

Animal Tracker – Year 6

An HRC-Managed Research Study, July 2013



Report in Brief

This report summarizes results from Year 6 of the *Animal Tracker* annual survey of U.S. adults regarding attitudes and behavior toward animals. The first survey (Year 1, 2008) included 16 questions; a subset of five of these questions was repeated in Year 3 (2010) and again in the current year (Year 6, 2013). In summary, the most recent survey finds that, while there is limited knowledge of animals other than companions, most people believe it is important to protect all animals. The perceived impact of animal advocates is modest, but most people hold favorable attitudes toward animal protection and support advocacy goals.

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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.

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Year 6 Results in Brief

- ❖ **Knowledge** – With the exception of companion animals, a majority of U.S. adults say they are “not very” or “not at all” knowledgeable about animal issues, with respondents being least knowledgeable about animals in laboratories and those in circuses/rodeos.
- ❖ **Importance** – When asked about eight different personal choices, a majority of U.S. adults say they believe the protection of animals is “very” or “somewhat” important. Protection is perceived to be most important when getting a new pet and buying food.
- ❖ **Attitudes** – Responses to the attitudinal statements about animals were positive in most cases, with a majority of U.S. adults agreeing that animals are capable of thought and emotion and that protecting endangered species should be a priority.
- ❖ **Movement’s Impact** – About four in ten U.S. adults think that the animal protection movement has had a “moderate” or “significant” impact on the nation’s policies.
- ❖ **Movement’s Goals** – More than two-thirds of U.S. adults support the specific advocacy goal to “minimize and eventually eliminate all forms of animal cruelty and suffering.”

Summary Results by Topic (Year 6 Only)

- ❖ **Knowledge** – Self-reported knowledge of animal issues varies significantly by topic, ranging from 22% who are very/somewhat knowledgeable about animals in laboratories to 72% who are very/somewhat knowledgeable about companion animals. In addition to research animals, there is very little self-reported knowledge of animals in circuses and rodeos and horses/dogs used in racing. Knowledge is greater for animals in pounds/shelters and the other types of animals covered in the survey; slightly more than a third of U.S. adults say they are very/somewhat knowledgeable about these other issues.
- ❖ **Importance** – Respondents’ perceived importance of animal protection differs by issue area, based in part by how likely they are to engage in a given activity. Excluding “N/A” responses, a majority of U.S. adults believe that animal welfare is either “very” or “somewhat” important for all issues listed in the survey (55% or higher). Most (83%) feel that animal welfare is very/somewhat important when “getting a new pet,” while 71% say the same when “buying food (i.e., meat, dairy, eggs)” and 64% say the same about “buying consumer products.” People are least likely to think that animal protection is important when going to dog/horse races, buying clothing, or voting for a political candidate.
- ❖ **Attitudes** – Agreement with various statements about animals yielded mixed results. Strong majorities of respondents agree with these statements: “some animals are capable of thinking and feeling emotions” (74% agreement) and “protecting endangered or threatened species should be a global priority” (73%). However, 66% also agree, “using animals for food is necessary for human survival.” Additionally, most people (55%) agree that “research on animals is necessary for medical advancement” and that “dissecting animals is a vital way for students to learn about anatomy” (51%). On the other hand, only 23% of respondents agree that buying real animal fur is ethically acceptable, and a solid majority (57%) says that farmed animals deserve the same consideration as pets.

- ❖ **Movement's Impact** – U.S. adults are almost evenly divided regarding whether or not they believe the animal protection movement has had an impact on our nation's policies. A plurality of respondents (37%) says that animal advocates have had "very little" impact, while nearly the same proportion (33%) says the impact has been "moderate." Almost one in ten respondents (8%) think the impact has been "significant," while 5% say "no impact." Finally, about one in six respondents (16%) say that they do not know how much impact the animal protection movement has had on national policies.
- ❖ **Movement's Goals** – There is strong support for the goals of the animal protection movement, which were described in the survey as "to minimize and eventually eliminate all forms of animal cruelty and suffering." Overall, nearly seven in ten U.S. adults support this statement, including 31% who "strongly support" it and 38% who "somewhat" support it. About 16% of respondents oppose it (including only 3% who "strongly oppose" it) and one in seven respondents (15%) say they are uncertain.

Changes from Previous Years (2008 & 2010)

The *Animal Tracker* questions covered in this report were asked most recently in Year 6 (2013) and were also asked in 2010 and 2008. For most questions, the survey results are consistent over time (allowing for an error margin of +/- 3.1%). However, there were a few significant differences worth noting that are outlined below by subject area.

