

Inside Philanthropy



The State of  
American Philanthropy

Giving for  
Animals  
&  
Wildlife

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## ABOUT INSIDE PHILANTHROPY

Inside Philanthropy is a digital media site that covers the world of charitable giving. We report daily on foundations, major donors, and trends in philanthropy. Through our GrantFinder resource, we also profile and track thousands of funders working across key issue areas and geographic regions. Inside Philanthropy is supported by reader subscriptions and advertising. We do not receive funding from any other source. Learn more at [insidephilanthropy.com](https://insidephilanthropy.com)

## ABOUT THE STATE OF AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY

The State of American Philanthropy is a series of background papers on important topics and trends in U.S. philanthropy. The papers draw on past research and reporting by IP writers, as well as new interviews, grantmaking data, and other sources. Learn more at [insidephilanthropy.com/state-of-american-philanthropy](https://insidephilanthropy.com/state-of-american-philanthropy).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Animal and wildlife grantmaking accounts for a small share of philanthropic giving, but that slice has grown in recent years. There are three primary segments of this sector—companion animals, wildlife and farmed animals—each with distinct dynamics and funders.

The landscape of nonprofit organizations in this sector varies across segments. Companion animal organizations are generally smaller and locally focused, though there are some large nonprofits that play a major role in the field, including as grantmakers. Wildlife-focused organizations, on the other hand, tend to be quite large and dominate the sector’s list of top recipients. The farmed animal sector is still nascent, but a handful of influential organizations have emerged, most aligned with effective altruism.

This brief focuses on U.S.-based funders and their grantmaking for animals and wildlife. However, such support is only one portion of the sector, particularly within the wildlife and farmed animal segments, which both have many funders focused abroad. Key takeaways about giving for animals and wildlife include:

## Who’s Giving

- Corporate foundations, most of which are supported via customer check-out donations, account for roughly half of all companion animal funding, according to advocates, with grantmaking public charities and private and family foundations making up most other funding.
- Wildlife giving is dominated by some of the largest private foundations in the United States, many of which are focused not specifically on wildlife, but on conservation.
- For farmed animals, which is the fastest-growing segment of this sector, funding largely comes from small private and family foundations.
- Major individual donors are a large source of support for wildlife, particularly from the tech and finance sectors. Companion animals receive some support from film and TV celebrities, while farmed-animal-focused nonprofits receive a significant share of funding from individual supporters, but to date, most give anonymously.

## Who’s Getting

- According to Candid, animal and wildlife funding grew from \$445 million in 2014 to \$1.02 billion in 2018. The largest share of funding goes to priorities typically related to companion animals, while wildlife-related priorities are the second-leading area.
- Companion animals (or “domesticated” animals, Candid’s term classifying this group) are the leading funding priority in this space, receiving \$2.3 billion between 2014 and 2018 for work including animal rescue and rehabilitation, adoptions and training. Zoos were second with \$1 billion.
- National and international wildlife organizations are the top grant recipients in this sector, with the top two recipients of funding, Ducks Unlimited and Wildlife Conservation Society, receiving \$220 million and \$163 million, respectively, over the five-year period.

## The Big Issues & Funding Trends

- A large share of companion animal funding has traditionally supported animal shelters and services. New pushes to reimagine shelters and to advance equity are now shaping those flows.
- Wildlife grantmaking encompasses a wide range of issues, including efforts to create protected areas, address threats, produce research and engage human-related issues. No one area predominates.
- Convincing people to change to non-meat based diets has long been the mainstay of farmed animal funding. Corporate campaigns and work on alternative proteins are a few rising focuses in this space.

## Equity in the Sector

- The “very white” companion animal sector has begun to fund new efforts to advance equity, both by supporting work by standalone groups and as an integrated piece of new campaigns. Foundations and nonprofits are also increasingly working on internal diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Wildlife funders take a variety of approaches to equity, including working with tribal communities domestically and shifting funding to frontline groups internationally, but many grantmakers are only just starting to consider this element of their work and grappling with the field’s racist and colonialist roots.
- Farmed animal funders have also recently started to consider how to better support equity within the movement, reassess practices that perpetuate inequity, and increase diversity and inclusivity within their own ranks.

## Fundraising Now

- The pandemic altered fundraising strategies but does not seem to have decreased the overall amount of funds raised for companion animals and farmed animals. There is less direct contemporaneous evidence from the wildlife space. Increasing public awareness of climate change and the large percentage of individual givers are good indicators that fundraising remains steady.
- Many fundraisers are taking the lessons learned from online fundraising and adapting it to plans for a future when in-person events resume, specifically creating events that are hybrid models that bring in more small-dollar donors from a wider geographic area.

Animal and wildlife funders currently face new and longstanding opportunities and challenges. Funders in this area benefit to some extent from the bond humans have with animals, whether in public support or fundraising. At the same time, each segment—particularly companion animal funders—must navigate the minimization of the sector by peers who often see greater value in efforts focused on humans.

Many challenges and opportunities in the broader animals and wildlife field are actually sub-segment-specific. Collaboration with other philanthropic fields could help companion animal funders extend their work, which can be insular. Farmed animal funders might benefit from showcasing its diversity to outsiders who consider it dominated by effective altruists. Wildlife faces an overwhelming threat from climate change and the biodiversity crisis, but also an opportunity to extend its partnerships and effectiveness. All segments could benefit from expanded tracking of grantmaking dollars.

# Introduction

Grantmaking to nonprofits focused on animals and wildlife is a relatively small corner of the philanthropic landscape. Animal protection organizations receive less than 2% of all charitable contributions, according to Giving USA. Yet within its boundaries, there are several even smaller areas. This report considers U.S. grantmaking within the field's three primary segments – companion animals, wildlife, and farmed animals. Each has distinct dynamics, and for the most part, different sets of funders providing support. Based on interviews with experts from across the animal and wildlife funding landscape, a careful analysis of Candid data, and additional research, this report charts the key areas within those three core segments.

The uninitiated may refer to the companion animals field using terms like “petcare”; however, those who work in this field have distinct feelings about such terms. For instance, the Journal of Animal Ethics asks that those speaking and writing on these topics replace the word “pet” with “companion animal.”

“Despite its prevalence, ‘pets’ is surely a derogatory term with respect to both the animals concerned and their human caregivers,” the journal notes. The difference being, you own a pet, whereas you live with a companion animal.

Our analysis of Candid data gathered all animal-related subsections and then grouped them to create a more accurate funding picture. Domesticated animals, a category that includes several priorities predominantly associated with companion animals, such as animal rescue and rehabilitation, adoptions and training, was the top priority, receiving \$2.3

billion in funding from 2014 to 2018. Three wildlife priorities—zoos, bird preservation and wildlife rehabilitation and sanctuaries—ranked second, third and fourth, respectively.

In general, wildlife funding is a challenging field to track, given that it overlaps with so many other environmental priorities, such as nature conservation (which will be a separate State of American Philanthropy brief). Livestock and ranching was the fifth-largest priority area, reflecting that farmed animal funding makes up a substantially smaller share than the other two general categories (companion and wildlife animals), though it is growing rapidly.

The landscape of nonprofit organizations in this sector varies across segments. Companion animal organizations are generally smaller and locally focused, though there are some large nonprofits that play a major role in the field, including as grantmakers themselves. Wildlife-focused organizations, on the other hand, tend to be quite large and dominate the list of top recipients within the overarching “animals” giving category. The farmed animal sector is nascent, but a handful of influential organizations have emerged, most aligned with [effective altruism](#).

There are also common realities that cut across all segments. Foremost, animals and wildlife are often viewed as being in competition with humans for funding, particularly within the companion animal space. As Andrew Rowan, a longtime animal protection advocate and grants advisor with the Edith Goode Trust, says: “We’re the Rodney Dangerfield of philanthropy. We don’t get no respect.” Whether trying to prevent euthanizations at animal shelters or preserve a lesser-known species, funders can face skepticism that their

mission is a worthy cause compared to the great injustices and dire conditions facing human beings.

While animals and their well-being are the central organizing principle of all three sub-categories, thorny human social problems comprise the root of all issues in animal and wildlife grantmaking. “The tricky thing with animals and wildlife is that people are the problem and people are the solution,” said Don Doering, former executive director of JRS Biodiversity Foundation. “One of the tensions that shapes the wildlife funding space is the inherent tension between humans and animals.”

