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## What [Laudato Si'](#) says about animals: a year on from the Green Papal Encyclical

June 30, 2016:

*"We are not God... and every act of cruelty towards any creature is "contrary to human dignity."*

A year ago this month, Pope Francis – named after the most famous lover of animals in Christian history – laid out the Catholic position on the environment – on our human relationship with Creation – in clear, beautiful, carefully considered language.

The *Laudato Si'* ("Praise be") Papal Encyclical implored "every person living on this planet" to transform our lives. Our current way of life has too high a cost - for the world's poorest people, and the world's animals – and as a result the earth "is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth".

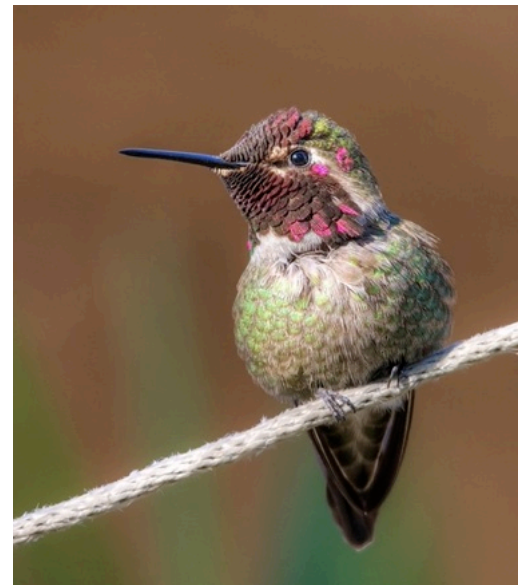
He expressed a profound skepticism of large-scale agriculture, praising "small-scale food production systems which feed the greater part of the world's peoples, using a modest amount of land and producing less waste." (#129) and rejecting "the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures."

[See below for 10 powerful quotes about animals](#)

One of the great new insights of *Laudato Si* is what the Pope calls "integral ecology" – a recognition of the interconnection of all Creation, and, [as Michel Roy of Caritas described it](#): "an invitation to heal the broken links between God, humankind and the planet... a call to arms to fight for global unity at the most profound level."

The simple, bold vision of *Laudato Si* has proved helpful in the past year for both secular and faith based conservation groups. It has given them words and authority to lay out their critical message to combat poaching, to prevent animal cruelty, to promote less intensive agriculture and more sustainable living, and to urge living more simply and walking more lightly upon the earth.

It helped the Climate Change talks in Paris and led to more open UN climate negotiations. "I know



Hummingbird. Photo: TD Lucas

that when the Pope speaks, we listen,” British member of Parliament Rebecca Pow said in the UK House of Commons. Read the Vatican Radio analysis on Laudato Si and Paris [here](#).

“Let’s be honest: how many other Vatican documents exceeding 100 pages in length attract rolling coverage from news channels to live blogs, become an issue in an American presidential election, and even have animal welfare organisations proclaiming approval on the tail of a plane in the skies above Rome?” [CAFOD wrote, a year on.](#)

“How many previous papal letters had pilgrims walking hundreds of miles across borders to demand action from heads of government who would then credit such a letter as acting as a catalyst for a UN climate accord? Yet this is what Laudato Si’ achieved in a mere twelve months.”

Fr. Elias O. Opongo, SJ, gave this analysis on the [Catholic Ethics forum](#).

Pope Francis in his Encyclical Laudato Si warns against human greed that threatens the balance in ecosystem. He notes: "Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation. But the cost of the damage caused by such selfish lack of concern is much greater than the economic benefits to be obtained.

Where certain species are destroyed or seriously harmed, the values involved are incalculable" (no. 36). There have been numerable reports corroborating the connection between ivory trafficking, the world underground black markets which are worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and the corruption among Africa’s security forces, its ports, and customs offices as well as the insurgent groups and notorious criminal networks across the continent. [1]

There have been a number of reports that classify ivory as a major source of income for criminal syndicates and terrorist groups all over the world. Ivory trading is said to have surpassed diamonds, narcotics, small arms, or other commonly trafficked goods. These reports are verified by the record-breaking number of poached elephants and rhinoceroses, which undermines the ban on ivory poaching that was instituted in Africa in 1989, and continues to sustain the trends of exploitation and instability.




Carcass of an elephant killed by poachers for its ivory tusks. Photo: US Fish and Wildlife Service



## 10 reasons in Laudato Si' to protect animals

(compiled by [Jesus People for Animals](#).)

1. "We are not God. ... [N]owadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures."
2. "Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures."
3. "In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish."
4. "[W]hen our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings. "Every act of cruelty towards any creature is 'contrary to human dignity.'"  


Lemur by Mathias Appel
5. "[T]he creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end."
6. "The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence."
7. "An inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world. Often, what was handed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world, which gave the impression that the protection of nature was something that only the faint-hearted cared about. Instead, our 'dominion' over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship."
8. "[St. Francis'] response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists."
9. "If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously."
10. "We read in the Gospel that Jesus says of the birds of the air that 'not one of them is forgotten before God' (Lk 12:6). How then can we possibly mistreat them or cause them harm?"

*This article originally appeared on the Alliance of Religions and Conservation website: <http://www.arcworld.org/newsaf59.html?pageID=880>. ARC closed in 2019.*