- ❖ **Knowledge** – Compared with both 2008 and 2010, there has been a decrease in self-reported knowledge for most animal issues. Specifically, from 2008 to 2013, U.S. adults were much less likely to say they are "very" or "somewhat" knowledgeable about endangered species (down 12%), as well as wildlife on public lands (down 8%), animals raised for food (down 5%), animals in zoos/aquariums (down 5%), animals in laboratories (down 4%), and animals in circuses/rodeos (down 4%). The declines in knowledge were greater from 2010 to 2013 than from 2008 to 2010 and there have been no significant *increases* in self-reported knowledge for any animal issue listed in these survey questions for any time period.
- ❖ **Importance** – Perceived importance of animal welfare has increased over time for all of the activities listed in the survey. From 2008 to 2013, the proportion of U.S. adults saying that animal protection is "very" or "somewhat" important to them increased most significantly when "getting a new pet" (up 14%), "going to dog or horse races" (up 12%), and "going hunting or fishing" (up 11%). There were also substantial increases in perceived importance of animal protection when "attending circuses or rodeos" (up 8%), "buying food, i.e., meat, eggs, dairy" (up 7%), and "buying consumer products" (up 6%).
- ❖ **Attitudes** – Despite significant differences over time for other questions, responses to a set of attitudinal statements (agree/disagree format) have held remarkably constant over the course of the surveys. The few instances of significant change are near the margin of error, with the exception of the statement, "Farm animals deserve the same consideration as pets and other animals." Agreement with this statement is at an all-time high and there are significantly fewer people saying they disagree with the statement, with some of that proportion shifting to having "no opinion." Moreover, agreement with the statement, "Using animals for food is necessary for human survival," is at an all-time low.

- ❖ Additionally, agreement with the statement, “Protecting endangered or threatened species should be a global priority” is at an all-time high (up 4% from 2010 to 2013). On the other hand, agreement with the statement, “People have an obligation to avoid harming animals,” is at an all-time low with the biggest drop from 2010 to 2013 (down 4%). There were no significant changes for the statements relating to the perceived necessity of animal research, the importance of dissection for students to learn about anatomy, or the notion that at least “some” animals are capable of thought and emotion.
- ❖ **Movement’s Impact** – The perceived impact that the animal protection movement has had on U.S. government and corporate policies was largely unchanged from 2008 to 2010, and then declined in 2013. Specifically, the proportion of those who say the impact has been “significant” or “moderate” was 44-46% in both 2008 and 2010, but dropped to 41% in 2013.
- ❖ **Movement’s Goals** – Overall support for the animal protection movement’s goal to “minimize and eventually eliminate all forms of animal cruelty and suffering” has remained essentially unchanged during all years of the *Animal Tracker* survey that include this question. The strength of this support eroded somewhat from 2008 to 2010 and then increased slightly from 2010 to 2013, but overall support and opposition responses have held fairly constant over time.

Key Implications for Animal Advocates

The *Animal Tracker* is a longitudinal study and this survey represents its sixth year and a third set of data for these specific survey questions. Now that we have collected at least three data points for each of these survey questions, we are able to determine trends to help advocates understand how public opinion is changing over time. Please refer to the 2008 (Year 1) and 2010 (Year 3) reports for a more complete background and the general findings for each question; the following implications are focused on changes in 2013 compared to these two years.

General Implications

A famous researcher once said, “most people don’t think about most issues most of the time.” This is certainly true of animal protection, a topic that most people do not consider on a regular basis and about which they have little relative knowledge. This is evident from the Animal Tracker results, which show that self-reported knowledge of animal issues is at an all-time low for most topics. The proportion of U.S. adults saying they are “very” or “somewhat” knowledgeable about animal issues decreased by an average of 5% from 2008 to 2013.

This decrease in knowledge may be due in part to the amount of attention given to animal issues during the 2008 voting season (which included several state ballot initiatives related to animals) and a comparatively lower level of attention to those issues in 2013. This decrease in knowledge suggests that animal advocates must work even harder to maintain the presence of animal-related topics in media and public discourse. If we are unable to effectively convey knowledge about the sentience and rights of animals to people, then they may be more likely to believe messages created by those who benefit from animal exploitation.

