



# Our Hen House

CHANGE THE WORLD FOR ANIMALS

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## Interview with Mark Hawthorne

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **MARK HAWTHORNE** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 198.*

JASMIN: So, today on our podcast we have Mark Hawthorne. And I've been a fan of Mark for so long, and he's been on our podcast once before and I know a lot of you really got a lot out of that episode. So, it thrills us not only that Mark is coming back on to join us to discuss new ways to change the world for animals, but especially the reason Mark is coming back today is because he has a new book out that is called *Bleating Hearts*. And this book is gonna change your life. I will say that without question, this book will change your life. It is talking about different types of animal exploitation that even the most seasoned animal rights person doesn't even know about. Nobody's talking about this stuff but Mark. And most importantly he's talking about ways to change animal exploitation of all different kinds. So, it's not like you're just learning about all this hideous shit and then you could go cry, but you will also feel empowered to do something about it. And I'm just so elated to talk once again to Mark Hawthorne.

Mark Hawthorne is the author of *Bleating Hearts: The Hidden World of Animal Suffering* and *Striking at the Roots: A Practical Guide to Animal Activism*. He gave up eating meat after an encounter with one of India's many cows in 1992 and became an ethical vegan a decade later. His writing has also been featured in *Vegan's Daily Companion*, and in the anthologies, *Stories to Live By: Wisdom to Help You Make the Most of Every Day* and *The Best Travel Writing of 2005: True Stories from Around the World*. Mark and his wife Lauren live in California. You can find more of his writing at [markhawthorne.com](http://markhawthorne.com).

Welcome back to Our Hen House, Mark!

MARK: Thanks so much, thanks for having me back.

JASMIN: It's just so exciting to have you. We still get emails about your previous appearance on our podcast, and I'm just thrilled that not only are we having you back on, but we're having you back on to discuss this book that we've heard about for so long. And finally, it's just about ready to be released. Tell us, in a nutshell if that's possible, about *Bleating Hearts*.

MARK: Well, it's a book that looks at a whole range of animal exploitation in the world. It's mainly focused on exploitation that doesn't get a lot of mainstream media attention. We hear a lot about factory farming and vivisection and fur, and rightly so. But there are -- and

there are definitely chapters in the book -- the first three chapters, in fact, cover those issues. But I wanted to look into issues that aren't getting a lot of coverage. After I wrote *Striking at the Roots* -- gosh, that was, came out in 2007 -- I started getting emails from people around the world telling me about the exploitation that was going on in their countries. And, for example, I was hearing about shark finning in Costa Rica and the dolphin drives in Japan. And I realized that there should be a book out there that addressed some of these other issues that activists are working on. And so I wanted to look beyond these major animal exploitation issues and examine issues that we don't hear much about. So, for example, I cover cruelty such as rabbit coursing and the commercial slaughter of kangaroos in Australia, the dolphin drives in Taiji, the dogsled racing in Canada. And it also explores issues that very few other books in our movement tackle, such as animal sacrifice and even the sexual abuse of animals.

JASMIN: Wow.

MARIANN: So, I'm not gonna ask you what was the worst thing you wrote about because that's just such an awful question in so many ways. It's obviously not a competition. But you've been involved in animal protection for a long time. So, I would be interested to know, what surprised you?

MARK: You know, after all my time as an animal advocate, which was about I guess 12 years, and the research that I had done writing for magazines like Satya and VegNews, I thought I could safely say that nothing would surprise me. But I was pretty shocked when I was researching the chapter on the sexual abuse of animals. I knew a little about it, but I never suspected how extensive and disturbing this abuse is, from bestiality, to using animals as a pawn in situations of domestic violence, all the way up to crush videos. This was definitely one of the hardest chapters to write. And I was also surprised by many other cruelties perpetuated by the captivity industry, such as inbreeding animals and drilling out the decayed teeth of whales without any painkiller.

JASMIN: Jeez.

MARIANN: Jesus.

JASMIN: Wow.

MARK: Yeah, it was a real eye-opener for me. It was an education.

JASMIN: Just when you think you can't love humankind any more!

MARK: I know.

JASMIN: Wow. Your topics, they range from things that are familiar to most advocates to things that most of us have never heard of. How did you do your research and fact check? I can't even imagine what that process must have been like for you.

