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Book Review: *Animal Harm: Perspectives on Why People Harm and Kill Animals*

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Book Review:

Title: *Animal Harm: Perspectives on Why People Harm and Kill Animals*.

Author: Angus Nurse

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Price: £65.00.

([Link to purchase book available at the end of the review](#))

What makes people harm, injure, or kill animals? Angus Nurse's book, *Animal Harm*, opens by posing this complex question – one frequently addressed from a range of perspectives: sociological, psychological and criminological. *Animal Harm* represents an ambitious effort to bring these diverse discussions together in one concise volume.

Situated as it is in the field of Green Criminology, Nurse's book at times struggles with some seeming contradictions related to distinguishing illegal animal harms from those harms that are legally allowable but nevertheless harmful to animals. In this sense, the broad nature of the book's title and the initial question are somewhat at odds with the Green Criminology perspective. I will return to these issues after briefly summarizing the book's content.

The text focuses on a diverse range of discrete animal harms: domestic animals; field sports; culture and self-expression; sport and trophy hunting; and trade in wildlife. Having set out the various types of harm, the author considers the effectiveness of current legislation, policy and sentencing, including an assessment of the (limited) international law responses.

Nurse evaluates the reasons for the commission of animal harm offences, provides an outline of the characteristics of different types of animal offenders and looks at some of ways offenders view the animals that they harm. In particular, Nurse hones in on the acknowledgement and justification for criminal harm of animals proffered by offenders themselves. The book really shines in this analysis as the author brings a range of studies of offender typology to bear on animal harm offenders, providing a depth currently not present in the literature.

In undertaking such a detailed analysis of the offenders for each offence, the book makes a refreshing contribution to a field where, in the absence of detailed analysis, it is assumed that animal harm crimes simply require more policing. However, Nurse shows that a more detailed understanding of animal harm offenders necessitates the adoption of more subtle and targeted approaches to policy and enforcement.

While an important contribution to the literature, some portion of the green criminological audience interested in legalized animal harms will find that these issues have been omitted from what is otherwise an insightful analysis of crimes against animals. In defining green Criminology as the "analysis of environmental harms from a criminological perspective", Nurse restricts the definition of animal harm to those harms that contravene the law. This means that Nurse is unable to look at animal harms that may be legal, despite acknowledging that laws often define harm to animals inadequately, often to permit harm according to human use, convenience or preference.

To illustrate this point, Nurse gives an example of a legal system that protects some species of bird, while allowing others to be hunted. Both situations involve the same level of

harm to the animal, and in many cases the same drivers will motivate the offender. However, as Nurse confines his exploration within the bounds of Green Criminology, legal animal harms are not within his scope. Although animal law has emerged as a critical legal theory which critiques this aspect of laws relating to animals, *Animal Harm* instead interprets animal law as being only a descriptive endeavour.

The choice to exclude animal harms that do not contravene the law is central to Nurse's criminological perspective, and certainly fits his legal definition of crimes against animals. However, this approach excludes legal animal harms which endanger the environment significantly more than illegal animal harms, while also including illegal animal harms that have little environmental impact. For example, a factory farming operation will cause considerable harm to animals and the environment, but may not be breaching any law. But factory farming is not discussed, even though it is likely to be much closer to the focus of some Green Criminologists than an illegal animal harm that has little impact on the environment, such as illegal sport shooting.

This issue with the book's conceptual framework is borne out in a section entitled *the importance of studying animal harm*, where the author sets out the reasons why animal harm should be studied as part of Green Criminology. Most of these reasons relate to its criminological interest, while the environmental aspects, which would link animal harm specifically to Green Criminology, rather than criminology more generally, are somewhat less convincing. The main environmental connection is that, in some isolated cases, the environmental impact of animal harm offences can be great, such as where the illegal hunting of a particular species is endangering that species.

Arguably, the author could have defined animal harm differently by taking a restrictive approach to the definition of crime itself, that is, by taking a jurisprudential approach to the question of crime. This conceptual difficulty is briefly addressed by Nurse notes that some Green Criminologists see crime as being broader than only the offences contained in criminal statutes, however, this approach is dismissed.

While studying illegal animal harm from a legal perspective within Green Criminology is certainly valuable and of interest, a more holistic approach is necessary to fully understand the linkages between environmental and animal harm and to explore why people harm animals in general, not just in a criminal context.

Putting aside the issues raised above, *Animal Harm* is a diverse and interesting text, which challenges accepted wisdom on why people harm animals. It therefore has significant implications for how law enforcement, NGOs and the legal system ought to respond to this often under-emphasised area of criminal law.

Overall, Nurse's text is a valuable exploration of the criminological perspective on the responsibility owed by humans to animals. The text will be of particular interest to criminologists, who will relish the detail on the nature of animal harm offenders. In addition advocates for improved animal welfare legislation will find that Nurse's call for more nuanced approaches will contribute to improved advocacy strategies. *Animal Harm* also provides a welcome opportunity to stretch the boundaries of Green Criminology, spark debate over what this field does and should include and provides a wealth of valuable research on an increasingly important topic.

Animal Harm: Perspectives on Why People Harm and Kill Animals, is published by Ashgate as part of their [Green Criminology series](#). It is available from [Ashgate.com for £58.50/\\$107.96 \(North/South America Link\)](#). It is also available [from Amazon for \\$95.96](#).

The copy of *Animal Harm* reviewed here was provided by Ashgate.



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