This brief examines only U.S.-based funders and their grantmaking for animals and wildlife. However, U.S. foundations are only a portion of intertwined international efforts to protect animals across the world in all environments, but particularly within the wildlife and farmed animal segments. A large share of wildlife funding goes to other regions and continents, such as to preserve iconic species in Africa, while U.S. farmed animal funders are increasingly seeing greater opportunities for impact overseas.

# The Lay of the Land

## Who's Giving

The institutional philanthropic landscape of animal and wildlife giving is best understood as comprising three segments. Terms used vary, but for the purpose of this report, we will refer to them as companion animals, wildlife and farmed animals. While there are other distinct fields of interest, such as animal research, equine and avian issues, and zoonoses (diseases transmitted from animals to humans) they are exceedingly small shares of the funding pie, and in several cases, overlap with the three major categories. Relatively few funders make grants across more than one of these three primary buckets, though there are exceptions, such as the Humane Society of the United States.

Across all categories, companion animal grantmaker PetSmart Charities was the leading funder, accounting for roughly 50% more funding than the next largest grantmaker in this space. Three major public charities, the Humane Society of the United States, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, also play a major role in the field, not just as grant recipients, but as fundraisers and grantmakers. A variety of family and private foundations account for much of the remaining companion animal funding, with a few major players, such as Maddie's Fund and the Annenberg Foundation.

Within wildlife, private foundations are the largest group of givers, including some of the largest foundations in the United States, such as the Gordon and Betty Moore, Margaret A. Cargill and the Richard King Mellon foundations. A long

list of smaller private and family foundations, some of which are single-species-focused, also play important roles. Some funders in this space, particularly major players, are focused on issues other than wildlife, such as conservation, yet wildlife-related grants are a portion of overall giving.

The farmed animals category, the smallest, yet fastest-growing segment, is also a mix of private and family foundations, including many small operations. The Open Philanthropy Project is the most prominent donor focused on that field. Historically, the farmed animals segment has accounted for between 5% and 10% of giving, but that may be changing. The field is growing as a result of more giving driven by effective altruism

### Top 10 Funders: Animals and Wildlife Funders 2014-2018<sup>1</sup>

Grantmaker	Dollar Value of Grants Awarded
PetSmart Charities, Inc.	\$94.26M
American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals	\$61.62M
Duffield Family Foundation (includes Maddie's Fund)	\$42.38M
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation	\$31.78M
Humane Society of the United States	\$29.98M
Walton Family Foundation	\$24.63M
Margaret A. Cargill Foundation	\$23.76M
Lilly Endowment, Inc.	\$16.65M
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals	\$15.62M
Richard King Mellon Foundation	\$15.54M

Source: Candid

and increasing public attention to animal agriculture as a major factor in climate change.

Major individual donors are important givers in all three segments. While individual giving is an important part of the companion animal landscape, individual major donors do not account for a substantial segment of funding. Wildlife nonprofits benefit from a wide range of wealthy supporters, particularly from the tech and finance sectors, though some of these individuals provide support via their namesake foundations. In the farmed animal space, individual donors are a key source of support, but many donors remain anonymous. Domesticated animals, and to a lesser degree, wildlife, are favorite causes for many celebrities.

Other sources of revenue for this sector’s nonprofits include program fees within the companion animal space, and federal and state government grants in the wildlife segment. Tourism dollars are also a significant source of revenue for wildlife nonprofits.

Funding for animals and wildlife has increased in recent years. According to an analysis of Candid data by Inside Philanthropy, funding to support

animal and wildlife causes grew from \$620 million in 2014 to \$1.3 billion in 2018. The largest funding increase occurred between 2014 and 2015, when the total dollar value of grants awarded grew from \$620 million in 2014 to \$1.09 million in 2015.

Other available data also suggests giving to animal and wildlife causes is increasing, particularly over the long term. But the sum remains tiny compared to more popular charitable causes. For example, education nonprofits (not public schools themselves) received an average of \$6 billion annually over that same five-year period.

Giving USA’s 2020 report found giving to the combined fields of environment and animals increased 9.4% after inflation. Over the past two decades, the rise has been much more impressive, at least within the animal protection sphere. An analysis by Andrew Rowan, a longtime advocate currently with the Edith Goode Trust, found animal protection grants—i.e., funding for all three segments—grew from \$41 million in 2000 to \$204 million in 2018. Yet it is still a small sector, with roughly 80 foundations accounting for all grants and making up less than 0.5% of philanthropic giving, according to Rowan’s data.

Year	Dollar Value of Grants	Total Number of Grantmakers	Total Grants Awarded	Total Number of Recipients
<b>2014</b>	<b>\$620.76M</b>	<b>11,116</b>	<b>44,398</b>	<b>8,397</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>\$1.09B</b>	<b>13,373</b>	<b>70,430</b>	<b>10,169</b>
<b>2016</b>	<b>\$1.08B</b>	<b>13,297</b>	<b>79,437</b>	<b>12,059</b>
<b>2017</b>	<b>\$1.18B</b>	<b>13,302</b>	<b>48,994</b>	<b>9,589</b>
<b>2018</b>	<b>\$1.30B</b>	<b>14,331</b>	<b>58,535</b>	<b>12,103</b>

Source: Candid



Note that data on this sector of philanthropy is limited. Few, if any, public reports on historical giving are available, apparently due to the small size of the sector, and perhaps also because of its siloed structure. One promising grant tracking effort, the Animal Funding Atlas, funded by Summerlee Foundation, Maddie’s Fund, the ASPCA and Tigers in America, is still in its early stages. The nonprofit research outfit, Faunalytics, is another valuable source of data, but focuses its funding analyses on individual giving. Large-scale grants tracking operations, such as Candid and Giving America, often code giving in ways that limit the data’s usefulness, such as combining animal and wildlife giving with broader environmental giving, and some in the field say they do not rely on such data.

Wildlife giving is a particularly challenging area in which to assemble good data. For many grants, it is difficult—even absurd—to determine if they are expressly targeted to wildlife versus broader ecosystem health. What helps the forest also helps its animal inhabitants, of course. Data also typically considers giving to animal protection issues writ large and is not broken out by the three segments used in this analysis. “There’s a lot of muddying of the waters of whether it is environmental or it’s habitat, and often, it’s both,” said Che Green, a consultant who founded and previously led Faunalytics, a nonprofit animal advocacy research group.

Among many fundraisers across all fields, there is a general rule of thumb that individual giving is usually about four times greater than institutional philanthropy’s giving. Does that hold true for animal protection? Multiple experts told Inside Philanthropy they did not know what share of revenue individual donors account for. However, anecdotal evidence—from the paucity of major

grantmakers with substantial animal protection-focused programs to the popularity of animal causes with Americans—suggests the field may rely more heavily than others on individual donors. Moreover, Schwab Charitable—a favored platform for individual givers—ranked as the No. 1 source of animal and wildlife funding from 2014–2018 based on IP’s analysis of Candid data.

## Who’s Getting

Based on Candid data, companion (“domesticated”) animals receive the bulk of funding in the larger animals and wildlife space, collecting \$2.3 billion over the five-year period. Candid breaks down this funding area into smaller subtopics, which include animal rescue and rehabilitation, adoptions, training, population control, as well as smaller categories like research, humane education and vegetarianism. We have used those categories in our analysis. Three of the five largest funding priorities identified by IP in its analysis of Candid data from 2014–2018 were categories typically associated with companion animals including rescue and rehabilitation, adoptions and training.

Subject	Amount Funded
Domesticated Animals	\$2.31B
Zoos	\$1.00B
Bird Preservation	\$474.05M
Wildlife Rehabilitation and Sanctuaries	\$222.20M
Livestock and Ranching	\$119.00M

Source: Candid

Wildlife priorities comprise the second-leading funding recipients among all funders from 2014 to 2018; zoos received \$1 billion, bird preservation got \$474 million, and wildlife rehabilitation and sanctuaries collecting \$222 million. Yet combined, wildlife still received somewhat less than the total given for companion animals.

One major challenge in accurately tracking animal and wildlife grantmaking is the overlap between general support for conservation and animal-targeted wildlife giving. For instance, grantmaking for oceans, coastal waters, rivers and lakes (a separate State of American Philanthropy brief) topped \$736 million in 2018, and some of the top recipients in that sector are also major beneficiaries in the animal and wildlife sector, such as Ducks Unlimited. Grants to preserve wilderness or restore habitat inevitably support animals, though that may be just one of several goals. While all fields face overlap with related sectors, those in the wildlife space identify this as a significant complicating factor.

