

Animal Tracker – Wave 3

An HRC-Managed Research Study, March 2010



Report in Brief

This report summarizes results from Wave 3 of the *Animal Tracker* annual survey of U.S. adults regarding their attitudes and behavior toward animals. The first survey (Wave 1, 2008) included sixteen questions; this most recent Wave 3 survey repeated five of the original questions to understand how public opinion and behavior are changing over time. In summary, the most recent survey continues to show strong support for the protection of all animals, but knowledge of some animal issues remains low and the perceived impact of animal advocates is modest.

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HRC Information

The Humane Research Council is a nonprofit organization dedicated to maximizing the effectiveness of animal advocates by applying professional, cost-efficient, and informative consumer and market research methods.

To learn more about HRC, please contact us:

By phone: (206) 905-9887

By e-mail: info@humanereseach.org

Online: <http://www.humanereseach.org>

By post: Post Office Box 6476

Olympia, WA 98507-6476



Overview and Discussion

WAVE 3 RESULTS IN BRIEF

- ❖ At least half of U.S. adults believe the welfare of animals is “very” or “somewhat” important when asked about eight different personal choices. Welfare is most important when getting a new pet and least important when going to dog or horse races.
- ❖ With the exception of companion animals (both animals in homes and in pounds/shelters), a majority of U.S. adults are “not very” or “not at all” knowledgeable about each of the animal issues listed, with animals in laboratories garnering the least knowledge.
- ❖ Slightly less than half of U.S. adults think that the animal protection (AP) movement has had a “moderate” or “significant” impact on government and corporate policies.
- ❖ Responses to the attitudinal agree/disagree statements were positive for animals in most cases, but majorities of U.S. adults believe that dissection is a “vital” learning tool, that animal research is necessary, and that eating animals is necessary for human survival.
- ❖ More than two-thirds of U.S. adults support the specific AP-related goal to “minimize and eventually eliminate all forms of animal cruelty and suffering.”

SUMMARY RESULTS BY TOPIC (WAVE 3 ONLY)

- ❖ **Animal Welfare Importance by Choice [Q5]** – Perceived importance of animal welfare differs by choice and is significantly affected by how likely people are to engage in an activity. Excluding “N/A” responses, a majority believes that animal welfare is either “very” or “somewhat” important for all issues (49% for “going to dog or horse races”). Most (83%) feel that animal welfare is very/somewhat important when “getting a new pet,” while 70% say the same when “buying food (i.e., meat, dairy, eggs)” and 61% say the same about “buying consumer products.” Most other choices were rated very/somewhat important by about half of respondents.
- ❖ **Knowledge [Q8]** – Self-reported knowledge of animal issues varies significantly by topic, ranging from 22% who are very/somewhat knowledgeable about animals in laboratories to 79% who are very/somewhat knowledgeable about companion animals. Other than companion animals, only a minority of respondents is knowledgeable about the animal issues listed. There is less knowledge of animals in circuses and rodeos and horses/dogs used in racing (as well as lab animals). There is more knowledge of pets and animals in pounds/shelters.
- ❖ **Impact [Q12]** – U.S. adults are divided regarding whether or not they believe the AP movement has had an impact on government and corporate policies. Just over a third of respondents (36%) say that AP advocates have had “very little” impact, while essentially the same proportion (35%) says the impact has been “moderate.” One in ten respondents think the impact has been “significant,” twice as many that say “no impact” (5%). Finally, about one in seven respondents (14%) say that they do not know how much impact AP advocates have had.
- ❖ **Attitudinal Statements [Q15]** – Agreement and disagreement with various animal-related statements yielded mixed results from an animal advocacy perspective. Strong majorities of respondents agree with these statements: “some animals are capable of thinking and feeling emotions” (77% agreement) and “protecting endangered or threatened species should be a

global priority” (70%). However, 70% also agree that “using animals for food is necessary for human survival.” Additionally, most people (57%) agree that “research on animals is necessary for medical advancement” and that “dissecting animals is a vital way for students to learn about anatomy” (52%). On the other hand, only 23% of respondents believe that wearing real animal fur is ethically acceptable, and a majority (53%) says that farm animals deserve the same consideration as pets.

