals. Or - to me the term 'conflict' is most often inappropriate - examine a situation in which a wild animal is in a certain place or does something that we - humans - don't like, then it's important to carefully examine the behaviour of both. For example, a resident in a forested area is a big fan of tulips and plants his/her garden full of them. And then a family wild boar comes along and is also a fan of tulips (bulbs) and turns the garden of that resident completely upside down. Not very nice for the resident, however is the boar really the problem? In this case, the planting of tulip bulbs by a resident in an area with roaming wild boar is not a good idea. The solution is simple though: if you don't want a fence around your garden, then don't plant tulips. If you don't mind a fence, you can plant your favorite tulips. Just be sure to inform yourself about what kind of fence works and what doesn't, and make sure the gate stays closed at night.





In short, have a look at the behaviour of humans and the behaviour of animals, what both of them do, in a particular non-desirable situation. And subsequently explore where and how a solution can be found. In many cases, both humans and wild animals are able to adapt their behaviour (think of Frans de Waal: smart animals!). Just like any human, not every animal is the same and both may not understand the message signaled by certain strategies in the same way. This immediately brings us to the next pillar:





E DUCATION



When we think of education, we tend to think of educating people. How should people behave in a certain area, in order to, for example, leave wild animals alone? Or, that people won't experience any nuisance from wild animals? In other words, this belongs to the category of educating people: people explain to other people how they should or can behave in order to learn to live together with particular wild animals.

This is not irrelevant in learning to coexist with wild animals. Quite the contrary. However, it is often a neglected part of all the 'management strategies'. Information panels alone are not enough to convey certain urgent messages. For instance, who is not familiar with the enthusiastic child (you might also think of your very enthusiastic four legged friend) that just wants to run into the forest and doesn't want to wait near an information panel? A genuine conversation, visuals, entertaining actions, and other forms often have more impact.

Educating people is one aspect of learning to live with wildlife.

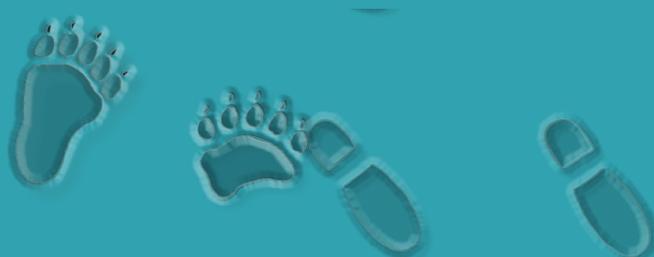
Besides humans, wild animals, in fact, also learn. Take bears as an example. Bears are also called 'smart animals'. They learn where it is safe and where it is not safe. They learn where they can easily find food. For example, some bears learn the meaning of organic waste containers: easy food sources. And, subsequently, they teach their children the same etc. They might also learn to enter houses through open windows or unlocked doors. And there are more examples like these. This 'learning process' is different for each wild animal, including a bear. We can also use the 'smartness' of wild animals, in this case black bears, to indicate where it is safe for them (and us!) and where it is not. We can anticipate their behaviour and indicate where they do have plenty of room to roam around and where not.



In other words, educating bears.

If we don't want bears to access our organic waste container, we can do a variety of things: lock the container so that it can only be opened by human hands. Or we lock the container and only put it outside on the day when it is picked up and emptied by trash hauling services (bears are often active at night). Or we use scent signs around the container which a bear can't stand. Or we can tap into the bear's sense of touch so that the bear will refrain from going near the container, for example by giving the bear a short electric shock. All such strategies are of course non-invasive (not causing injuries). The main aim is that the animal, in this case the bear, understands our message and adapts his/her behaviour. Otherwise there is no learning process. And thus education.

With this idea of education, however, it is important that we humans know how wild animals communicate. That we learn to recognize and 'speak' the language of the wild animals around us. With regard to the latter, I particularly mean that we learn to communicate our boundaries – what and where – in a non-lethal way.





AWARENESS

Awareness is about raising awareness and is therefore inseparable from the previous two pillars. Awareness involves more than just an 'I know' and that you understand something. Awareness also involves emotion and feeling. This often occurs in interaction between humans and wild animals. This might be even called a kind of 'in-depth awareness' (or also referred to as 'affective learning'). A thorough awareness of the other, that you are aware that there exists a particular relationship between you and a wild animal in a particular situation and that you perceive that wild animal (and other wild animals) as sentient beings that you need take into account. Or that you have become aware that these animals do things that you wouldn't expect. Awareness is therefore not a stand-alone fact, but a learning process. For some it is even a transformative process (think of a vegan who talks to a hunter). In this - affective - learning process it is important to be immersed and become sensitive to what those wild animals around you actually do. And conversely, wild animals also respond to our presence, what we do. They are aware of our presence and might respond in unexpected ways.