As noted in the Who’s Giving section, Candid data suggests animal and wildlife funding is rising, but not all those in the field perceive a growing pie. Among respondents to IP’s August 2020 survey of funders and grantmakers who work in the animals and wildlife space, a narrow plurality (about 4 in 10) said the field is losing traction. Of those, two-thirds believe it is a current trend due to the focus on COVID-19 and racial justice and equity, with the rest saying the decline has lasted for several years. Yet nearly the same proportion (about 4 in 10) said the field is attracting new funding and engagement, with most remaining respondents reporting no change. The responses suggest the new funding may be going primarily to certain strategies or organizations.

Individual giving also appears to favor companion animals. An analysis of Charity Navigator and Guidestar data by Animal Charity Evaluators found 66% of donations to animal charities in the U.S goes to companion animal shelters, 32% to mixed activities, and just 0.8% goes to farmed animal organizations and 0.7% goes to laboratory animal organizations. (Wildlife giving was not included in the analysis.) Another study, by Faunalytics, found that over half of all animal welfare donors give to companion animals exclusively.

Recipient	Dollar Value of Grants Received
Ducks Unlimited	\$219.56M
Wildlife Conservation Society	\$163.43M
Omaha Zoological Society	\$75.81M
National Audubon Society	\$71.40M
Omaha Zoo Foundation	\$58.82M
Lincoln Park Zoological Society	\$49.76M
Found Animals Foundation	\$49.10M
Humane Society of the United States	\$45.28M
Atlanta-Fulton County Zoo	\$36.80M
Zoological Society of San Diego	\$35.03M

Source: Candid

## Getting and Giving: Deeper Dive

Companion animal funding accounts for a significant share of animal and wildlife funding, but much of it flows to local institutions that are much smaller than the large national and



international wildlife organizations. In IP's analysis of the top 10 recipients of animals and wildlife funding, there are only two organizations with substantial companion animal programs: the Foundation for Animals and the Humane Society of the United States.

The Candid top 10 may partly reflect who submits their data and how that data is coded in Candid's system. Companion animal funders and advocates tell Inside Philanthropy that they believe Candid data does not accurately capture the totality of private funding to their field, yet there aren't any other robust sources of overarching data on the sector. Nonprofit organizations focused on companion animals, such as shelters, also depend heavily on "earned" revenue (programs and services). From adoption fees to veterinary hospital bills, this income stream is estimated to account for roughly 40% of all funding for such organizations.

Unlike companion animal funding, a lot of wildlife funding goes to large organizations. Three of the top four grant recipients—Ducks Unlimited, Wildlife Conservation Society, and National Audubon Society—received a combined \$454 million in funding between 2014 and 2018. The Humane Society of the United States, also works on wildlife issues. As national, well-recognized organizations, many of them can also rely on individual donations, membership fees, programming revenue, and other sources of funding.

Zoos and zoological societies are clearly the field's fundraising heavyweights, accounting for half of the top 10 recipients. The Lincoln Park Zoological Society, Omaha Zoological Society, the Atlanta-Fulton County Zoo and the Zoological Society of San Diego are all among the top 10 grant recipients over that period, each receiving between \$36 million and

\$76 million in funding. Zoos in Houston and Nashville are also major recipients. One of the field's top recipients, the Wildlife Conservation Society, also runs several New York zoos and aquariums, reflective of the dual roles of certain zoological organizations. For these institutions, public revenue and government funding can also be significant sources of support.

Because there are conflicting philosophies about what's best for animals, not everyone in the field considers zoos and aquariums "wildlife" organizations. A recent examination of [zoos and their missions](#) by the New York Times looked at a study by the members accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, which indicated that only 7% of the scientific papers they produced focused on biodiversity conservation. This was one of numerous indicators environmental writer Emma Marris presented, leading to a conclusion that zoos do not operate in the best overarching interest of many of the wild animals in their care, especially large animals that are most popular with visitors.

Multiple sources pointed to farmed animal funding as the fastest-growing portion of the field. To date, many of the groups are relatively small. Larger influential organizations include groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, The Good Food Institute, The Humane League, and Mercy for Animals.

## The Big Issues and Beyond

The big issues in animal and wildlife philanthropy vary by segment. Companion animal funders and farmed animal funding are largely focused on a few key topics, although leaders in both subcategories name a variety of other issues outside of the main ones. Leaders among wildlife funders, on the other

hand, name a vast array of issues, to the extent that it is difficult to say which issues are the core focus of the field.

Companion animal funding is dominated by support for animal shelters, particularly support for spay and neuter campaigns. The no-kill movement, centered on the belief that shelters should not have to euthanize any incoming animals—has long driven this focus, though it is a topic that causes some divides within the field. More recently, companion animal funders have put more focus on encouraging animal fostering, and there is a new effort to reimagine animal shelters as community hubs, with funding from Maddie’s Fund, Michelson Found Animals Foundation, Petfinder and others.

Furthering equity, both in racial terms and across socioeconomic statuses, has also risen as an issue, as covered in the Perspectives on Equity section of this brief. While responding to disasters has always been

a key function of animal welfare groups and funders, recently, several of the field’s biggest players came together to form the [Animal Disaster Funding collaborative](#) to streamline grants in emergencies. Humane education—the idea of instilling compassion for all living things—is another perennial issue within the animal welfare movement, but has seen funding decline significantly in recent years.

An increasingly prominent issue is the legal rights of animals—similar to the human rights field—that asserts basic rights to live healthy, torture-free lives. One approach seeing emerging popularity in the companion animal space is litigation, via funding for groups like Animal Legal Defense Fund that file suits against zoos, puppy mills and government agencies on behalf of animals.

There is a remarkably wide range of issues in wildlife grantmaking. Experts classify them in a variety of ways, and given the diversity of the field, it is hard to tell which areas predominate as funding priorities. Based on the opinions of experts consulted for this brief, most issues fall into four broad and overlapping categories: protected areas, threats, human-centered issues, and research.

Protected areas include large-scale wildlife refuges and sanctuaries, wildlife migration corridors, and zoos and aquariums. Some relatively small foundations have played a role in this area, such as George B. Storer Foundation’s work on wildlife corridors. “Threats” is a particularly large umbrella, encompassing poaching and trafficking, invasive species, impacts of diseases like rabies, and human activity, such as wildlife killing contests, poison and pest control, and legal hunting, which are focuses for funders concerned about the humane treatment of wildlife.

### Issue Spotlight: Reimagining Shelters

A rush of adoptions in the early days of COVID-19 and new attention to racial inequities and structural racism combined in 2020 to accelerate a new movement to reimagine animal shelters. Backed by some of the field’s biggest funders, including Maddie’s Fund, PetSmart Charities and Petfinder, the effort is bringing together a range of groups, including those long divided by a debate over no-kill shelters. The push encompasses a wide range of changes to standard operating procedure, including placing most animals with foster homes, offering more services for struggling families, and ensuring equity in how shelters support communities of color and other underserved groups.

While humans are central to all animal and wildlife issues, human-centered issues reflect those areas where the interplay is particularly direct, including tourism, livelihoods of surrounding populations, and wildlife-related threats to humans, such as zoonotic diseases (a disease caused by an infectious agent, such as a bacterium, virus, parasite or prion that has jumped from an animal to a human). Research covers all efforts to expand our knowledge of wildlife, and includes technology development and data collection, which, for some funders, constitutes a separate category. Paul G. Allen Family Foundation is one grantmaker particularly focused on research in this area. Again, categorization varies, and many of these categories overlap. Issues like climate change and equity cut across many other issues of concern to leaders in the animal and wildlife space.

In the farmed animal segment, vegan and vegetarian advocacy aimed at getting people to change their diets has traditionally been the leading funding focus. It remains a substantial share of the movement, but other efforts have gained momentum. The effort to improve conditions for farmed animals is now perhaps the largest slice of the funding pie, in large part due to the analysis and funding from effective altruists, such as the Open Philanthropy Project. One of the most popular methods is through corporate campaigns, seeking to improve conditions for animals, such as going cage-free, by pressuring the companies that raise them for food and those that serve them to customers.

As they have surged in viability and popularity, alternative proteins have recently attracted philanthropic support from farmed animal funders, from direct investments to boosting open-source information. Other smaller issues include sanctuaries for rescued farm animals, humane

education on food systems, and movement building. More broadly, many American funders are shifting from focusing on efforts in the U.S. and Europe to a more international approach.