MARK: Well, it was really a matter of five years of research and talking to other activists, other advocates in the community and saying, look, I'm working on this book, and contacting people in other countries and saying, what's going on in your country that needs attention? And so, I spoke with former animal trainers. I read reports. I watched foreign documentaries. I interviewed activists who had worked undercover in research labs and fur

farms and even in the ivory trade, and activists who have dedicated their lives to fighting animal abuse. And I even got some details from the exploiters themselves. For example, I communicated directly with Thomas Whiting, who owns a rooster farm in Colorado that supplies feathers for the fashion industry. And they kill about 1500 roosters a week.

MARIANN: Unbelievable! That's unbelievable.

MARK: Just for the feathers. And Whiting actually said that the birds are not good for anything else. And I spoke with a company that makes nasal implants for male chickens to keep them from eating the hens' food. So I just, I had a variety of sources, and just spent -- I mean, the book is pretty well-noted. I mean, it's pretty well-resourced, documented in the back, and I think about 100 or 150 pages of the book are just footnotes.

JASMIN: Wow.

MARIANN: Yeah. No, it does seem to be very, very well-documented. You're really writing about things here that most people don't actually probably want to know about. So, who do you think the audience will be for your book? Do you think people are more open to finding out about animal suffering than they have been in the past?

MARK: Yes, Mariann, I think people are definitely more open to it. My audience, to answer that question, is really activists, educators, students, consumers, anybody with a conscience, really. But I do think that with this rising tide floating all boats recently -- I mean, we're hearing more about veganism, we're hearing more about the welfare of animals, the importance of animal rights. And I really think that the timing for this book is just right.

JASMIN: Yeah, I totally agree. I mean, I feel like things are shifting. Despite what I just said about, "just when you can't like humankind any more," I also think that out of sadness and despair and the reality of what's going on like this, you're also getting true activists, and you're also getting social change on a mass scale that I feel as though, even in my ten years of working in animal rights, this has changed so much just recently, even in the past year. And a lot of people seem to get very focused on one issue, or on one animal, like marine mammals or elephants or dog-eating, and miss the big picture. Do you hope that by putting everything together in one place, you will encourage people to approach animal issues more holistically?

MARK: Yes, absolutely. We've had, for the last, I don't know, few years it seems, maybe even longer, an emphasis from certain people and certain groups, to just work on factory farming, for example, because in terms of numbers, there are no more animals killed than in factory farming. I mean, I think that the statistic of just land animals worldwide right now is 65 billion.

JASMIN: Wow, wow.

MARK: So, a lot of people think, a lot of activists think, okay, well this is where I need to be devoting my time. But as I learned when I was working on *Striking at the Roots*, activists don't necessarily just want to work on one issue because, for whatever reason, it doesn't speak to them. Maybe they're pulled toward doing fur activism, or maybe they want to work on marine mammal activism. And so this book provides really a landscape where they can target their activism a little bit better and not necessarily feel like, oh I have to work on factory farming because that's really all I know about, that's really the information out there

is, what I'm finding's about animals killed for food, when now we have information out there about so many other issues. And we can put effort into things that speak to us.

MARIANN: But I think also there's the risk that people, and this is one of the things I think your book really addresses, the risk that people -- you know, you see this in companion animal issues and in horse issues a lot -- that they work on that one issue but then they don't change their behavior vis-à-vis other animals, and they don't go vegan. But I think maybe the way you've put every issue together, it's sort of a "think globally, act locally" kind of issue. Work on the issue that you care about, but think about animals globally and the harm you're doing to them.

MARK: Exactly. Absolutely right.

MARIANN: So, actually most of our listeners are vegan already, and should they read this book, since they're already thinking globally?

MARK: Oh, yeah. This book was written for anybody with a conscience, and I would definitely recommend it for vegans. They're gonna find information there that they had no idea about, and they're gonna have resources that they can share with other people. And I end each chapter with a resources section, actions people can take, groups people can contact, things people can do when they're outraged about the issues that they've learned in a chapter. So, this is definitely written for vegans, for activists to get more involved, and for just people in general. I was just speaking with a colleague this morning who was reading the book. She's not a vegan, she's not an animal rights activist, but I've known her for about eight years, and this was her first animal rights book. And she was just telling me what an eye opener it is, and how she thinks it might even change her behavior.

JASMIN: Yeah, that's wonderful to hear. I could see why that would be because sometimes when you get people kind of in, in animal rights issues, with issues that don't necessarily pertain directly to their own behavior, their defenses aren't up as much because they just get to kind of think it's awful from afar, as opposed to taking a look at their own behavior or our own behavior. I mean, everyone certainly is on this evolution of trying to live as consciously and compassionately as we can. And you see so much ignorance about what's really happening to animals from the press. Do you see this book as a potential resource to give to those who are reporting about animal issues, like a starting point to at least question the industry versus the industry versions of animal treatment?