However, this 'in-depth awareness' is often very difficult or even impossible to explain in words. You could also compare it with a 'deep connection', and I don't mean that in a spiritual sense. People who frequently interact with wild animals understand this. They tell for example 'we know them'. What constitutes such knowing can often be described as that those animals are not just an appearance, but a 'strange person'. A 'strange person' whom you are trying to understand. They are not numbers in a table. The reverse also applies, wild animals become acquainted with (certain) people, without having a connection/relationship as with a pet. Indeed, wild animals are affected by the people around them and become aware of e.g. time, place, behaviour, which person and e.g. which car they should beware of. For example, a wildlife manager indicated that when he approached with his own car, a bear always ran away. If he approached with another car, nothing happened.





Awareness, as described here, has a great deal to do with us – humans – accepting that wild animals are smarter than we think and that individual wild animals of the same species cannot be regarded as equal. This idea of Awareness also implies that we are attentive what kind of – safe – environment is important for wild animals, that we can take that into account. And, conversely, that we communicate our own safe environment to the wild animals around us, so that they don't visit our safe-spaces. In this situation, you are literally including wildlife as an ally (co-participant) in your considerations about possible strategies.



Therefore, Awareness involves more than simply focusing on the learning capacity of humans or animals and is in that sense more elusive. Awareness can be raised in various ways, but the most effective way to raise awareness is through direct experiences between people and wild animals. This applies to both humans and wild animals. Additionally, there are more and more scientific studies demonstrating that wild animals also have emotions and feelings. What remains, of course, is that we humans – still – attach those concepts (and their interpretation) to certain behaviours of those wild animals.

The Awareness I refer to won't be accomplished by just transferring knowledge about wildlife. It involves much more.

Of course, it wouldn't be appropriate for all of us to subsequently go searching for wild animals (on the contrary!). Fortunately, there are several ways. One way is to share stories about wild animals and encounters with them (both the nasty and the lovely ones). Those (real-life) stories, those experiences, can trigger other people to start thinking, perhaps make them aware of their own attitudes and behaviours regarding wild animals.

A focus on this Awareness contributes to both humans and wild animals becoming 'unconsciously competent' in living together.





RESPONSE-ABLE PRACTICE

The key point of a 'response-able' practice or cohabitation between humans and wild animals is that we – humans – take our responsibility towards other sentient beings, such as wild animals. This means that we adopt strategies that allow wild animals the possibility to respond, to learn, to adjust their behaviour. In the same way this applies to humans. For both, in turn, other strategies will be necessary.



For people, this includes, for instance, setting up warning signs: 'Watch out! Wild animals cross here!' Or speed bumps, which reduce the speed on certain roads and enable people to break more quickly if wild animals suddenly appear from nowhere and cross the road. In this way, collisions with wild animals (literal collisions between humans and animals) can be prevented. However, issuing warnings and actual fines, as in Colorado for not offering your organic waste container in a bear-proof way, is also one of the possibilities for increasing responsibility.

For animals, you can think of natural repellents, such as redesigning the landscape, resulting in discouraging specific animals to move in a certain direction at all, rather direct them to walk another way. Alternatively, all kinds of technological gadgets can be used, such as scent panels, the use of sound to chase away animals from a certain area, or the use of electric fencing.



In short, a 'response-able' practice is about providing the possibility to 'respond', a possibility to react, a possibility to learn and adapt to a new situation. To achieve such a response-able practice, both natural defense mechanisms and technology can be used. Both are still in development, which makes sense as we continue to learn more about why animals do what they do – including humans. And that's great. Because that will enable us to respond to wild animals and 'use' their learning abilities to jointly pursue an appropriate way of living together.



As you can imagine, all the preceding pillars are actually a prerequisite to achieve a response-able practice. Thus, there is a reason why this pillar is listed at the end.





These four pillars are at the basis of various "cohabitation strategies", that can be employed. I purposefully write 'various'. Because, the stated pillars also indicate that we shouldn't fall back into the constant search for universally applicable solutions. To find 'the' optimal solution that we can deploy everywhere. Wild animals are not mere - standard - objects. Wild animals learn, just like people. Management and therefore learning to live together with wild animals is and remains a dynamic process.