- ❖ **Advocates’ Goals [Q16]** – There is strong support for the goals of the AP movement, which were described in the survey as being to “minimize and eventually eliminate all forms of animal cruelty and suffering.” Nearly seven in ten people support this statement, including 28% who “strongly support” it (41% “somewhat” support it). About 17% of respondents oppose it (7% “strongly oppose” it) and one in seven (14%) says they don’t know.

CHANGES FROM WAVE 1 TO WAVE 3

In most cases, the findings from Wave 3 are consistent with the results from the Wave 1 baseline survey (allowing for an error margin of +/- 3.1%). However, there were a few significant differences worth noting, outlined below by subject area.

- ❖ **Animal Welfare Importance by Choice [Q5]** – Perceived importance of animal welfare has increased or remained essentially unchanged for all choices involving animals. The largest increase was for “getting a new pet,” with 83% of Wave 3 respondents saying animal welfare is very/somewhat important in this situation, an increase of 11% over Wave 1. Also, the proportion saying that animal welfare is very/somewhat important when “going fishing or hunting” increased by 10% from Wave 1 to Wave 3 (those saying “N/A” decreased by 4%).
- ❖ **Knowledge [Q8]** – There were no major changes regarding self-reported knowledge of animal issues from Wave 1 to Wave 3. There was a slight increase in reported knowledge regarding animals in zoos and aquariums (+8% saying very/somewhat knowledgeable) and companion animals (+6%). However, respondents report being somewhat less knowledgeable about endangered species (-7% saying very/somewhat knowledgeable from Wave 1 to Wave 3).
- ❖ **Impact [Q12]** – The response to the question about the impact that the AP movement has had on government and corporate policies remained essentially unchanged from Wave 1 to Wave 3. The only significant difference is slightly fewer respondents (-4%) saying “very little impact” in Wave 3 compared with Wave 1.
- ❖ **Attitudinal Statements [Q15]** – From Wave 1 to Wave 3 there were significant differences in agreement with only two of the statements included in the survey. The statement that “some animals are capable of thinking and feeling emotions” elicited slightly more agreement in Wave 3 (+6%), while there was slightly less agreement (-4%) with the statement, “Buying clothes made of real animal fur is ethically acceptable.”
- ❖ **Advocates’ Goals [Q16]** – Overall support for the AP movement’s goal to “minimize and eventually eliminate all forms of animal cruelty and suffering” remained unchanged from Wave 1 to Wave 3. However, the strength of public support eroded somewhat, with 28% “strongly” supporting this goal in Wave 3 (-7% from Wave 1). However, those who say “somewhat” support increased by 6% over the same period.

Key Implications for Animal Advocates

The *Animal Tracker* is designed to be a longitudinal study and the results will be most meaningful after we have collected multiple waves of survey data. When we have at least three or four data points for each survey question, then we will be able to make long-term comparisons and understanding how public opinion is changing over time. The implications from Waves 1-3 are therefore somewhat limited because we do not yet have sufficient data. Please refer to the Wave 1 report for general implications; the following are focused on changes from Wave 1 to Wave 3.