## Funder Trends & Strategies

Funder strategies vary somewhat by animal protection segment. “It’s a little bit different flavor for the different sectors of the movement,” said Che Green, a consultant who founded and previously led [Faunalytics](#), an animal advocacy research group.

Most companion animal funding goes to service provision, with the bulk of grants going to individual shelter, rescue and animal welfare organizations. Due to the decentralized nature of the animal protection field, with each community having one or more local facilities, these are the most common grant recipients. One analysis found that all but a sixth of animal protection organizations had budgets of less than \$100,000. This dynamic may also reflect that there are relatively few large grantmaking organizations that set big-picture agendas in the space. “There’s not a ton of high-level strategy,” said Green.

### Funder Spotlight



### Maddie's Fund

Established in 1994 by Dave and Cheryl Duffield, Maddie's Fund has awarded nearly \$250 million to help companion animals.

Though it may be best known as one of the leading advocates of the no-kill shelter movement, Maddie's Fund supports companion animals in a number of different ways including improving shelter medicine education, making foster care a standard practice across the United States and helping reunite pets with their families.

There are signs of change. One effort, [Shelter Animals Count](#), seeks to aggregate data to more closely track what is happening at shelters across the country. Initiated by [Maddie's Fund](#), the field's largest private funder, the effort drew many of the biggest names in animal welfare. The more recent push to reimagine shelters has similar backing. Generally, capacity building is a common strategy, particularly among bigger players. Another such effort consisted of equipping domestic violence shelters to accept animals, led by giving from corporations like Bayer, Banfield and Purina.

Among wildlife and companion animal funders, there are several popular strategic approaches. One is research, though it is more common and more extensive among funders of wildlife organizations. This can include studying disease, tracking migratory patterns and investigating human-animal interactions. For example, The Summerlee Foundation, one of the few funders to support both wildlife and companion animals, has funded species-specific research.

Providing capital funding is also a cross-cutting strategy. This is particularly common within wildlife grantmaking, where it takes massive investments to fund new facilities, such as zoos or aquariums, or to make the land purchases necessary, among other expenses, to create wildlife refuges. Certain companion animal funders, at least historically, have also provided capital to set up or upgrade shelters.

Advocacy and policy work are strategic approaches used by all segments of the animal welfare space. While it is less common among companion animal funders, there are examples, such as the Michelson Found Animals Foundation, which hosts an annual policy forum on issues impacting animals. For

wildlife grantmaking, advocacy work includes a broad range of approaches, such as building constituencies for individual species, from buffalos to wolverines; pushing enforcement of legislation to protect wildlife, such as the Endangered Species Act; as well as fighting policy shifts that harm wild animals. Within the farmed animal space, campaigns to change corporate behavior are increasingly the most common form of advocacy.

### Inside Philanthropy August 2020 Survey

*"[Important trends in the field are] the link between biodiversity loss, habitat destruction, resulting ecosystem imbalance, illegal wildlife trade and zoonotic diseases like COVID; environmental justice; and the twin existential threats of climate change and the extinction crisis."*

—Fundraiser, Edgartown, Massachusetts

One strategy that is particularly common among wildlife grantmakers is pursuing partnerships and relationships. Wildlife preservation can require a systems-level approach that needs some degree of buy-in from a wide variety of stakeholders. For instance, the Walton Family Foundation has supported bringing together relevant players to improve fisheries management. "These are really complicated issues, and if you're not working with the tribes, if you're not working with the ranchers, then what the hell are you doing?" said Cristina Mormorunni, director of U.S. field conservation at Wildlife Conservation Society.

Farmed animal funders are best known for using an effective altruism lens in their grantmaking. Simply put, the approach seeks to alleviate the most suffering at the least cost, with a focus on areas that are neglected and efforts that are scalable. Some are driven by philosophy to support farmed animal causes, given the potential for policy changes to

improve the lives of millions of animals in the U.S. and billions globally. Some of the biggest funders, such as Open Philanthropy Project, and most influential groups, such as Animal Charity Evaluators, use an effective altruism lens. Yet farmed animal funders stress that they are a big tent with a diverse range of approaches.

In terms of individual strategies, the farmed animal space is relatively varied. Public education is a common approach, with the most traditional campaigns targeting individual behavior change, such as switching to a vegetarian diet. Funding documentary films is also particularly popular within this segment. The Greenbaum Foundation is one such funder. Legislation and litigation are also top strategies, particularly efforts mounted by major groups, such as the Humane Society of the United States or Animal Legal Defense Fund. Unlike other segments, farmed animal funders are also known for providing venture capital, specifically for alternative meats. This reflects, in part, the fact that many philanthropists' financial support in this space more frequently comes out of LLCs and other nontraditional funding mechanisms, not just private foundations. For instance, Chuck and Jennifer Laue's Stray Dog Capital supports funding for alternative proteins, while their Stray Dog Institute and Quinn

Foundation provide philanthropic support for related farm animal work.

## Perspectives on Equity

The killing of George Floyd and the national uprisings against police brutality, anti-Blackness and systemic racism pushed the animal and wildlife sector, like most in philanthropy, to reexamine its practices. This has led funders in the different segments of this space to start new initiatives and/or to join peers in existing areas of work.

The companion animal welfare field has long been known as a "very white" sector, and this new push marks the first time equity on race has garnered so much attention. Funders such as Spring Point's Life of Reilly program have begun funding efforts to advance equity in the field. One recipient, CARE, which stands for Companions and Animals for Reform and Equity, seeks to address organizational and personal biases in the sector, not only racial equity, but other forms of bias. Take gender equity, for example. Mainstream portrayals of animal caretakers in movies and TV have long featured men, although studies show women most often play that role, and also dominate nonprofit and philanthropic staff and leadership in this sector. Equity has also been a driver and a key element of the campaign to reimagine animal shelters.

### Funder Spotlight:

PetSmart Charities, the single largest funder of animal welfare, named a new president, Aimee Gilbreath, in the summer of 2020. Gilbreath was the founding executive director at one of the companion animal sector's largest private funders, Michelson Found Animals, where she created a social enterprise startup accelerator. PetSmart is now one of the supporters of the push to reimagine animal shelters. Time will tell if Gilbreath, a former consultant to Fortune 500 companies, guides more of the foundation's grantmaking toward the entrepreneurial approaches she pursued in her prior role. "I expect PetSmart to make much more of a splash than they have in the past," said Andrew Rowan, a long-time animal advocate and board member of Animal Grantmakers.

Animal protection has also seen a range of efforts to address equity issues in the sector. Funders, particularly corporate philanthropy, have long supported efforts to make domestic violence shelters welcoming to individuals with pets. More recently, an increasing number of funders are supporting equity programs, including efforts to address animal service deserts (areas with limited animal care or support options), serve pets and companions in low-income communities and aid homeless people in keeping their pets. The Pets for Life program of the Humane Society of the United States is one long-running example, while CARE is launching local centers dubbed CARE centers.

There are a variety of approaches to integrating equity in wildlife grantmaking, but many foundations have only recently started to elevate such considerations. One prominent domestic approach to equity by wildlife funders has been to initiate or deepen work with Native Americans. Indigenous communities, of course, have a long, somewhat mythologized history of wildlife management, but also have a history of marginalization or exclusion from institutionally sanctioned efforts. Indigenous communities also control some of the largest undeveloped, contiguous swathes of acreage outside of government and thus are integral partners for wildlife preservation. Wilburforce Foundation has been one leader in this area.

For American grantmakers funding wildlife responses outside the United States, one measure to increase equity has been to direct more funding to front-line groups led by local people, rather than large international nonprofits. Ideally, the goal is to have affected communities inform and lead responses. Grantmakers large and small, such as the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and JRS

Biodiversity Foundation, have sought to shift their work in this manner.

Most recently, the wildlife field has started to grapple with its own racist roots, and after the presidency of Donald Trump, a wider recognition that its victories could easily be wiped out because they were not backed by a diverse and dedicated range of supporters. The need is clear for the historically white-dominated movement to expand beyond its traditional base. Some grantmakers have funded in this space for some time, and more appear to be interested. Whether these forces lead to substantial funding shifts is unclear.



