General Comments
About 500 people and dozens of their pets attended the 2013 national Animal Rights Conference at the Hilton Mark Center Hotel in Alexandria, Va. Organized by the Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM), the conference commenced on Thursday, June 27, and closed on Sunday, June 30. Out of 62 “workshop” sessions, only five sessions explicitly focused on animal research, as most attention was devoted to examining and responding to the treatment of animals in agriculture and in the wild. Spread throughout the sessions and plenary talks were the typical allusions to other progressive movements (abolition, civil rights, women’s rights, gay rights), as well as acknowledgement of recent headline stories, such as the Supreme Court same-sex marriage decisions, the announcement that the National Institutes of Health will reduce chimpanzee use in research, and the disclosures of National Security Agency-led domestic surveillance by former contractor Edward Snowden. Reflected by the closing plenary title, “We’re Winning,” conference speakers were convinced that the animal rights movement has continued to gain new ground, citing the spread of veganism in popular culture and a recent Gallup poll suggesting a steady decline in moral support for medical testing on animals.

Thursday, June 27

Opening Plenary
With an audience of 300-400 people, the opening plenary mixed historical perspective, soaring rhetoric, and procedural announcements, all to be frequently drowned by the barking of dogs. FARM founder Alex Hershaft opened the conference by soliciting laughter when he used the NSA surveillance story to deride the law enforcement personnel he thought to be in the room. “The government has found out a way to be here remotely, so I don’t think you’ll be sent here anymore,” he said.

Following Hershaft was Dawn Moncrief, founder of plant-diet advocacy group A Well-Fed World, who emceed the plenary in the place of the absent Hollywood actress Elaine Hendrix. Moncrief introduced 11 other people including singer-songwriter Daniel Redwood, hailed as the “Phil Ochs” of the animal rights movement. Of particular note, Shirley McGreal of the International Primate Protection League applauded the “great news” that “the chimpanzees are gradually getting out of the labs. It’s been a very, very long battle.” In Defense of Animals campaign director Nicole Meyer said one of IDA’s functions is “to erode the myth that animal research is necessary in medical research.” Once Nathan Runkle of Mercy for Animals delivered a fiery polemic that invoked Peter Singer, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Luther King, Jr., and after author Norm Phelps traversed a storied history of human-animal relationships, lawyer Jerry Friedman pushed the need to “wreck our opponents’ alliances,”—calling the SHAC campaign an “incredibly effective” example of this strategy in its efforts against Huntingdon Life Sciences in the mid-2000s.

Friday, June 28

Session: Lessons from Vivisection Campaigns (~50 attendees)
Speakers shared their successes, advice, and descriptions from their respective anti-animal research campaigns.
Brenda Shoss (founder, Kinship Circle)
The main attraction of Shoss’s talk was her organization’s new video, “The Multi-Billion Dollar Lie,” uploaded to YouTube in October, 2012 (http://y2u.be/YLKaHcKIUDY). Set to the backdrop of rallying music and rotating between pictures and clips of animals in laboratory procedures, the video makes the case that the use of animals in research wastes billions of taxpayer dollars so that a small elite can profit, invoking the words of former Amgen official C. Glenn Begley to argue that using animal models is irrelevant to human disease and fails to prevent adverse drug reactions. After the video, Shoss encouraged the audience to be “pro-research” and to use the terms “animal-free research” or “human-related research” instead of “alternatives.” Preferring “layered cell” cultures, Shoss acknowledged that animal research supporters will always counter with the living system argument “until we get an entire human, with all the interacting systems.”

Anthony Bellotti (founder, White Coat Waste Project)
By day, a Republican campaign consultant for Campaign Solutions, Bellotti launched WCWP “a few months” ago to focus on the taxpayer side of the opposition to animal research; his group is “pro-animal, pro-taxpayer.” Clearly experienced with campaign advertising, Bellotti filled his sleek and flashy presentation with carefully designed questions and buzzwords. One Powerpoint slide read, “Pop Quiz: Who is the biggest supporter of vivisection? A) Cosmetic companies, B) You, C) Pharmaceutical companies.” His presentation, just like the WCWP website, offered up examples of “waste, fraud and abuse” of NIH animal research funding, ranging from research on drug abuse to cardiovascular function. “If it can be funded by government, it can be defunded,” he said.