MARK: Absolutely. Yeah, I'm hoping that the media uses this book as a resource, at least as a jumping off point. I would encourage reporters and other people in the media to contact me through the website, and I can pass the information onto other groups or contact them directly with some of the people I spoke with. Yeah, definitely a good resource for news people. And I'm hoping that some of the issues I'm talking about will become more mainstream. Taiji is one example. I mean, your listeners know about the dolphin drives and the dolphin slaughter that goes on. It's happening right now in Japan. And it's very, there are very few mainstream media outlets who report this. And I think it's just now, even after *The Cove* won Best Picture a few years ago, it's still not caught on with the mainstream media. So, it's an issue I address in the book, there are resources in the book, and I'm hoping more media outlets will grab onto this and see the value in reporting these stories.

MARIANN: Yeah, I really hope that as well. I think that you see so often that when you see press articles or TV spots even, at most they might give an activist version and then they'll give the industry version and they don't really delve to find out the truth. And I think your book can really give those details and give them resources to go a little further and not just say, well, this is what the industry says. I mean, sometimes that's all they report is what the industry says. And the truth is so different. I think of this particularly in issues like fur. I mean, nobody ever really looks at what's going on. And when they hear the details -- and your book can be an easy resource for anybody working with the press to give to people and inform them a little bit more and provide them with some resources to dig deeper.

But I'm wondering what it did to you personally. I mean, you must have been immersing yourself for years literally in the worst of the worst animal abuse, to come up with this book. And I want to tell people that, even though the book has harrowing incidents in it, it's written in such a accessible and, I wouldn't say light tone, but it's not like -- you make it as light as you possibly can. I mean, it's a very dark subject, but you deal with it very matter-of-factly, and without a lot of unnecessary emotion, 'cause the emotion is right there in the details themselves. So, you make it as easy as possible to read about this, if I can say that. But what was it like to write about it?

MARK: It was, well, Mariann, it was difficult. There were times when I had to push back and say, I'm having such trouble. I can think of two or three examples off the top of my head, which I won't go into. But, because everybody has their own, will have their own experience and think this is horrible. But yeah, there were times when I would have to take a break because for five years, I spent almost every day either researching or writing this book. And it did take a slight toll on me, to be sure. But last time I was on your podcast, I talked about ways to avoid getting burnt out, and that's definitely advice that I took to heart when I was writing this book. So, I definitely took time to exercise and to make sure I was eating properly, and spent time with my wife, and we took vacations, and we watched comedies, and we would try to end every day doing something fun, and we went to animal sanctuaries and we volunteered, and we petted our rabbit. And we just did everything that we could to remind ourselves because -- and I say us because she kinda lived it with me 'cause she was reading it as I was writing it. We just did everything we could to remind ourselves how lucky we are, and that this is important. I don't want to sound like a martyr and say that I was writing this, saying, well I'm doing this for the animals, therefore I need to suffer. But I did realize how important this material is to get out there, and so I was motivated to do the best job I could.

JASMIN: Yeah, I mean that's very important. I think it's important, too, for people who are listening to this to familiarize themselves with what you're talking about and with the issues that you're bringing out and very few others are bringing out in such a comprehensive way. And just to reiterate what you just said, it's also so important for people to take care of themselves along the way 'cause it can be really easy to forget to do that. And I'm speaking to myself also here, so it's a good reminder for all of us that we're animals too and we need to take care of ourselves just like we would take care of our rescued rabbit.

MARK: Exactly.

JASMIN: What is your explanation for the dissonance between what most people say about animals, that they care about them and they're against cruelty, and what goes on in the real world?

MARK: Jasmin, I don't know that I have a great explanation for that. I think that's one of the big questions that we all have. And certainly, in the last chapter of my book, I asked some ethicists and philosophers and some of the voices in our movement that very question. I think that it has to do with a number of factors. I think habit is one of them. I think we get used to the way we were raised. I mean, I was raised to eat meat and to use animals. And until we have a very strong epiphany, and I think that is different for everybody, whether it's visiting an animal sanctuary or watching *Earthlings* or listening to Our Hen House, whatever it might be. There's something that will click for every different person, and until that happens, we continue to just rely on habit. And I think laziness is another part of it. We're not only lazy in what we eat, but lazy in our behaviors. We're lazy about not wanting to push ourselves and read a book like *Bleating Hearts* or watch a documentary like *Earthlings*, or go hear a speaker or go to an animal rights conference, you know, learn as much as we can. So, I think there's just a number of factors. And I'm not sure I'm giving you the best answer out there, but that's just my experience in talking to people, and learning as I wrote this book that it's just a very challenging atmosphere.