*“I think there is such a big gap between what people are and what we perceive them to be and that gap is represented in the adoption gap...I think we have to relearn what love and compassion is and that's not just in this field. I think we have to do that as a country. We need to sort of abandon our concept that wealth means smart. The reality is, is that the human-animal bond is not tangible and it can't be bought.”*

—James Evans, CEO, CARE

While the LGBTQ+ movement is not a prominent part of wildlife grantmakers' work on equity, in a notable coincidence, there are at least two funders that support both sectors, both with a focus on great apes and chimpanzees. The Arcus Foundation, known for its seminal advocacy funding, is also the [largest private backer](#) of great ape conservation, while the [David Bohnett Foundation](#) supports research into how apes and chimps use language.

The farmed animal funder community is going through a similar awakening and reassessing how



to advance equity through its work. “We’re thinking now about how our philanthropy has perhaps supported systems that we’re not proud of,” said Mikaela Saccoccio, executive director of Farmed Animal Funders. Practices such as prohibiting unsolicited proposals may filter out groups from outside the networks of funders, who are more likely to be white, creating a “cycle of inequalities in this movement,” she said.

Like the companion animal space, one key challenge is diversifying the community’s own ranks. A group formed in 2017, Encompass, which works to expand racial diversity and inclusivity within the farmed animal welfare movement, has seen a wave of interest from funders and others. The most visible organizations in the movement have been predominantly white, although there are many groups run by and focused on people of color, and the issues attract support from a wide range of individuals, Saccoccio said. “The majority of people who are vegetarian and vegan worldwide are people of color, but historically, this movement hasn’t reflected that, and that needs to change.”

## Funding Trend: Reduced Focus on Animal Testing

One area that currently gets little attention from animal protection funders is animal testing. With the notable exception of the Greenbaum Foundation, few institutional grantmakers support such work.

Once more widely funded, the issue is now largely supported by individual donations, particularly from wealthy individuals. “It has lost its seat at the table in philanthropy right now,” said Anthony Bellotti, the founder of White Coat Waste, an organization that opposes government-sponsored animal experiments.

# A Closer Look at Funder Types

## Private and Family Foundations

The siloed nature of the animals and wildlife space means that each segment of the space features different leading funders. Within the companion animal space, the Dave and Cheryl Duffield Foundation and its perhaps better-known offshoot, Maddie's Fund, is the most well-known and largest private grantmaker. According to the foundation's website, it has awarded nearly \$250 million in grants from 1993 to 2020 to increase "community lifesaving, pioneering shelter medicine education and establishing foster care as a standard across the U.S." The foundation has helped fund the push for better data from animal shelters and advanced a "no-kill" movement among animal shelters. Today, it is part of a coalition of funders that is supporting a reimagining of animal shelters.

Another important companion animal funder is Michelson Found Animals Foundation. The foundation funds a wide range of programs, from social enterprises addressing animal welfare issues to biological research. It is also backing the effort to reshape modern animal shelters. Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, whose assets rank among the top 50 grantmakers, is one of the few major grantmakers with an animal welfare portfolio, though its funding also goes to wildlife. The Annenberg Foundation is another top companion animal grantmaker that falls just outside Candid's top 10. Notably, the giving of both Maddie's Fund and Michelson's is less than the grantmaking of either the leading corporate philanthropy, PetSmart Charities, or one of the sector's major public charities, the ASPCA, according to Candid.

Within the wildlife space, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation was among the largest institutional grantmakers, with nearly \$32 million in grants between 2014 and 2018, according to IP's analysis of Candid data. It's worth noting that Ducks Unlimited, is technically the No. 1 wildlife funder, according to Candid, with \$176 million in funding over four grants during the same period; however, all four grants were awarded to the Ducks Unlimited headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee. It funds environmental restoration and conservation work throughout the country, with most grants supporting land acquisition and wildlife protection.

There are several major private and family foundations that, while they are not among Candid's top 10 wildlife funders, are significant grantmakers in this space. Like Moore and Walton, most are focused on conservation or broader environmental goals, and wildlife is one of many priorities. These include the MacArthur Foundation, Bobolink Foundation, Domen Family Foundation, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. There are also smaller single-issue funders, such as the Arcus Foundation, the largest private backer of great ape conservation, that are laser-focused on individual species or groups of species.

For the farmed animal space, there is limited data on total giving, and many major donors strive to remain private. The Open Philanthropy Project, which is backed by Cari Tuna and Dustin Moskovitz, who co-founded Facebook and Asana, is the most prominent funder in this space and largest publicly known funder. While not included in Candid data, it gave \$58 million between 2014 and 2018, according to the Animal Funding Atlas. They are known for using an effective altruism lens for their giving, and they focus broadly on advocacy,

particularly influencing corporate behavior. Other public players in this space include the Sobrato Philanthropies, EJF Philanthropies and the Greenbaum Foundation.



*“The animal advocacy movement has grown leaps and bounds over the last several decades. With this growth of momentum and funding, the movement has achieved admirable wins for animals. But our movement doesn’t begin and end with a small handful of large nonprofits that have long-term support, growing staffs, and dedicated funders.”*

—Meghan O'Brien Lowery, partner and director, Greenbaum Foundation

## Corporate Giving

The role of corporate funders varies considerably between the segments. Corporations are major funders of the companion animal space, a visible but not dominant presence in wildlife grantmaking, and virtually non-existent in farmed animal funding.

Andrew Rowan, a grants advisor with the Edith Goode Trust, who has long tracked grantmaking in the space, estimates the top seven corporate philanthropies account for half the funding in the field. PetSmart Charities tops the list of corporate donors to animals, largely thanks to donations by customers at the checkout counter. The foundation gave \$94 million between 2014 and 2018, according to IP’s analysis of Candid data. Companion animal advocates say Petco’s charitable arm is another major corporate funder and its 990s indicate it has recently granted as much as \$30 million annually, but it is not listed in Candid. Petfinder.com, the

animal adoption platform, is another similar funder, albeit on a smaller scale. Supporting pet adoptions, shelters, animal welfare organizations, spay-and-neuter services, and medical research are among these grantmakers’ core program areas.

Additional funding for companion animals comes from the charitable wings of other companies that provide services or products for animals. These include the pharmaceutical giant Bayer’s animal branch, the Banfield veterinary hospital chain, and the pet food company Purina. All three have contributed to efforts to ensure domestic violence shelters can welcome individuals with pets.

Within wildlife, direct grantmaking by corporate philanthropies does not appear to account for a substantial share of giving. No corporate funder of these issues was among the top 10 animal and wildlife grantmakers, according to our analysis of Candid data. However, a wide range of corporate philanthropies focuses on conservation and the environment, and such grantmaking typically includes support for wildlife. For instance, Patagonia, REI, The North Face and Kelty—four outdoor apparel and equipment companies with broader environmental grantmaking—came together to form The Conservation Alliance, which works to protect habitat. Many individual firms also support wildlife. One example is Jaguar Land Rover, which is known for its grantmaking on elephants and its namesake cat.

There is also some support for wildlife that comes from corporations indirectly. For instance, The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a significant wildlife funder, works to build partnerships between U.S. companies and federal agencies. Its [corporate partners](#) come from a diverse range of industries, but most are Fortune 500-level

companies, such as AT&T, Chevron and Wells Fargo. In addition, several technology companies, including Microsoft, Google and Cisco, are known for providing in-kind support for wildlife conservation organizations.

There are no traditional corporate philanthropies that give grants in the farmed animal space. There are a few individuals whose giving is directed through or associated with their companies, though those tend to be nontraditional businesses.

## Community Foundations

Community foundations have not traditionally been a major presence in the animal and wildlife philanthropic landscape. For instance, Animal Grantmakers, the largest philanthropic support organization in the space, has no community foundation members and staff could recall only one past member.

However, due to independent giving through donor-advised funds and other avenues, community foundations are among the largest givers. Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF), the largest community foundation in the world and one of the largest philanthropies in the nation, was a leading source of support for animals and wildlife, with nearly \$51 million in gifts from 2014 through 2018, according to IP's analysis of Candid giving data. The total appears to be rising rapidly, as the foundation reported nearly \$30 million in animal welfare grants in 2019 alone. SVCF animal protection gifts stretch well beyond the traditional scope of a community foundation, with donor-advised grants going to organizations in Germany, Denmark, Italy, India, the Philippines, Japan, Australia, as well as states including Oregon, Arizona, North Carolina and New York.