Sharon Strong (founder, International Primate Protection League)
Strong played down the recent decision of the U.S. Dept. of Fish and Wildlife to reconsider defining chimpanzees as endangered. Speaking of the supposedly “17,000” primates imported into the U.S. last year for biomedical research as a remnant of “Project Bioshield,” she said “the monkeys are really the ones taking the hit.” Strong then talked about two case studies of past IPPL international interventions. In the first, she described how IPPL worked with the Wildlife Watch Group in Nepal to successfully convince the government to bar the use of native Nepali rhesus monkeys in biomedical research, according to Strong. In the second case, she talked about how the IPPL helped the Colombian group Fundación Entropika revoke the permits of a noted Columbian malaria researcher when it was discovered that the animals used were illegally transported from Peru and Brazil. Strong advised attendees to pressure governments and to not shy away from lawsuits.

Michael Budkie (founder, Stop Animal Exploitation Now)
Budkie opened by adding weight to the “profit” explanation for animal research: “If it wasn’t for the money, animal research would not be happening.” He then took credit for the impending closure of the New England Primate Center at Harvard University, speaking up the media exposure that his campaign earned while “publicizing how labs are breaking the law.” By law-breaking, Budkie meant USDA-cited violations of the Animal Welfare Act, which he believes undermine the scientific validity of animal research results. “If they can't hang a water bottle in a cage, why should we believe they can do science?” He also claimed responsibility for the publicized Gallup poll, saying, "When we change public opinion, the life on earth for animal
experimentation is coming to an end." Budkie closed by echoing Strong’s worries about the implications of the recent NIH announcement: “This is great for chimps; this is really lousy for the macaque monkey,” he said.

Alex Graff (St. Louis Alliance for Medical Progress)
Alongside PETA, Graff’s STLAMP group has protested the use of cats in intubation training at the St. Louis Children's Hospital of the Washington University of St. Louis. STLAMP and PETA claimed victory when a spokeswoman for the hospital said the use of cats was discontinued in one course, but STLAMP recently claimed “manipulation” when it discovered that the training procedure was used elsewhere in the university.

Saturday, June 29
Session: Applying Direct Action (~60 attendees)

Brenda Shoss (founder, Kinship Circle)
Shoss began by identifying herself as a former spokeswoman for SHAC USA, talking about her trip to Rome earlier in 2013 to educate Italian activists about the SHAC campaign, and arousing laughs by making light of the often physical nature of “direction action,” saying, “These guys will punch me or kick me in the calf if I go over [time].” She then talked of two major obstacles in the way of direction action today, “government suppression,” symbolized by the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act and how her “friends” in the SHAC 7 were treated, and “virtual activism.” The latter obstacle manifests as “forwarding other people’s alerts, but not actually taking action yourself,” and Shoss urged attendees to send form letters themselves as opposed to participating in automated petitions. To close, Shoss played parts of film she composed in Rome titled, “The Campaign That Changed Everything” (http://y2u.be/kaLbmLoxPr4), a 9-minute dirge mourning the imprisonment of SHAC 7 members.

Peter Young (Animal Liberation Frontline)
Six years after serving a 2-year prison sentence for the unlawful release of mink from fur factories, Young announced in this session that he is writing a book about the secret history of the Animal Liberation Front, which he says “rescues animals illegally, in situations where the laws have failed animals.” Young spent the rest of the talk dispatching “lessons” that arise from the stories of ALF members who have talked to him. From Young’s perspective, successful ALF agents were driven by a “tremendous sense of urgency,” and not because they were highly trained—he quoted a friend to say, “When there’s a strong enough why, the how will take care of itself.” Another myth, according to Young, is that “carrying out an illegal action equates to prison,” as he pointed to less than 40 arrests out of 1500 incidents and contended that the reasons for why people get caught “are easily avoidable.” Additionally, Young said, “nothing happens until you start trespassing.”