Despite decreasing knowledge about animal issues, however, belief in the importance of animal protection is actually *increasing* over time. The proportion of U.S. adults saying animal protection is “very” or “somewhat” important for the various topics covered in the survey increased by an average of 10% from 2008 to 2013. This is a clear trend, with significant increases from 2008 to 2010 and from 2010 to 2013. This implies that public opinion is increasingly favorable toward animal protection, even for relatively uncommon behaviors such as going hunting/fishing or going to circuses/rodeos. Advocates can take advantage of this with increased outreach and legislative efforts targeted at marginal activities (e.g., canned hunts, horse races, pound seizure).

The perceived impact of the animal protection movement has decreased over time; again, this may be related to the visibility of animal issues during the 2008 voting season. While it may not be essential for people to think the animal protection movement has a major impact on the nation’s policies, most people arguably want to be part of a winning team. To be taken seriously as a voting bloc and to effectively persuade more people to participate in animal causes, advocates need to be perceived as having an impact. We can help accomplish this by creating collaborative, highly visible campaigns and publicly celebrating all major victories for animals.

Lastly, behavioral science suggests that individuals also want to feel like they are in good company when it comes to making decisions. As a result, when positioning requests for behavior change, advocates may find it useful to cite that more than two-thirds of U.S. adults would like to see the elimination of all forms of animal cruelty and suffering to help individuals make a “popular” choice. However, support for this statement has remained essentially unchanged since 2008, so animal advocates may also want to consider how to promote an upward trend.

Implications by Issue Area

Farmed Animals – A third of the U.S. public acknowledges that consuming animal products is not necessary for human survival. This suggests that a third of the population is ready for specific information about how to reduce or eliminate their consumption of animals, while the remaining two-thirds need more basic education about the viability of plant-based diets. Despite this divide, agreement with the statement, “Using animals for food is necessary for human survival,” is at an all-time low, which indicates that advocates are headed in the right direction.

Companion Animals – Although people report being most knowledgeable about companion animals, there is a significant gap between knowledge of “animals kept as companions or pets” and “animals in pounds and shelters.” A plurality of respondents are “not very” or “not at all” knowledgeable about animals in pounds and shelters, which suggests that advocates need to do even more to educate people and dispel negative perceptions about shelter animals.

Animals Used for Research – The proportion of the U.S. public that thinks research on animals is necessary for medical advancement and that dissection is an important learning experience for students hovers near the 50% mark. Advocates may be able to influence these attitudes with an increased focus on studies that question the usefulness of the animal model for biomedical research and that highlight existing alternatives to dissection. Additionally, given that knowledge about research animals is the lowest for any animal issue, advocates should emphasize the intelligence, emotionality, and sentience of individual research animals.

Other Animal Issues – There is a significant need to increase public awareness about the welfare of animals used in circuses/rodeos, laboratories, and horses/dogs used in racing. Advocates will want to continue to help the public realize the importance of animal protection when voting, purchasing clothing, and in regards to dog/horse races.

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 (Year 1) was completed in June 2008 and included a larger sample size (N=1,500) for the purpose of baseline analysis. Subsequent surveys have been completed annually since then, with each year asking a subset of questions from Year 1. Following are the sample sizes and error margins for all years of the *Animal Tracker*.

Year	Date	Number of Respondents	Margin of Error
1	March 2008	1,500	+/- 2.5%
2	March 2009	1,000	+/- 3.1%
3	March 2010	1,020	+/- 3.1%
4	March 2011	1,252	+/- 2.8%
5	March 2012	1,072	+/- 3.0%
6	March 2013	1,028	+/- 3.1%

All years of the survey have been 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 much more accurate than most other online surveys.

The Year 6 sample size is 1,028 respondents, although this number is slightly lower for most questions due to refusals, which were less than 3% in almost all cases. The possible answers were randomized for all survey questions except those that present answers in a logical order. 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 U.S.

YEAR 6 VITAL SIGNS

- Field period: 3/28/2013-4/8/2013
- Total number of surveys fielded: 1,651
- Total number of surveys completed: 1,028
- Survey response rate: 62.3%
- Median completion time: 4 minutes
- Questions included: 5 questions (#s 5, 8, 12, 15, and 16 from the Year 1 survey)

SURVEY LIMITATIONS

It should be noted that using online research methods can 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* (Year 6) was sponsored by a consortium of animal advocacy organizations including Alley Cat Allies, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Animal Legal Defense Fund, Animal Welfare Trust, Best Friends Animal Society, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and the Summerlee Foundation. The Humane Research Council initiated the collaborative study and provided discounted consulting services related to project planning, survey design, research, and analysis.

