

an EVEN exclusive interview –



with

Marc Bekoff

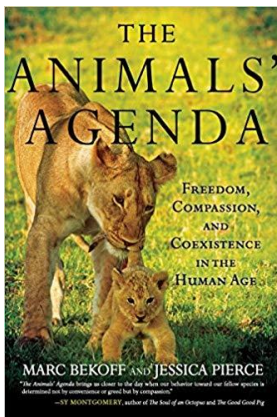
Author, Professor, and Long-Time Animal Rights Advocate

Marc Bekoff is Professor Emeritus of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and a Former Guggenheim Fellow. In 2000, he was awarded the Exemplar Award

Photo Courtesy of Tom Gordon

from the Animal Behavior Society

for major long-term contributions to the field of animal behavior.



Marc has published more than 1,000 scientific and popular essays, three encyclopedias, and 30 books including *The Ten Trusts (With Jane Goodall)*, *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals*, and *Ignoring Nature No More: The Case for Compassionate Conservation*. His latest books are [*The Animals' Agenda: Freedom, Compassion, and Coexistence In The Human Age*](#)



[*Freedom, Compassion, and Coexistence In The Human Age*](#) and [*Canine Confidential: Why Dogs Do What They Do*](#). He writes regularly for *Psychology Today*.



**"The 'It's too hard to become vegan excuse' is really pretty flimsy.
It's not difficult at all."**

EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?

Marc: As I studied and learned more and more about the emotional lives of nonhuman animals (animals), it became very clear that I simply could no longer justify eating other animals. It was an ethical choice and an easy decision and easy transition, because I really didn't eat a lot of animals or animal products.

I have seen a difference with some of my friends who cycle and race seriously, and with a number of my teammates, who are very bright people and open to talking about vegetarianism and veganism. They won't be coerced, but some have gotten 'more veggie' and when we eat after rides they eat veggie or vegan meals. They're very thoughtful.

I get lots of emails from students who have read *Animals Matter* and I was thrilled to see how many of them were 10-14 year old kids in elementary and middle schools who were considering changing their meal plans to exclude animals and animal products.

**"Science and the ethical treatment of animals aren't incompatible.
We can do solid science with an open mind and a big heart."**

EVEN: So, you believe things are changing?

YES! Not fast enough but moving along in the right direction via incremental changes. A lot of people do it that way. The bottom line is that some people do change permanently, but it can take some time. Some people backslide, but I'm not disappointed. It's best to not be in their face about it.

**"Changes in diet and changes in moral compasses
don't happen overnight."**

I like to hear from readers and it blows my mind that sometimes a 6th grader sounds like a college freshman, having read my and others' books and essays on animal emotions, animal sentience, and animal protection. I recall a student in California, a sophomore in high school, who contacted me saying she wanted to go vegetarian, and then she organized a Veg Club at her school! All very non-confrontational.

“A reduction of meat consumption by only 10% would result in about 12 million more tons of grain for human consumption. This additional grain could feed all of the humans across the world who starve to death each year---about 60 million people.”

EVEN: Who was an influential person in your life earlier on that led you to veganism?

Marc: No one in particular, really. I simply decided to 'go vegan' because it was the right thing to do, and it was very easy.

EVEN: what, in your opinion, is the most misunderstood idea about veganism?

Marc: That it is **difficult** to do. I've traveled all over the world and it's really simple to eat a vegan diet. Another misunderstood idea is that it's **unhealthy**. I've never been in better health.

From 2004 to 2014, I flew more than a million miles and traveled all over the world, and it was so easy to be vegan! Vegan pizza, pasta, salad, various sorts of potato dishes, and fake meats, if you like them --- what's hard about that? What are you really giving up?

We're brainwashed and imprisoned by the taste we acquire. Just get healthy and high on carbs.

“Often, the greater our ignorance about something,
the greater our resistance to change.”



EVEN: What do you think makes veganism hard for people?

Marc: The habits they form that center on their meal plans. I've had really nice people say something like, "I know they suffer, but I need and love my burger." Many people get locked into certain meal plans and they feel they really need **who**, not what, they are eating. It's essential to point out that many of the nonhumans who wind up on a fork, plate, or in our mouths were formerly sentient, feeling, and conscious beings who must be referred to as "who" or "whom", not "that," "which," or "it."

“Just because other animals are different than us doesn’t mean they are less than us.”

EVEN: What one thing from your thinking in childhood do you wish you could change?

Marc: Really not much. I grew up in a warm and peaceful home and was pretty much told I could do whatever I wanted to do. It was obvious to my parents that by the time I was around 3 years old, I was deeply concerned about what other animals knew and what they were feeling. My parents said that I told them **I could feel their joy and pain and suffering**, and that humans simply **had** to take care of them.

“Dominion does not mean domination. We hold dominion over animals only because of our powerful and ubiquitous intellect. Not because we are morally superior. Not because we have a "right" to exploit those who cannot defend themselves.

Let us use our brain to move toward compassion and away from cruelty, to feel empathy rather than cold indifference, to feel animals' pain in our hearts.”

In my younger years vegetarianism was not on my radar, but I would talk to my goldfish and squirrels and my parents fully supported it. As a matter of fact, my parents never gave me grief about my meals or when I spoke highly of other animals and often changed their ways whenever I visited them!