Andrew Stepanian (Sparrow Media Project; SHAC 7 member)
Out of prison since 2009, Stepanian spent his talk discussing the history and implications of the SHAC USA campaign against HLS, which he said used “Wall Street-savvy tactics and coupled them with on-the-ground direct action.” (In a different session that NABR could not attend, Stepanian gave a talk about SHAC’s targeting of so-called “market influencers” such as Carr
Industries, which traded HLS stock.) He said that he and his fellow SHAC members went to school to study “what would create financial pillars of support for a multinational company, and then we started knocking out those pillars of support, one by one.”

_**Susan Hartland (administrative director, Sea Shepherd Conservation Society)**_

Hartland talked about the “immediate satisfaction” that comes with “physically getting in between the seals and the harpoons,” among the forms of direct action against whaling that have prompted Japan to issue a warrant for the arrest of Sea Shepherd’s founder, Paul Watson.

**Q&A**

One attendee notified others that a demonstration would take place that evening outside the home of a US Bank executive in the D.C. area, responding to the bank’s recent loan to HLS.

When asked about where direct action could be taken in the future, Stepanian said, “There are no tactics that are passé.” Young thought the fur industry could be a prime target, saying, “If that one building were gone, it would cripple the industry, for at least a year or so,” and Shoss said, “We could close HLS. That’s one we can win.”

**Session: Dealing with Vivisection (~60 attendees)**

This session was designed to focus on methods of opposition and raising awareness, but only Michael Budkie appeared to meet this standard, whereas the other presenters fleshed out causes for concern and detailed their campaigns.

_**Michael Budkie (founder, Stop Animal Exploitation Now)**_

Budkie asked attendees to consider two tools of action with which to oppose animal research: “protests” and “civil disobedience.” Regarding the former, Budkie decried how activists “tend to set up a protest when they’re convenient”; he discouraged weekend events and pushed instead for careful selection of times and locations so as “to have a concrete impact on the target.” He also suggested protests that attempt to “intercept their income stream” by targeting alumni who donate to flagged universities, and he encouraged attendees to carry jarring photography during their protests. Regarding “civil disobedience,” Budkie stepped up his language. Laboratories must be “forced” to change, and “if that means that we need to go to a laboratory and sit down and block the entrance to prevent the vivisectors from being able to go in and work that day, then we need to do that,” he said. “I want to encourage all of you to consider taking the next step when you’re involved with protests.”

_**Anthony Bellotti (White Coat Waste Project)**_

Beginning with a similar taxpayer-focused appeal as per his previous session (See “Lessons from the Vivisection Campaign”), Bellotti closed his talk with a discussion of public opinion. He saw a lot of hope in the publicized Gallup poll, which he said asked respondents “the cold question.” He thinks that could foretell success for the marketing efficacy of other, more pointed questions. “What does that tell you about tax dollars, wasteful spending?” he asked. “Bottom line is we think this issue is very vulnerable.” Drawing from his campaign experience, Bellotti found particularly enticing the Gallup poll results for the 18-24 age group, as he called the 18 percent drop in moral support “not a bleed, that’s a hemorrhage.”
Aysha Akhtar (author, “Animals and Public Health” and formerly with PCRM)
Not speaking on behalf of her employer, the FDA Office of Counterterrorism and Emerging Threats, Akhtar offered the conference’s most in-depth look at the supposed failures of animal models. Due to the effects of the environment on animals, incongruencies between diseases, and species/strain-specific differences, Akhtar argued that animal models provide no meaningful prediction of the efficacy of drugs in people. She cited the difficulty of deriving an animal model of stroke, the limited usefulness of primate models in developing an HIV vaccine, and a February paper of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that questioned the usefulness of a mice model in immunology research. Given her belief in the unreliability of animal models, Akhtar also wondered whether any of the drugs proven ineffective in animals could be lifesaving for humans, if only tried.