Year 7 of the *Animal Tracker* will be fielded late in the first quarter of 2014 and will include a subset of the original baseline survey's 16 questions. The exact cost of sponsorship for Year 7 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), ability to ask your own questions, and full permission to use the results publicly with the media, in reports, etc. New sponsors for Year 7 will be considered through January 31, 2014.

Please contact the Humane Research Council at (206) 905-9887 or info@humaneresearch.org if you or your organization is interested in sponsoring next year's *Animal Tracker*.

To access reports and data from previous years of the *Animal Tracker*, as well as an interactive graphing tool to compare different years and demographic groups, please visit HRC's www.humanespot.org.

Year 6 Data (Topline Percentage Responses)

NOTES ABOUT THE YEAR 3 AND YEAR 6 SURVEYS

- The green and red arrows show the change from the previous year in which these questions were asked (Year 3, 2010), if the difference is greater than the margin of error.
- Missing data (blanks/refusals) have been omitted from the analysis; however, missing data represents at most 3% of the response for any individual question or element.
- Where applicable, “don’t know” (DK), “not applicable” (NA), and “no opinion” responses have been combined.
- Responses are ranked by the first column of data. For some questions, however, it may make sense to sum columns for a more accurate impression of public opinion.
- Row totals may not equal 100% and percent change may not equal zero for all questions due to rounding.

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

	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	Not at All	Do Not Know
Animals in circuses and rodeos	3.5%	19.4% ↓	42.1%	27.1% ↑	7.9%
Animals in laboratories	3.3%	19.1%	40.4%	27.7%	9.5%
Animals in pounds and shelters	8.0%	37.1%	32.4%	14.9%	7.6%
Animals in zoos and aquariums	4.9%	31.9% ↓	38.2%	17.8% ↑	7.2%
Animals kept as companions/pets	30.2%	41.9% ↓	15.1%	6.7%	6.2%
Animals raised for food	5.7%	30.9% ↓	36.1% ↑	19.4%	7.9%
Endangered species	4.5%	30.2% ↓	38.3%	19.1% ↑	8.0%
Horses and dogs used in racing	4.8%	19.7% ↓	41.3%	26.2%	8.1%
Wildlife on public lands	5.1%	28.9% ↓	37.7% ↑	20.9%	7.3%

How important to you is the protection of animals when it comes to making the following personal choices?

	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	Not at All	Do Not Know
Attending circuses or rodeos	21.5%	37.2% ↑	20.7% ↓	13.7%	6.9%
Buying clothing	22.3% ↑	33.4%	25.6%	12.0%	6.7%
Buying food (i.e., meat, eggs, dairy)	33.5% ↑	37.3% ↓	16.1%	7.6%	5.6%
Buying consumer products	24.5% ↑	39.3%	21.2%	9.0%	6.0%
Getting a new pet	57.3% ↑	25.4%	7.5%	5.8%	3.9%
Going hunting or fishing	28.0%	34.5%	19.8%	11.8%	5.9%
Going to dog or horse races	24.2% ↑	30.9%	21.1% ↓	17.4%	6.4%
Voting for a political candidate	25.3% ↑	30.9%	21.5%	13.7% ↓	8.6%

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

	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion	Do Not Know
Some animals are capable of thinking and feeling emotions	73.8%	6.6%	10.4%	9.2%
Buying clothes made of real animal fur is ethically acceptable	23.3%	40.9%	29.2%	6.6%
Dissecting animals is a vital way for students to learn about anatomy	51.0%	20.6%	21.9% ↑	6.5%
Farm animals deserve the same consideration as pets and other animals	57.0% ↑	16.4% ↓	20.4% ↑	6.2%
People have an obligation to avoid harming all animals	51.8% ↓	22.5%	17.9%	7.8%
Protecting endangered or threatened species should be a global priority	73.1% ↑	7.7%	13.6%	5.6%
Research on animals is necessary for medical advancement	55.2%	16.6%	20.1%	8.0%
Using animals for food is necessary for human survival	65.9%	17.0% ↑	12.7%	4.4%

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?

Significant Impact	8.1%
Moderate Impact	32.8%
Very Little Impact	37.5% ↑
No Impact	5.3%
Do Not Know	16.3%

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

Strongly Support	30.5%
Somewhat Support	37.9%
Somewhat Oppose	13.2% ↑
Strongly Oppose	3.2%
Do Not Know	15.2%