

What the COVID-19 Crisis Is Telling Humanity

From Marc Bekoff, Psychology Today/Animal Emotions

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Humans are largely responsible for the alarming increase in zoonotic diseases.

I recently read an excellent essay by [Dr. David Wiebers](#) , Emeritus Professor of Neurology and Consultant Emeritus in Neurology and Health Sciences Research/Epidemiology at Mayo Clinic, and [Dr. Valery Feigin](#) , Professor of Neurology and Epidemiology and Director of Auckland University of Technology's National Institute for Stroke and Applied Neuroscience, titled "[What the COVID-19 Crisis Is Telling Humanity](#) ." It was first published in the prestigious journal *Neuroepidemiology* and reprinted with some additional text and commentaries in *Animal Sentience*.



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"What the [COVID-19](#) Crisis Is Telling Humanity" is a very concise and easy-to-read, detailed summary of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, and I'm pleased that Dr. Wiebers could take the time to answer a few questions about this landmark essay.

Why did you and Valery write "What the COVID-19 Crisis Is Telling Humanity"?

The COVID-19 crisis, while creating incredible hardship and destruction, has also provided us with important information, messages, and opportunities relating to the future of our species and other lifeforms on Earth. We felt compelled to point out the most pertinent of these latter aspects, along with what we thought were the relevant implications not only for the medical community but also for all of society.

How does your essay relate to your backgrounds and general areas of interest?

Valery and I have been trained in medicine, neurology, and epidemiology, and the COVID-19 crisis has impacted all of these areas enormously, along with the broader field of brain health, which is central to all health and includes cognitive, psychological, [psychiatric](#), and neurological aspects. We have also had a longstanding interest in protecting nonhumans as well as humans, and I have always personally viewed

my work in animal protection as an extension of the work I do in medicine. The primary goal of the medical profession is to decrease the amount of unnecessary death and suffering in human beings—and the animal protection community simply wishes to extend this same goal to beings other than humans.

Who is your intended audience?

Our intended audience was an all-encompassing one, including the medical and scientific communities; governmental, non-governmental (NGO), corporate, and academic entities; the One Health and One Welfare communities; the animal and environmental protection communities; and broader society, because all are greatly affected by these issues, and all will be needed as part of the solution.

What are some of the topics that are woven into your piece, and what are some of the major messages?

As we begin to find our way through this crisis, it is imperative for us as a species to reflect deeply upon what this and other related human health crises are telling us about our role in these increasingly frequent events and about what we can do to avoid them in the future. Our failure to do so may result in the unwitting extermination of all or a good part of our species from this planet.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest example of how human behavior in connection with other lifeforms has brought about an alarming increase in zoonotic diseases in recent decades with the potential to cause massive amounts of societal and economic devastation. The time has come for us to rethink our relationship with all life on this planet—other humans, nonhumans, and the Earth. In this context, a One Health and One Welfare approach, rooted in the premise that human, animal, and environmental health and welfare are inextricably linked, becomes imperative to our collective future.

Rather than simply attempting to react to crises like COVID-19 after death and destruction are already upon us, we need to have the vision, [wisdom](#), and compassion to address the fundamental underlying causes and act now to mitigate and prevent the numerous disasters that are literally waiting to happen.

The Chinese government should be applauded for taking the much-needed step of banning the trade and consumption of wild animals in China on February 24, 2020. Although shutting down this \$74 billion wildlife farming industry has been criticized by some as economically harmful, such harm pales overwhelmingly in comparison to the vast health and economic threats to China and the world involved in continuing to allow business as usual. Other nations throughout the world should also ban the trade and consumption of wild animals associated with live-animal markets. Such a ban should also apply to the import, export, and internal transport of live wildlife or wildlife meat intended for sale in wildlife markets.

Intensive confinement of animals in factory farm operations should be discontinued worldwide for the sake of animals, humans, and [the environment](#), and we should rapidly evolve to eating other forms of protein that are safer for humans, including a wide range of time-honored, fundamental, plant-derived food sources as well as the more recently developed plant-based meat/dairy and egg alternatives, and even cultured meat (which is produced by culturing animal cells). Additional investment in plant-based agriculture to grow crops to feed humans rather than livestock for human consumption would feed far more people while utilizing far less land and water, allowing for the preservation of vital ecosystems for innumerable species.

The COVID-19 crisis has provided us with a wake-up call, an opportunity—and it is important that we as a species awaken to the imperative for us to change and that we act in ways that are beneficial to all

lifeforms. What is good for nonhumans and the Earth is virtually always in the best interests of humans, given the profound interconnectedness of all life. All that we do depends upon abundant plant and animal life as well as clean air and water—and each of us can have a positive impact upon these fundamentals by demonstrating and inspiring enhanced [mindfulness](#), beginning most basically with what we eat and how all of our daily choices and actions may be affecting animals and natural habitats. Ultimately, the survival not only of other lifeforms on this planet but also of ourselves will depend upon humanity's ability to recognize the oneness of all that exists and the importance and deeper significance of compassion for all life.

What are some of your current projects?

We are now focusing a great deal of [attention](#) on global brain health and its connection to a One Health approach, the overarching importance of brain health to overall health, and a number of global COVID-19 research efforts. ² We are also active in efforts to carry out the suggested actions on behalf of all life that we have laid out in this current paper.