Camille Hankins (Win Animal Rights, SHAC North America)
As a former supporter and spokeswoman for the original SHAC campaign, Hankins took the microphone in an unscheduled, impromptu talk to comment on her experience with SHAC. Echoing Andy Stepanian from an earlier talk, Hankins said, “We hit them on every level” and “attacked every support.”

Dealing with Law Enforcement (~60 attendees)
The purpose of this session was to prepare attendees so that, while practicing activism, they avoid breaking laws and respond appropriately if arrested.

David Simon (lawyer, Animal Protection and Rescue League)
Simon advised attendees to ensure their protests meet four standards: that protesters choose an appropriate “public forum,” use “protected speech,” engage in “lawful activity,” and comply with regulations. He defined “public forum” as parks and sidewalks; from “protected speech” he excepted threats, harassments, incitement, obscenity, profanity and defamation; and from “lawful activity” he excepted trespassing, vandalism, disturbing the peace, and obstructing offices or businesses.

Jeff Light (DC criminal defense lawyer, National Lawyers Guild)
Light showed a video depicting what he called a “good cop/bad cop” strategy in which police elicited a “false confession” from a suspect, so as to warn attendees about what he called “police tricks.” If attendees found themselves questioned by police after an activism event, they should consider invoking their right to remain silent, ask for a lawyer, and then refuse to answer further questions, out of the possibility that they may actually incriminate their fellow activists. “After you invoke your rights, shut up,” he said.

Sunday, June 30

Session: Advocating for Primates (~80 attendees)

Shirley McGreal (founder, International Primate Protection League)
A colleague of the late gorilla researcher Diane Fossey, McGreal talked about the pressures facing non-human primates across the world, referencing macaque extermination in Malaysia,
the bushmeat trade in Cameroon, the effect of the palm oil harvest on orangutans, and primate use in Western fashion and entertainment. She closed with the Nepali macaque story from Sharon Strong’s talk, saying, “Those monkeys were due for a horrible fate” in American research institutions. “Not one monkey left Nepal,” she said to a cheering audience.

Michael Budkie (founder, Stop Animal Exploitation Now)
Budkie began by suggesting that “probably 130,000 primates annually” changed hands in international trade, the “majority” destined for animal research. He then cycled through pictures of experimental procedures—what he called “clearly a horrible thing”—taken from different U.S. primate centers, and he listed USDA-cited violations of the Animal Welfare Act as they relate to primate research. Budkie referred to the line of unsuccessful HIV vaccines to argue for the irrelevance of primate research, and he suggested recent progress, citing Penn State Medical School’s discontinued primate program and the impending closure of the New England Primate Research Center. “As far as I said with the primate centers, one down, seven to go.”

Natalie Prosin (executive director, Nonhuman Rights Project)
As executive director of the NRP, which has been around since 2007 and includes Jane Goodall on its board, Prosin expects to file the organization’s first lawsuit this November. The NRP aims to extend the legal rights of bodily liberty and integrity to certain animals, namely great apes, elephants, whales and dolphins (animals that can pass the mirror self-recognition test). Prosin claims that the NRP will plug potential judges’ behavior into an “algorithm” to “mine through the cases to determine whether or not there are any patterns in their voting,” the goal being to find the ideal jurisdiction to try the first lawsuit. Inspired by the famous 1772 Somersett slavery case, the legal strategy will utilize “habeas corpus” and “thousands of pages of affidavits from the world’s leading scientists” attesting to the “autonomy” of these animals.