“Emotions are the gifts of our ancestors. We have them and so do other animals. We must never forget this.”

EVEN: If you were to mentor a younger person today, what guidance might you offer? What encouraging words might you share with a newbie?

Marc: I would simply and gently show them that it's easy to "go vegan" and that it's okay to do it incrementally. This way the changes in their meal plans last a long time, hopefully forever. And I'd show them **good role models** to follow. I'd also talk to them about how important it is to "Walk the talk!"

I have many cycling partners 22 to 70+ and when we go out to lunch, many eat veg out of respect for me. They don't do it to please me, but rather because it is the right thing to do.

We must remain hopeful that a universal ethic of courage, caring, sharing, respect, radical compassion, and love will make a difference even if we do not see the positive results of our efforts...
We can never be too generous or too kind.

EVEN: What advice would you give to a vegan advocate wanting to become more of an activist?

Marc: I usually refer to and explain what I call the 12 Ps of rewilding that were developed in my book *Rewilding Our Hearts: Building Pathways of Compassion and Coexistence*. They are being **proactive, positive, persistent, patient, peaceful, practical, powerful, passionate, playful, present, principled, and proud.**

EVEN: Do you have a favorite vegan meal or food you can tell us about that really makes veganism work for you?

Marc: Not really. I eat the food that my body tells me I need and I don't have any problem maintaining good health and a balanced diet. I eat a lot of pasta, tofu, rice and veggies and stir fries, bean rice burritos and enjoy Italian cuisine with eggplant --- no cheese but extra pasta. I've never had a restaurant refuse to make some changes in their standard dishes to avoid animals or animal products, and when I can see they're very busy, I don't ask them to. Rather, I find something I can eat without causing any fuss.

My snacks usually are potato chips, popcorn, twizzlers, and dark chocolate and berries. I have absolutely no problem at all making veganism work for me.

After rides I drink coconut chocolate milk. There are so many ways to do it! On rides, I eat different energy bars and bananas. I eat a ton of fruit (I love honeydew and mangos) and I enjoy bread with almond butter.

Many stores have great pancakes, and I just leave out the eggs! You can't tell the difference. They're delicious.

And it's always important to remember that it's not **what** you eat, it's **whom** you eat---a formerly sentient being!

“Make ethical choices in what we buy, do, and watch. In a consumer-driven society our individual choices, used collectively for the good of animals and nature, can change the world faster than laws.”

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

Marc: Saving animals' lives and stopping the brutal treatment and killing of these animals for unneeded human meals.

Duality in our thinking can easily result in cognitive dissonance because the world pulls us in lots of different directions. Some people can easily

overcome the dissonance whereas others find it problematic and look to make changes in their meal plans.

Dogs and cats can help us connect with so-called “food animals” because they all have rich and deep emotional lives---they help us bridge what I call the “empathy gap.” I’ll ask people something like, “Would you do it to your dog?” --- meaning would you allow your dog to become a meal? --- and when they say “No,” usually rather emphatically, I ask them why. They come to learn that cows, pigs, other mammals **who** so many people choose to eat, or birds, fishes, and other vertebrates or invertebrates, **who** also become human meals are no less sentient than dogs or other companion animals. All of these individuals experience rich and deep feelings and all of them care about what happens to them, their family, and their friends.



Photo Courtesy of Tom Gordon

EVEN: So...on the future of veganism in today's world...are you optimistic?

Marc: I am! There are a lot of problems in today's world --- unrelenting and brutal harming, abusing, using animals, but I look at any step forward as positive. You can be nasty to meat-eaters, but you don't get anywhere.

Silence is the enemy of social change.

It doesn't work to be forceful. Just do not let up. Over time, and explaining that it's easy not to eat other animals or animal products, there can be major changes.

In my *Animal Manifesto* book, I offer six compelling reasons for changing how we treat animals who have such rich emotional lives. We can improve how we treat animals by simply rethinking so many of our daily decisions. It's all about expanding our **compassion footprint**.

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I encourage everyone to go where their hearts take them,
with love, not fear.

If we all travel this road,
the world will be a better place for all beings.
Kinder and more humane choices will be made
when we let our hearts lead the way.

Compassion begets compassion and caring for and loving animals
spills over into compassion and caring for humans.

The umbrella of compassion is very important
to share freely and widely.

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Twitter: [@marcbekoff](https://twitter.com/marcbekoff)

[*Kids & animals*](#), Marc Bekoff, Foreword by Jane Goodall

[*Jasper's story: Saving moon bears*](#), by Jill Robinson and Marc Bekoff

[*Ignoring nature no more: The case for compassionate conservation*](#), edited by Marc Bekoff

[*Why dogs hump and bees get depressed*](#), by Marc Bekoff

[*Rewilding Our Hearts: Building Pathways of Compassion and Coexistence*](#), by Marc Bekoff

[*The Jane Effect: Celebrating Jane Goodall*](#), edited by Dale Peterson and Marc Bekoff

[*The Animals' Agenda: Freedom, Compassion, and Coexistence in the Human Age*](#) (with Jessica Pierce)

[*Canine Confidential: Why Dogs Do What They Do*](#)

Marc's articles on [*Psychology Today*](#).