

## **Animals arouse the full humanity in humans**

From the human perspective, there are pet animals, livestock, urban wildlife, wildlife, marine life and so on. It is unlikely that animals see the world the way we do. To them, we are likely all just one big ecosystem. Long ago, when I had dogs, I taught them to not chase the squirrels or rabbits or crows we see in our neighbourhood and on the trails. They learned to coexist peacefully with urban wildlife. Over time, the little animals no longer scampered away when we walked or ran by, but simply looked on. They found a place for us to fit into their world and perspectives. Human animal coexistence is a wonderful feeling.

One spring day, I saw a bird picked up an old clump of dog fur in our backyard and flew off. It must have been good nest building material. I started sticking the fur into hedges and tree branches. In the beginning, it will take several days before the birds picked up the fur. Soon they'd come within minutes to pick up the fur. They were always watching. Eventually the birds will be hopping around the backyard with us while we all relaxed. Our safe place was their safe place. These birds often built their nests under on our property.

Perhaps the little birds got used to the smell of our dog from the fur in their nests or perhaps they saw how their parents trusted us. When the little ones hatched, their parents brought them to us, often hopping on the railings just a metre from us while we sat on the porch.

Crows are scavengers that will eat almost anything. When one of my older dogs got sick and often puked out his not quite digested kibble food, I'd collect them and leave them on an empty plot across the little street on our home. Initially, it would take days before the crows would start to eat this waste. Eventually, one will start crowing the moment I left some food and within minutes and soon the others will fly down for their buffet. They were always watching.

One summer, the crows started dropping trinkets like wingnuts, screws and earrings onto our backyard. At first, I thought these ungrateful crows were trying to poison my dogs. Then it occurred to me that they were gifts because while my dogs would be sniffing at the items, the crow(s) would be on the fence crowing away.

When I run or walk a new route in any neighbourhood, the squirrels and rabbits will scurry off when they see me coming, and the birds will fly off. Over time, I noticed that the squirrels will half-heartedly scurry off and

peek at me from behind the tree trunk, and the birds will hop a little away but won't fly off. I usually say a soft 'hi, squirrel' or 'hi, birdie' when I go by, just so they can recognize my voice and perhaps even the words. Within weeks, I'd see them hopping or running closer to my path ahead. They got curious about me and trusted me. They wanted to be friends. By then, my greetings no longer scared them off but reassured them enough to just stay still and watch me go by. These little ones are always watching and eager to connect to us. We can connect as long as we pay attention and offer some kind of reciprocal interactions.

Is there inter-species communication and existence in urban settings that are dominated by humans? Yes. One early calm morning when I was out for my run, a crow suddenly started cawing loudly and urgently and flew up to the very top of a tree. The other animals scampered away urgently into hiding. Was the crow threatening the little animals? Then when I looked up ahead, I saw a fox emerge from a bush and crossed the road. That was a danger-alert from the crow to the others. It is hard to tell if this kind of coordination only exist among prey animals, but it is clear they coexist and have each other's backs. Amazing.

Another time when I was jogging home, I saw what looked like two very slow moving squirrels in the bushes. When I slowed to a walk, I noticed the animals started to follow while keeping a relatively safe distance. Thinking they might be sick, I decided to investigate. They were baby raccoons. Where was their mom? I then realized I saw a dead raccoons by the side of the road two days earlier about five hundred metres. Those babies were orphans and needed help. I managed to find a blue bin recycling box and some old newspapers where I placed them. It was early morning so I had to wait for about three hours for the local humane society to show up. When I found out the baby raccoons will be 'destroyed', another word for killed, I took them back and started desperately looking for anyone who might be able to rescue and rehabilitate them. Another three hour passed before someone who knew someone who knew someone....found a lady on a farm who knew how to rehabilitate baby raccoons. She arrived within a half hour and knew exactly how to handle them.

These are just a few of my interactions with non-pet animals over the years. When I feel connected to the little wildlife around me, I am more conscious of what they need to survive, and thrive. Do the bushes really need to be trimmed? What kind of trees should I plant? Should I plant more clover which the rabbit seems to like? I should leave the harmless dead tree alone for the woodpecker, shouldn't I?

One day when I was sitting on the porch with my dogs having a snack, I realize rabbit was there eating the clover just in front of me, squirrel brought his nuts and ate them just a metre from me, the birds were on the railings and the crows just walking around the yard. We were all just hanging out together. One big inter-species family. It was a wonderful feeling. Are there others who have such relationships with their neighbourhood wildlife?

Animals are always aware of us but humans are not always noticing the animals around them. There's always point B to get to, a list of to-do's, time schedule, and so on. Children and youths have their mobile phones to distract them from their surroundings these days. What if I bring their surroundings onto the mobile devices? Will that cause them to look up and about? To listen to what's around them?

A mouse is just a mouse until you give it a name, like Mickey. A duck is just a duck until you call it Donald. A squirrel is just another squirrel until we recognized it and give it a name. It's the same for the rabbits, the crows, the bear, and all other animals. People may not think twice about a raccoon or a squirrel, but they'd stop to consider Robbie the Raccoon and Sherry the Squirrel. What we're missing in the animal-human coexistence world is a quick and accurate ability for us to recognize individual animal. It's the recognition that cause people to develop relationships.

Imagine a mobile platform that enables a neighbourhood to 'adopt' a neighbourhood bear with a profile that is managed by some experts. Barry the neighbourhood bear is a lot more familiar and understandable than a generic unknown bear. Barry can have a profile that everyone is able to update and refer to. This could prevent needless killing of bears and enable us to coexist.

Everyday people I speak with see conservation as some top-down sophisticated operations by experts and organizations. However, the opposite is true. Conservation comes in various forms and sizes. For the masses, conservation is simply small everyday habits that benefit their animals and natural ecosystem in their immediate surroundings. It is these micro-environments that collectively make up the larger environment. Experts and organizations do amazing work in this field, but they can only cover so much ground and so the gaps can be filled by everyday people.

That is the reason for my current startup project. I believe the spectrum of connectivity from everyday people to conservation starts with the identification and understanding of animals around us, not just pets. If humans make inter-species coexistence second nature, that will lead them to value conservation of our natural

environments. The key to unlocking the floodgate to human-animal connectivity is the ability to quickly and accurately identify individual animals and to read their emotions. That is the greater goal of my startup tech project.

I have received research funding to enhance multi-modal machine learning animal identification algorithms that will eventually also read animals' emotions. We will start with dogs and cats for widespread acceptance and usage before expanding into other species. A mobile platform will be built to host this algorithm for the masses, and to enable connection among everyday people and between them and conservation groups like Uneathodox. Enabling and enhancing the wellbeing of animals and bridging the gaps between everyday living and conservation habits through small everyday habits and learning. The effects from the great work of organizations like Uneathodox can be magnified only if the masses follow suit.

Humanity is the high level of consciousness and conscientiousness that steer humans to value the larger world of conservation; to regenerate our world. Regeneration occurs when everyday people connects with the animals around them and then treats the larger natural ecosystem preciously. Animals arouse the full humanity in humans and this eventual platform aims to achieve this goal.