

## **Sustainability | Individual communication**

### **IC - (20820) - DO CHILDREN'S JUDGMENTS OF HARMFUL ACTIONS TOWARDS ANIMALS DEPEND ON THEIR ATTRACTIVENESS?**

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#### **Background and objectives**

Nature has an aesthetic value, which has been demonstrated to influence people's preferences for landscapes, plants, and animals. This aesthetic value or perceived attractiveness influences people's attitudes towards animal conservation more strongly than objective characteristics such as the animal's ecological value or its usefulness to humans. This, in turn, has an impact for many species' survival prospects.

Nature conservation has long been thought to have moral roots, and individuals who believe that nature has a moral standing tend to behave in a pro-environmental way. Considering this, the current research asks whether children's judgments of harmful actions towards animals depend on animals' perceived attractiveness.

#### **Process and methods (for empirical research)**

We conducted two complementary studies. In Study 1, primary school children ( $N = 359$ ) rated the perceived attractiveness of six animals and judged how severe it is to hurt them, as compared to moral transgressions, social-conventional transgressions, and personal choices. In Study 2, we experimentally tested whether the attractiveness of animals rated as unattractive in Study 1 could be influenced by an environmental education intervention.

#### **Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)**

In Study 1, our results showed that hurting attractive animals was perceived as severe as hurting another child, while hurting unattractive animals was evaluated as less serious than social-conventional transgressions. After the intervention (study 2), children in the experimental group ( $N = 21$ ) rated unattractive animals as more attractive than before the intervention, and this led to judging harming these animals more severely than before the intervention. No changes were found in the control group ( $N = 20$ ).

#### **Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution**

Our findings show that perceived attractiveness plays a role in children's moral judgments of actions against animals. Hurting attractive animals was assessed more severely than hurting unattractive ones. Fortunately, animals' perceived attractiveness can be enhanced by environmental education interventions, leading children to consider harming animals previously seen as unattractive less acceptable.

**Palavras-chave : Children, morality, animals, environmental behavior**