Q&A
Cynthia Sampson alerted other attendees to a website (uwnotinourname.org) that advocates against primate maternal deprivation research at the University of Washington.
As to the need to do more, Budkie said, “We need to do everything we can…Anytime we get these laboratories fined, that’s that many primates that they don’t get the money to buy.” Budkie also pushed for more funding for primate sanctuaries.
Director of an Oklahoma primate sanctuary, Bob Ingersoll reiterated the need for more sanctuaries. A lack of space for primates released from laboratories “can be a PR nightmare for us,” he warned. Ingersoll also spoke of running a “secret network” of infiltrators: “People are in labs giving us information.”

Special Session: Lobby Training (~30 attendees)
Odette Wilkins (executive director, Equal Justice Alliance)
Attendees practiced delivering talking points in a “speed-dating”-style training session for a lobby day to take place on Capitol Hill the next day, Monday, July 1. Wilkins called the 50 people who signed up for the lobby day the “biggest lobbying effort we’ve ever had at the AR conference.” Talking points and factsheet-containing folders were distributed to attendees, and they took turns playing the roles of legislator and constituent. Attendees were asked to urge their legislators to support the Safeguard American Food Exports Act, the Prevent All Soring Tactics
Act, and the Stop Antibiotic Overuse on Factory Farms act, and to lift the funding cap of the CHIMP act and repeal the AETA. Wilkins and the attendees appeared most interested in the AETA issue.

Session: War on Animal Activism (>100 attendees)
Speakers addressed what they believe to be a corporate-governmental joint effort to “oppress/suppress/repress” the animal rights movement.

Will Potter (author, “Green is the New Red”)
Potter argued that the “corporations and politicians” want to break animal rights activism apart from other progressive movements while simultaneously lumping them together with terrorism. Citing the 2006 Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act and the recent “Ag-Gag” bills—which would bar photography on agricultural property—Potter believes the focus has shifted more toward terrorism “conflation,” and that change is “indicative of how effective these movements have become.” To Potter, the “Ag-Gag” bills represent an opportunity to reach out to other movements “to show them what the corporations are attempting to silence.” At an unscripted moment in Potter’s talk, when he acknowledged how the animal rights movement includes “illegal elements … that are stealing animals from laboratories and releasing mink from fur farms,” the audience suddenly erupted in applause.

Elizabeth DeCoux (professor, Florida Coastal School of Law)
DeCoux decried the “Ag-Gag” bills and placed the blame on Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), whose “King amendment” to the recently defeated Farm Bill would have “undermined” existing animal protections, according to speakers. To a joyous crowd, DeCoux said, “The King amendment is dead!” DeCoux then issued a series of warnings to attendees, first to advise caution in personal communications given the NSA surveillance revelations—“they don’t even have to go to a judge” to monitor “our” emails and phone calls, she said—and then to advise proper conduct if attendees are arrested or targeted. DeCoux closed by leading the audience in the chant, “I invoke my right to remain silent, and I want a lawyer, now.”

Ryan Shapiro (graduate student, Massachusetts Institute of Technology)
Nine years after charges were dropped for a rescuing ducks from a New York foie gras farm, Shapiro mainly shared the details of his ongoing MIT doctoral dissertation, titled “Bodies at War: Animals, The Freedom of Science, and National Security in the United States.” In his research, Shapiro aims to chart the development of “rhetoric and apparatus of national security to marginalize animal protectionists as threats to the state.” In addition to other sources, Shapiro claims to have used the Freedom of Information Act to acquire 40,000 pages of FBI records that relate to 250 animal rights activists. After the FBI stopped handing over documents—crying “a threat to national security” as Shapiro said—he sued the FBI, with 600 FOIA requests and four lawsuits supposedly pending. “The FBI is in routine violation of the law,” he said, “the FOIA.”

Sarahjane Blum
Fellow foie gras duck rescuer alongside Shapiro and plaintiff in the case Blum v. Holder—a pending constitutional challenge to the AETA—Blum spent her talk calling for vegan meals to be made accessible for prisoners. Of Marie Mason, who in 2009 was sentenced to 22 years in
prison for activism-related arson, Blum said she is “one of the kindest people I know.” Regarding her challenge of the AETA, Blum said she is still waiting on a court date.