

To: *The New York Times*.

Subject: On Talking to the Animals: Horses, Cattle, and Buffalo.

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Bernd Heinrich's recent Op-Ed column "Talking to the Animals" caused me to reflect more broadly on the work I have been doing in Texas for the past ten years. My work has been with veritable American icons: horses, cattle, and buffalo. My goal has been to build bridges of trust, respect, and communication that span not only species differences but the natural opposition between prey and predator.

In practical terms, this allows for the handling of these domesticated prey animals with a high level of safety, not only for the animals, but for those that work them and for the facilities. All these animals are part of our human food chain. If this is an unavoidable reality, we can at least offer them as stress-free a life as is possible.

Working with methods often referred to as natural or non-coercive, (c.f. "horsewhispering"), I find that the similarities these species share with us and with each other greatly overshadow the species-based differences that set us apart.

Indeed, with the help of ethologists, who study the social organization of herd animals in natural and domestic settings, the make-believe world of Disney and his animals, has been shattered.

In the world of horses, for example, from the middle of the twentieth century, the word has gone out that horses are neither potential pets nor wild beasts to be broken, but are basically peace-seeking, sociable animals struggling for survival. Instead of using our language and predatory psychology to force them to do what we want, a growing number of horsemen now offer the horse a chance to become a partner rather than a slave, by learning to emulate the natural behavior of equine herd leaders.

Today, clinics and demonstrations all over the United States and Western Europe demonstrate these techniques and values on a daily basis. This approach is most generally known as Natural Horsemanship.