Three of the largest DAF managers in the United States—Fidelity Investments Charitable Gift Fund, Schwab Charitable, and the National Philanthropic Trust (NPT)—are also important funders in the animal welfare and wildlife space. According to Candid, NPT, Fidelity, and Schwab gave \$99 million, \$68 million, and \$32 million, respectively, between 2014 and 2018.

### Funding Trend: Plant-based Alternatives to Save the Planet

Alternative proteins, once a niche area for philanthropy, have taken the food world by storm, landing on menus at both fast food establishments and Michelin-starred restaurants. Could fashion be next? A \$200,000 grant in 2020 by the Open Philanthropy Project to the Material Innovation Initiative aims to advance plant-based alternatives to animal-based fashion. Attracting investors is essential but philanthropy could play a catalytic role.

Even when the grantmaking does not hit outsized levels, the popularity of animal causes among small-scale givers means that many community foundations are channels for sizable grantmaking in animal welfare. Community foundations from Illinois to Texas and from Georgia to Washington count animal protection among their areas of practice. However, since much of this giving is directed by individuals, it is difficult to analyze how giving in this segment breaks down between companion animals, wildlife, and farmed animals.

## Major Donors

Celebrities and billionaires, like the rest of us, love animals. Examples abound of wealthy and famous people whose giving supports causes in this area. Yet

the significance of those givers varies widely for each segment of the animal and wildlife funding space.

For companion animals, the TV industry and Hollywood are perhaps the most prominent sources of high-profile donors, though none are major players. Examples include Bob Barker, the original host of “The Price is Right,” whose barebones [DJ&T Foundation](#) supports low-cost spay/neuter clinics. Another is the late singer and actress Doris Day, who was known for her animal activism during her lifetime, and supported a wide range of related causes through the [Doris Day Animal Foundation](#). Other donors include the singer and actor Michael Landon and The Simpsons co-creator Sam Simon, both now deceased.

More recent entrants include actress Katherine Heigl, who along with her mother, Nancy, is the force behind the [Jason Debus Heigl Foundation](#), named for her late brother, which focuses on animal welfare. Celebrity chef and talk show host [Rachael Ray’s foundation](#) also supports a range of major animal charities, including an alliance aimed at remaking animal shelters. The institution straddles the line with corporate philanthropy, as it is wholly supported by sales of her branded pet food. Yet the amounts from these efforts are often relatively small, and none of them rank among the top donors. Heigl’s foundation, for instance, gave out between \$80,000 and \$650,000 in recent years, while Ray’s granted between \$600,000 and \$1.2 million annually.

Wildlife also has many celebrity supporters, though they do not account for a substantial share of funding. Comedian and talk show host Ellen Degeneres’s recently established philanthropy, The Ellen Fund, focuses on wild mountain gorillas in

Rwanda. Leonardo DiCaprio had a long run as a prominent wildlife supporter, though such giving by him has slowed in recent years.

Wildlife’s largest individual supporters come not from Tinseltown but from Silicon Valley, and to a lesser extent, from Wall Street. Tech and finance philanthropists are frequent funders of conservation efforts that benefit wildlife, particularly marine projects. Examples include Salesforce founder Marc Benioff and his wife, Lynne, who [gave \\$10 million](#) to a center that has worked to prevent fatal collisions between boats and whales in shipping lanes; and finance and media mogul Mike Bloomberg, who [has committed](#) at least \$53 million through his foundation to battle overfishing. Many of the largest foundations in the space, such as Packard and Moore, were founded by tech billionaires. Some of the same mega-rich

### Major Donor Spotlight Howard G. Buffett



Howard G. Buffett’s philanthropy flows through his Howard G. Buffett Foundation. Though animal welfare and wildlife are not focus areas at the foundation, in 2014 it pledged \$23.7 million to combat rhinoceros poaching in South Africa’s Kruger National Park. The park’s rhino poaching troubles are led by criminal networks and armed militias. The ill-gotten gains from the sale of rhino horns are often used to fund conflict across Africa.

donors have funded anti-poaching projects, with a particular focus on protecting elephants and rhinos. Examples include heir Howard G. Buffet and the late Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.

There is one area of animal and wildlife philanthropy that attracts deep-pocketed, if lesser-known individual donors: zoos. Since the time of Andrew Carnegie, billionaires have tended to support legacy institutions like museums, libraries, and gardens. While there is debate over the role of zoos in conservation, there's no question that large gifts flow their way. The San Diego Zoo, for instance, has received about [\\$40 million](#) from credit and banking billionaire T. Denny Sanford. Insurance billionaire Ernest Rady and his wife, Evelyn, have also [pledged \\$20 million](#) to the zoo.

Aquariums are buoyed by a similar dynamic—and benefit from the noted affinity for ocean conservation by tech philanthropists. For instance, the Monterey Bay Aquarium opened its doors thanks to a \$55 million gift by David and Lucile Packard, whose foundation has given more than \$200 million to the institution in succeeding years. Several other Bay Area billionaires, including [Eric Schmidt](#), former CEO of Google, and his wife Wendy, and [S.D. Bechtel Jr.](#), heir to the country's largest construction and engineering firm, have

also funded the aquarium. Similar examples can be found around the country. In New England, television producer and Boston Red Sox co-owner Thomas C. Werner [has given](#) to the New England Aquarium, while Chicago investment manager Gary Brinson [has supported](#) the city's Shedd Aquarium through his foundation.

While there are many prominent and vocal vegan celebrities, from Alicia Silverstone to Joaquin Phoenix, there are few well-known individual funders of farmed animal issues. Individual donors are the major source of the sector's funding, but few have wide prominence. Moreover, some of the largest donors choose to remain anonymous.

## Associations & Intermediaries

Like other parts of animal and wildlife grantmaking, associations and intermediaries are typically aligned with one of three segments used throughout this brief: companion animals, wildlife, and farmed animals. While affinity groups in other funding areas can serve to bring together funders whose priorities may differ but whose overarching concerns are similar, this funding space tends to serve grantmakers within the same segment.

[Animal Grantmakers](#) is the lone overarching affinity group in this space, welcoming all funders

### Initiative Spotlight:



GLOBAL FUND FOR  
**CORAL REEFS**

Coral reefs support a quarter of all marine life and could become extinct in our lifetimes. This disturbing reality has prompted an international, multi-sector partnership, the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, which brings together U.N. agencies, financial institutions, and foundations. The aim is to use philanthropic dollars to de-risk private investments in conservation projects, such as plastic reduction, sustainable aquaculture and clean energy generation. It hopes to leverage at least \$2 billion in investment. Ensuring private profits is a controversial use of charitable capital, but the scale and urgency of the threat to coral reefs is driving the effort. If successful, the fund could be a model for similar work in other areas.

whose giving benefits animals, regardless of issue. Companion animal funders form the largest share of their roughly 40 members, but it also has many who fund wildlife issues. Founded in 1999, the group holds an annual conference, and as previously noted, recently launched an online grants tracking tool for animal and wildlife giving, the Animal Funding Atlas, with the support of several of its members.

The most recent association to emerge in this space is [Farmed Animals Funders](#). Formed in 2018, its membership is limited to individuals and institutions who give \$250,000 a year or more to end factory farming. Effective altruists are a highly visible segment of this group's members, including the Open Philanthropy Project, which was one of the founders. However, funders come from a variety of motivations.

There are also groups focused on marine funders' interests. Most take a global perspective, but membership is often dominated by American

institutions. Some are focused on wildlife, such as the [Shark Conservation Fund](#), while others take a broader approach that still benefits wildlife, such as [Oceans 5](#). There are also efforts to guide funding more directly, such as the [Global Fund for Coral Reefs](#), which pools philanthropic and other resources from the U.S. and beyond.

Animals and wildlife also comprise one of several concerns for several other funder groups. Wildlife is not the primary focus of [Biodiversity Funders Group](#), but it is one interest area for the group's members. Similarly, [Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders \(SAFSF\)](#) members include many who, directly and indirectly, fund farmed animal welfare.

[Environmental Grantmakers Association](#), which has the widest focus among these groups, also counts members that support animals and wildlife through their grantmaking.

While not a funder association, [Animal Charity Evaluators](#), which rates nonprofits on their perceived effectiveness in helping animals, is also influential within this space, particularly within the farmed animal space and among those with an effective altruist lens. Its recommended charities include most of the largest nonprofits in the farmed animal segment, but it is known for giving the biggest groups in animal welfare relatively low effectiveness ratings. Known as ACE, the organization also runs a few of its own funds.