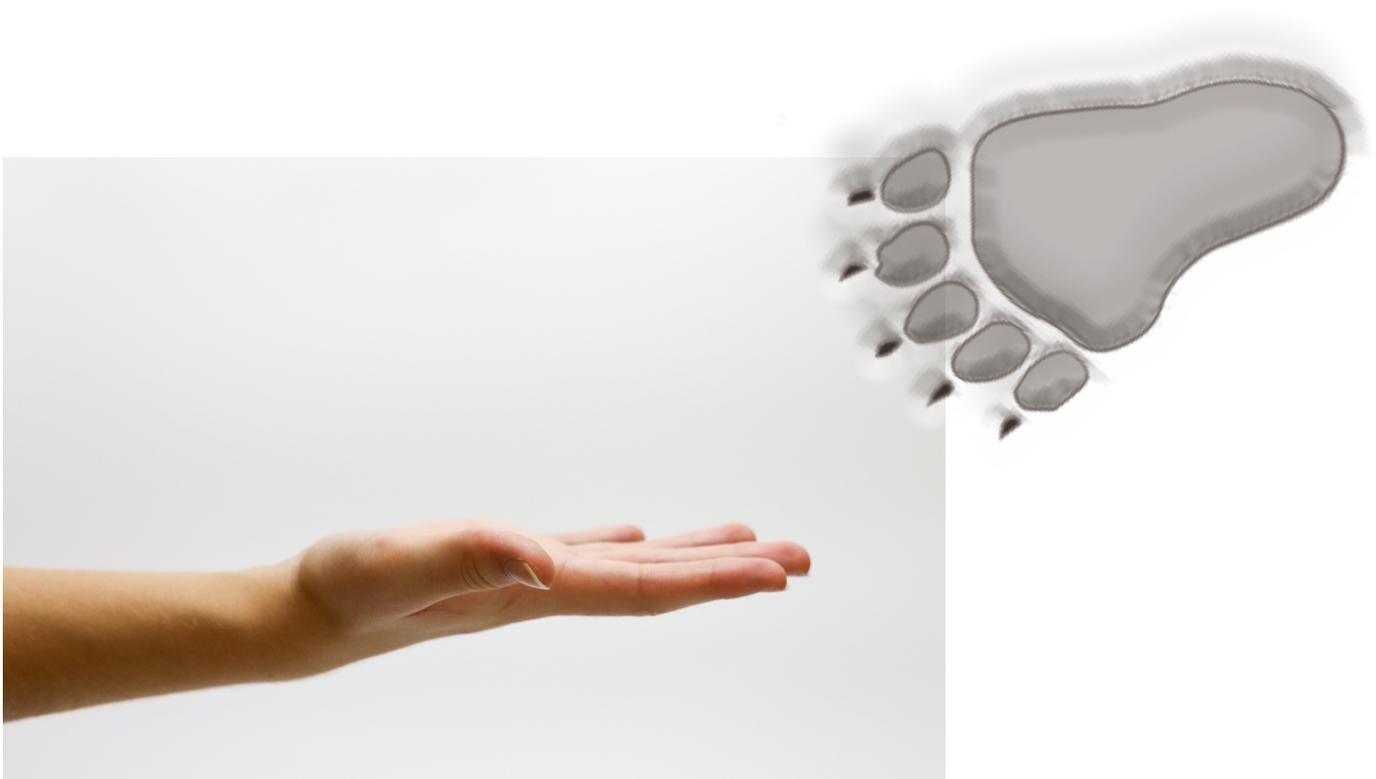
Said that, I may argue for something inconvenient.



And for some people totally undesirable.

Because:

"To learn to live together with wild animals is also to learn - or dare to - give up a bit of control".





DIFFERENT VIEW

As you probably have understood from the preceding, the idea of learning to live together with wild animals I have described in this E-book is not the most common view. Fortunately, worldwide this 'non-conventional version' is being adopted more and more! There is an increase in examples from various (field!) practices that show 'how it can be done differently'.

I can tell you much more about that. And I love to do that.

I would be pleased to share how you can think differently with wild animals during a presentation, a workshop, or a lively debate.

Will I meet you there?

Susan

For more information:
check my website
www.bearatwork.org





Colophon

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However, you are welcome to forward this E-book to people you know who would also like to read more about how to learn to live with wild animals, and especially the idea behind B.E.A.R..

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