- ❖ Belief in the importance of animal welfare may be strengthening over time. In particular, those who said welfare is “not at all” important declined significantly from Wave 1 to Wave 3 for four of the eight situations listed. Additionally, the improvements were for relatively uncommon personal choices such as hunting, going to a circus, or going to a dog/horse race, which may suggest that these issues are becoming increasingly “winnable” for animal advocates.
- ❖ Although based on a single data point, there appears to be an increased understanding of the cognitive abilities of non-human animals. Specifically, those agreeing that “some animals are capable of thinking and feeling emotions” increased by 6% from Wave 1 to Wave 3 and seven in ten adults agreed with this statement in the most recent survey. The growing body of academic research on animal sentience and cognition may be having an impact.
- ❖ Knowledge of animal issues is low in general (excepting companion animal issues), but is particularly low for animals in laboratories. This lack of knowledge may contribute to the relatively lower importance placed on the welfare of animals used in research. Increasing public knowledge of the animals most commonly used in research (e.g., rats, mice, and birds) may lead to more emphasis on the protection of animals in labs. Additionally, continued focus on the misleading results obtained from animal research and the high cost of such research may be particularly persuasive given current economic conditions.
- ❖ Although the strength of support eroded slightly from Wave 1 to Wave 3, most recently seven in ten people say they personally support the animal protection movement’s goal to “minimize and eventually eliminate all forms of animal cruelty and suffering.” Despite the fact that these types of questions often yield positive responses, it is significant to think about what this support would mean for animals if taken to its logical conclusion. The challenge for advocates is to determine how to translate this sentiment into tangible gains for animals.

Background and Methodology

STUDY BACKGROUND

The *Animal Tracker* is a collaborative research project that provides animal advocates with an accurate and consistent understanding of the opinions and behavior of U.S. adults over time. The initial *Animal Tracker* survey (“Wave 1”) was completed in June 2008 and included a large sample size (N=1,500) for baseline analysis; Wave 2 was completed in March 2009 with a sample size of 1,000. All waves of the survey were fielded using the Knowledge Networks panel, which combines offline random digit dialing techniques with online panel research capabilities. This results in a true probability sample and survey data that are more accurate than most other online surveys.

The Wave 3 sample size is 1,020 respondents, although this number is slightly lower for most questions due to refusals, which were less than 1% in almost all cases. This sample size yields a maximum margin of error of +/- 3.1% for the entire sample at a 95% confidence level; the error margin is larger for subgroups. Note that the possible answers were randomized for all survey questions except 12 and 16. Additionally, the results have been weighted to account for differences between survey respondents and the population being studied, in this case all non-institutionalized adults (ages 18+) currently living in the United States.

WAVE 3 VITAL SIGNS

- ❖ Field period: 3/5/2010-3/16/2010
- ❖ Total number of surveys fielded: 1,645
- ❖ Total number of surveys completed: 1,020
- ❖ Survey response rate: 62.0%
- ❖ Median completion time: 4 minutes
- ❖ 5 questions (#s 5, 8, 12, 15, and 16 from the Wave 1 survey)

SURVEY LIMITATIONS

It should be noted that the use of online research methods could be subject to limitations given that some groups are not fully represented online; this typically results in under-representation of non-white, lower-income, and elderly individuals. Weighting the survey results reduces this bias considerably, but does not eliminate it entirely. Another caveat to these results is the reliance on self-reported data. Respondents’ answers may differ from their actual opinions or behavior for a variety of reasons, particularly for questions involving predictions of the respondents’ changes in the future.

Sponsorship Information

The *Animal Tracker* (Wave 3) was generously sponsored by a consortium of animal advocacy organizations including Alley Cat Allies, American Humane Association, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Animal Legal Defense Fund, Animal Welfare Trust, Born Free USA, and World Society for the Protection of Animals (USA). The Humane Research Council initiated the collaborative study and provided consulting services related to project planning, survey design, research, and analysis.

Wave 4 of the *Animal Tracker* will be fielded in the first quarter of 2011 and will include a subset of the survey's original 16 questions. The next wave will cover animal-related behavior and motivations, humane education, and support or opposition to various advocacy tactics. The cost of sponsorship for Wave 4 is likely to be in the range of \$500 to \$1,000 per sponsor. The benefits of sponsorship are significant, including access to more detailed survey results (including "cross-tab" data for key demographic segments) and full permission to use the results publicly with the media, in reports, etc. New sponsors for Wave 4 will be considered through January 31, 2010.