## Funder Spotlight



The Arcus Foundation's Great Apes & Gibbons program supports organizations working within its 24 ape-range landscapes in Africa and Asia. It also works with groups in the U.S. and Kenya where apes are held in captivity. Arcus awarded more than \$13 million in grants to protect the world's gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans and gibbons. Grants supported a wide range of activities including conservation, policymaking, law enforcement, local community engagement, public awareness, and thought leadership.

# Fundraising Now

When the pandemic hit, donors large and small responded by channeling support toward the millions of people in need. But donors didn't forsake animals and wildlife nonprofits, according to fundraisers IP interviewed. Organizations working in support of companion animals, wildlife and farm animals alike reported increased interest in pets and animal welfare causes, along with growing concern over timely issues like climate change and vulnerabilities in agriculture and food supply chains.

When COVID-19 was designated a pandemic, the leaders of Best Friends Animal Society, a no-kill shelter organization with an annual budget over \$100 million, prepared for the worst. It quickly put a strategy in place with a major spend in digital and direct response, and their fundraising results remained steady.

As the first wave of the virus rolled across the country, the organization knew it had to close its brick-and-mortar animal shelters to keep its staff, volunteers and the public safe. "When our shelters closed down, our animal care workers started doing thank-you calls to donors and volunteers, asking were they OK, how were their animals doing, staying top-of-mind," said Valerie Dorian, chief development officer. "Stewardship is in our DNA."

Locked in a socially distanced world, the organization saw that supporters were spending more time than ever on their screens and decided to lean into digital outreach, according to Amy Starnes, senior director of digital engagement. Donors wanted to support the nonprofit in three core ways: support animals, support animal shelters, and connect neighbors.

"We became deliberate about our messaging, engaged social media through email and our website, and started our first connected TV campaign on streaming services like Hulu and Netflix, and then advertised on devices to reinforce the message. We decided to meet our donors where they are," she said, adding that the organization had to take advantage of this cultural moment with services like TikTok. "We tried to be everywhere."

Best Friends ran its first all-virtual national conference in June 2021, with an increased level of interconnectivity, enabling it to reach a wider audience that could join the meeting and actively ask questions and participate. COVID canceled its annual benefit in New York City, scheduled for April 2020, and when things were no better in the fall, the organization moved the whole affair online. Donors loved it and asked that they do it again, said Dorian. The nonprofit experimented with its first hybrid in-person event in May 2021, featuring the opening of a pet resource center in Bentonville, Arkansas, a smaller on-site event with masks, social distancing, and an outside venue that was also available virtually.

Starnes said that most of their online donations come through the "Donate Now" button on its home page, where donors can choose a one-time, monthly, in-memory-of, or in-honor-of gift. "Our web traffic is up over 60% in the past year," she added. But direct mail is still the larger channel for donations, said Dorian, attributing the growing online numbers to changing demographics and donors who might start with a direct mail message and then donate online. She said another successful tactic for the organization was organizing smaller groups of major donors reached by monthly Zoom calls, providing them with insider briefings by a regional director, connecting people in different



locales, and effectively creating local fundraising affinity groups.

Data has made a big difference. The organization's website features an updated dashboard that allows donors to see the impact of their gift at a glance. This dashboard went up two years ago and is the first of its kind in the animal welfare arena, said Dorian. "This is a critical tool for donors and volunteers to get life-saving data," she noted, citing just another example of Best Friends' continuing digital efforts to increase support as it links "heart" donors who want to hear the stories with "impact" donors who want to give where the need is greatest.

In the farmed animals space, philanthropy also continues apace amidst the pandemic. "Donors found us with the pandemic as a direct result of the connection between food, public health and worker safety," said Mikaela Saccoccio, executive director of Farmed Animal Funders. A three-year-old, decentralized funding collaborative, Farmed Animal Funders' mission is to end factory farming and transition to a more plant-based society, with a concurrent increase in food chain sustainability and mitigating damage to the environment.

This collaborative, established as a 501(c)(3) through partnership with another nonprofit, operates as a membership circle, with donors contributing at least \$250,000 to join. The organization currently has about 40 members. The affinity group functions as a learning hub that allows its members to become more educated about the cause and pinpoint the best impact areas to support, without controlling where those dollars go. "We don't pool funding. Our donors have full autonomy," she said.

In 2020, Farmed Animal Funders' membership increased, and the organization switched from in-

person events to an online Zoom meeting once a month. Its annual weekend retreat went virtual with a week-long presentation of programming and content, which the organization expects to continue in 2021, depending on pandemic considerations. Some 15% of all global greenhouse emissions are generated by factory farming, which contributes to animal waste in waterways and soil. "To give you an idea, one pound of beef needs 8,000 gallons of water to process, while one pound of oats needs 300 gallons," she said. "We have to revisit how our food is provided and what is more sustainable as our population increases."



Farmed Animal Funders is a collaborative of individuals and foundations giving more than \$250,000 a year to improve or supplant the factory farming industry. Though many of its members choose to remain anonymous, openly supportive members include Suzy Welch of the John F. Welch II Family Foundation and Chuck and Jennifer Laue of the Quinn Foundation and the Stray Dog Institute.

The Humane Society of the United States is one animal nonprofit whose work was magnified by the pandemic. "Our pillar issues are really working—ending cosmetic animal testing, improving the lives of farm animals, banning trophy hunting, rescues for natural disasters, stopping the hoarding of animals—we really wanted to make sure that our donors knew who the Humane Society is, not what they think it is," said Jamie Natelson, senior vice president of marketing, referring to the organization's goals to advocate, educate and raise funds for many of the top-of-mind concerns about animals, from factory farming to wearing fur.

“We were already tied into what happened with COVID-19 in the wet markets in Asia, with the extreme confinement of farm animals as the next viral breeding ground, with the Australian wildfires and loss of wildlife. This allowed us to sustain fundraising throughout the year, but where we struggled and had to pivot was the conference and event space,” said Kimberlee Dinn, senior vice president of philanthropy.

The organization formerly held two major in-person galas on the East and West Coasts. “With six weeks’ notice that first spring, we pulled off ‘Rock the House for Animals,’” said Dinn. Inspired by supporters Rob and Marisol Thomas, the nonprofit went for an old school telethon with the help of a new online platform, which they live-streamed on Facebook and YouTube. “People watched from around the world,” said Dinn, spreading the Humane Society message and bringing in many smaller contributions. Ultimately, the event raised \$330,000 in three hours.

“We thought we’d be back to normal in six months, but that didn’t happen, so for the fall gala, we looked to our former ticket and table buyers and did a more classic online gala with large matches, so half the monies were in-hand pre-event.” The virtual gala included pre-recorded and live content, said Dinn, calling it “a really fun and exciting event that brought in \$2 million and exceeded our expectations.”

Now, the organization is looking at a combination of in-person and virtual events. “Our donors don’t all live in L.A. or New York, so this fall, we’re looking at a signature event with regional hosts to increase visibility and donor access. The pandemic lit a fire under us on how to expand access,” said Natelson.

## Funder Spotlight



In October 2020, the Best Friends Animal Society bought 30 “courtside” seats at the Western Conference Finals Game between the L.A. Lakers and the Denver Nuggets. The seats featured photos of the 30 animals available for adoption along with some of their foster parents. When speaking about the event, Valerie Dorian, chief development officer at Best Friends said:

*“Now is a great time to have a pet in your home as people are working at home, to have a buddy to watch an NBA game with, or just to be your companion in life and everything that you do.”*

# An Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities

One of animal welfare philanthropy's greatest assets is the powerful bonds that humans form with animals. This is particularly true for companion animal funders: [About half](#) of U.S. households have a pet. Annual spending on pets is close to [\\$100 billion](#). Cat videos still rule the internet. Those connections have led donors large and small to make animal well-being a focus of their giving.

Yet its association with “warm fuzzy feelings” and cute animal images can also work against the perception of the field as a serious one. Within the philanthropic world, the animals and wildlife space can be dismissed, marginalized or mocked as unimportant, with companion animal funding a particularly common target. There is often a perception that supporting animals is mutually exclusive from supporting humans. This disconnect has left the sector somewhat isolated within philanthropy, and in some ways, insular. While collaborations between animal grantmakers is common, projects with other sectors of philanthropy are relatively rare, particularly in the companion animal space.