Please contact the Humane Research Council at (206) 905-9887 or info@humaneresearch.org if you and/or your organization are interested in learning more about Wave 3 or sponsoring the upcoming Wave 4 of the *Animal Tracker*.

Wave 3 Data (Topline Percentage Responses)

NOTES ABOUT THE WAVE 1 AND WAVE 3 SURVEYS

- The question numbers below correspond to the numbering used during Wave 1 (to make tracking easier between survey waves). For the complete Wave 1 results and to see all 16 original questions, please visit <http://www.humanespot.org/node/2901>.
- The numbers in parentheses show the change from the previous wave, where available and only if the difference is outside of the survey's overall margin of error (+/- 3%).
- Missing data (blanks/refusals) have been omitted from the analysis; however, blanks represent at most 1.4% of the response for any individual question or element.
- Where applicable, "don't know" (DK) and "no opinion" (NO) responses have been combined.
- In most cases, responses are ranked by the first column of data. For some questions, however, it makes more sense to sum columns for a more accurate impression of public opinion.

[Q5] How important to you is the protection of animals when it comes to making the following personal choices? If you never make these choices, mark "not applicable."

<i>N=1,020 (excluding N/A responses)</i>	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	Not at All	DK
Getting a new pet	56% (+8)	27%	8%	5% (-7)	4%
Buying food (i.e., meat, eggs, dairy)	29	41 (+8)	15 (-4)	10	5
Going hunting or fishing	26	36 (+7)	19	13 (-10)	6
Voting for a political candidate	21 (-5)	30	24	17	8
Going to dog or horse races	21	28 (+6)	23	19 (-8)	8
Attending circuses or rodeos	20	34 (+6)	23 (+4)	15 (-7)	7
Buying consumer products	20	41	20	10	9
Buying clothing	19	36	24	14	8

[Q8] How knowledgeable do you feel about issues that affect the welfare of animals in the following circumstances?

<i>N=1,020</i>	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	Not at All	DK
Animals kept as companions or pets	32% (+4)	47%	11%	6%	4%
Animals in pounds and shelters	7	42	33	13	5
Animals raised for food	7	36	33	18	7
Wildlife on public lands	6	34	37	17	6
Animals in zoos and aquariums	5	37 (+6)	39 (-4)	15	5
Endangered species	4	36 (-4)	38 (+7)	15	7
Horses and dogs used in racing	4	23	42	24	8
Animals in circuses and rodeos	3	25	43	24	7
Animals in laboratories	3	19	42	26	10

[Q12] Regardless of your personal opinion about the animal protection movement, how much of an impact do you think it has had on our nation's policies? Please include any impact on federal and state laws and regulations, as well as corporate policies.

<i>N=1,020</i>	
Very little impact	36% (-4)
Moderate impact	35
Significant impact	10
No impact	5
Do not know	14

[Q15] Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

<i>N=1,020</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>NO/DK</i>
Some animals are capable of thinking and feeling emotions	77% (+6)	6% (-4)	18%
Protecting endangered or threatened species should be a global priority	70	11	19
Using animals for food is necessary for human survival	70	14	16
Farm animals deserve the same consideration as pets and other animals	53	25	22
People have an obligation to avoid harming all animals	56	25	19
Research on animals is necessary for medical advancement	57	17	27
Dissecting animals is a vital way for students to learn about anatomy	52	24	24 (-4)
Buying clothes made of real animal fur is ethically acceptable	23 (-4)	44	34

[Q16] Do you personally support or oppose the animal protection movement's goal to minimize and eventually eliminate all forms of animal cruelty and suffering?

<i>N=1,020</i>	
Strongly support	28% (-7)
Somewhat support	41 (+6)
Somewhat oppose	10
Strongly oppose	7
Do not know	14