This situation presents an opportunity, both for animal funders and the rest of philanthropy. Whether it is [helping](#) domestic violence shelters upgrade so they can admit victims with pets, [aiding](#) individuals and animals fleeing disasters, [supporting veterans](#) and others with PTSD, or dog training programs in prisons, there is much crossover between the priorities of companion animal grantmakers and other funders, given the inextricable role of animals in humans' lives. Studies show pets can prevent loneliness, boost compassion, improve fitness, and more.

Companion animal grantmakers might consider how they can advance such research and make a case to funder peers pursuing such priorities. A related weakness is that there is currently little capacity or funding for advancing these areas of research.

Expanding cross-cutting collaborations could not only accelerate change, but also provide a counterbalance to companion animal funders' reputation among certain of their peers. Such partnerships, when carried out well, can also leverage additional funding and ensure it is distributed more strategically. One place to start might be with other funders in this sector. Given concerns in each segment about the lack of funding for the issues they care about, finding areas for collaboration across segments could help all animal protection funders multiply their impact.

For example, the sector may also look to wildlife grantmaking, which has forged more connections with other funder circles because the links between supporting wildlife and human life are more widely acknowledged. There are still siloed approaches, but the field has increasingly recognized interconnections, particularly among green funders. “Old environmental grantmaking was landscape or it was whole-species. I think we're growing up and beginning to see more crossover,” said Melanie Anderson, program director at the Summerlee Foundation, who has been doing animal welfare grantmaking for 30 years.

In wildlife philanthropy, there is a duality to many of the field's strengths and weaknesses. Some experts in the field said funders offer a willingness to experiment and stability greater than

government, yet many also decried the sector’s risk aversion and short-term perspective. Some said this was due to foundations following fads; others chalked it up to factors like churn of programmatic strategy and staff within foundations. Observers also cited classic philanthropic topics, from an ability to convene stakeholders to the unfortunate prevalence of project grants over general operating support.

In a sector with a high number of tech and new-wealth philanthropists, many felt funders had played a vital role in bringing technologies to protected environments—and even skeptics acknowledge there is more room for expansion. “Technology is overstated, but there’s still a lot of opportunity,” said Don Doering, former executive director of JRS Biodiversity Foundation.

The influence of tech and finance billionaires in the space—and their particular outlook—also concerns some in the field. “Because they’ve excelled in one realm, they think they know a lot about these other realms. You can get really over-engaged but under-knowledged funders,” said Arthur Middleton, assistant professor of wildlife management and policy at the University of California, Berkeley. “Environmental problems are social problems, but environmental funders often want technological or top-down big wins that don’t solve those social problems.”

The move to advance equity within all segments of the animal welfare field is also a major opportunity. Extending greater agency to communities that have not had power in this field can open new pathways and approaches that were previously unexplored or unknown to funders. “There’s a real opportunity for funders to keep trying to get closer to their grantees,” said Doering. Bringing in new staff and

leadership from previously unrepresented communities can begin to correct blindspots in the field and foster new ideas and innovations.

Climate change and the interconnected biodiversity crisis pose massive long-term threats to the future survival of wildlife. Rising temperatures will stress wildlife in myriad ways, from shifting migration patterns to threatening the stability of the food chain. Climate change also poses an opportunity to draw the connection between the fate of wildlife and humanity—and the role of thriving ecosystems in our collective future. “Our survival is dependent on sustaining an environment out there—and its richness is part of that. It’s not just for pleasure,” said Liz Storer, president and CEO of George B. Storer Foundation.

### Inside Philanthropy August 2020 Survey

*“Awareness of pet adoption is growing. The need for animal companionship grows more important as people grow further apart due to technological growth and collective narcissism.”*

—Fundraiser, United States

Farmed animal philanthropy is still in its infancy, and its biggest priority is growth. The field benefits from growing recognition that a wide range of social concerns—including human dietary health, climate change and water quality—are related to animal agriculture. Leveraging those connections, including with funders pursuing related priorities, can help the space to expand its ranks.

Lack of public understanding and acceptance of effective altruism is one potential weakness of farmed animal philanthropy. By applying that lens, nonprofits in the field have gained powerful and deep-pocketed individual supporters. But at the

same time, public perception and acceptance of effective altruism may not be catching up, which could be a hindrance in attracting new supporters. Farmed animal funders say the space includes a broad diversity of approaches. Presenting that variety more publicly may help the field grow.

Finally, a weakness for each of the three main segments of animal and wildlife philanthropy is a lack of detailed data or studies on the sector, as noted at the outset of this report. It makes it difficult to know who is funding what and where. Large-scale reports typically do not break out giving to animal welfare. "It's lumped with the environment. It's hard to separate out who's getting what share," said Jill Hoffman, a communications consultant with Animal Grantmakers. The sector's smallest segment, farmed animals, does a great deal of data analysis, though even it has limited publicly available figures on grantmaking. Animal Grantmakers hosts the [Animal Funding Atlas](#), which could create such a snapshot. While it lacks some major companion animal funders, such as Petco Foundation, and lists only a limited number of wildlife grantmakers and funders in the farmed animal space, with wider participation, it could become an invaluable guide to the field.

# Resources on Animals and Wildlife Funding

## Reports & Data Sets:

[Animal Funding Atlas](#). (2021). Hosted by Animal Grantmakers, and funded by Summerlee Foundation, Maddie's Fund, the ASPCA, and Tigers in America.

Bockman, J. (July 21, 2016). [Why Farmed Animals? Animal Charity Evaluators](#).

Hussein, M. (December 18, 2019). [Donor Segmentation: The People Who Donate to Non-Companion Animals](#). Faunalytics

[Giving USA 2020: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2019](#). Giving USA.

Rowan, A. (n.d.). [Animal Grantmaking AG Annual Meeting Report](#). Edith Goode Trust.

## Websites & Individual Pages with Key Information:

[Animal Charity Evaluators](#)

[Animal Grantmakers](#)

[Companions and Animals for Reform and Equity](#)

[Encompass](#)

[Farmed Animal Funders](#)

[Faunalytics](#)

[Human Animal Support Services](#)

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# Thank You

*Thank you to these individuals who were interviewed:*

Melanie Anderson, program director, animals, Summerlee Foundation

Anthony Bellotti, founder and president, White Coat Waste

Lewis Bollard, program officer for farmed animal welfare, Open Philanthropy Project

Kimberlee Dinn, senior vice president, philanthropy, The Humane Society of the United States

Don Doering, former executive director, JRS Biodiversity Foundation

Valerie Dorian, chief development officer, Best Friends Animal Society

Simone Friedman, head of philanthropy and impact investing, EJF Philanthropies

Che Green, consultant (and founder/former CEO of Faunalytics)

Jim Greenbaum, founder and managing director, Greenbaum Foundation

Jill Hoffman, member engagement and outreach, Animal Grantmakers

Denise Joines, senior program officer, Wilburforce Foundation

Paul Keating, head of philanthropy, Paul G. Allen Family Foundation

Annette Lanjouw, chief executive officer, Arcus Foundation

Arthur Middleton, assistant professor of wildlife management, University of California, Berkeley

Louisa McCune, executive director, Kirkpatrick Foundation

Cristina Mormorunni, U.S. field conservation and regional director, Rocky Mountain West, Wildlife Conservation Society

Jamie Natelson, senior vice president, marketing, The Humane Society of the United States

Meghan O'Brien Lowery, partner and director, Greenbaum Foundation

Andrew Rowan, grants advisor, Edith Goode Trust and president, WellBeing International

Mikaela Saccoccio, executive director, Farmed Animal Funders

Ted Schmitt, principal program officer for conservation, Paul G. Allen Foundation

Amy Starnes, senior director, Best Friends Animal Society

Claire Sterling, board member, Animal Grantmakers and chief operating officer, Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers (HEART)

Shelly Thompson, director of grants, Maddie's Fund

<sup>1</sup>Based on available grantmaker data from Candid. Excludes federal funding, funding by higher education institutions and major donor advised funds (DAFs.)

<sup>2</sup>Based on available grant recipient data from Candid. Excludes government organizations and higher education institutions.

## Feedback?

The State of American Philanthropy is an ongoing project, each SAP brief will be updated periodically to integrate new information, additional data and evolving perspectives. This brief was originally posted to Inside Philanthropy in November 2020. It has not yet been updated. If you have comments or information you'd like to share with us, please email us at [managingeditor@insidephilanthropy.org](mailto:managingeditor@insidephilanthropy.org).