JASMIN: Yeah.

MARIANN: Yeah.

MARK: To sort of move people past that point where they can say, "yeah, I love animals, and I love animals so much, but I'm no longer going to exploit them."

MARIANN: Yeah, well that's why it's so important that all of us who care about this issue have tools. And *Bleating Hearts* is obviously going to be one more really important tool that people have. Actually, your last book, *Striking at the Roots*, which you mentioned before, was also a very important tool for people, but it was much more about technique and how to be an effective activist, and *Bleating Hearts* is much more about substance, it's information about what's actually going on with animals. So, why did you switch, and do you feel that they work as companion volumes?

MARK: Absolutely. Yeah, they complement each other. The way I was describing, when I pitched *Bleating Hearts* to the publisher -- it was the same publisher who did *Striking at the Roots* -- I said, look, if *Striking at the Roots* is a quill full of arrows, then *Bleating Hearts* is gonna be the target because *Bleating Hearts* is a comprehensive book explaining the vast array of animal exploitation in the world, and *Striking at the Roots* would be the tools that people can use to fight those, to fight that exploitation. So, they definitely are companion pieces, and I hope that people will regard them as such.

JASMIN: Yeah, I think that they're excellent companion pieces. And *Striking at the Roots* remains one of my absolute favorite books, and one that I recommend to so many people who are at all interested in changing the world for animals, which presumably is most of the people listening right now. So, in addition to getting *Bleating Hearts*, I hope people just make it a twofer and also get *Striking at the Roots*. And Mark, there's probably no one in the world who knows more about what's happening to animals in so many different places and contexts than you do at this point. And yet, despite all that, you seem to have hope for the future. Can you tell us how you hold onto that hope? And I'm taking notes here.

MARK: Well, actually, I'm really encouraged by the sheer proliferation of vegan foods, and how they're going mainstream, everything from Hampton Creek Foods and Beyond Meat to

TCBY's vegan frozen yogurt. Even Oktoberfest in Munich was catering to vegans for the first time in their 200 year history. So, I hang onto the fact that vegan is really going mainstream and there are people like Jasmin and Mariann who are working so hard, and there are just so many activists that I hear from every week who say that they want to get involved and what can they do? And it's literally like a snowball going downhill. It's just getting more and more and more, so I am very encouraged. It can be discouraging reading this book, but I want to emphasize that there is hope, and each chapter ends with things people can do, and I hope that people will take action.

JASMIN: Yeah, I'm glad that you did that too because whenever I see a documentary or read a book that's just about how everything is going to hell in a hand basket, and then that's it, there's no further action, I just kind of feel, well now what?! And it's frustrating, so you do provide a lot of ways that people can get involved, and you are definitely a voice of reason.

MARIANN: And by the way, have you had that TCBY yogurt?

MARK: I personally have not had it.

MARIANN: Yeah, I haven't yet either. I gotta find that stuff.

JASMIN: Yeah me too.

MARK: Yeah, I know that Sarah Brown over at Queer Vegan Food raved about it, so that sparked my interest.

MARIANN: Yeah, I saw some non-vegan blogs that raved about it, so I really gotta find this stuff.

JASMIN: I think it's in Brooklyn, honey.

MARIANN: All right, let's go to Brooklyn!

JASMIN: All we have to do is like hop on the F train and we're good.

MARK: You guys are so lucky where you live.

JASMIN: Yeah. Well, you don't have it so bad yourself over there in California, I would say.

MARK: No, no. We're really close to San Francisco, so I shouldn't complain.

MARIANN: No, you shouldn't.

JASMIN: Mark, I can't thank you enough. We are such big fans. We remain such big fans of you and your work. And this just really, as if there were any question, this just totally seals the deal in that because this is an absolute important part of anyone's library. And I said to you before we started recording that I'm looking forward to finishing reading this in full, but I also said, though I'm also not! But I guess I more am than not because I feel empowered by it rather than in complete despair about it, and that's an important way of approaching this kind of work.

MARIANN: Yeah, and actually you gave us some advice, which I'd like you to repeat for our listeners about the fear of being traumatized by reading *Bleating Hearts*.

MARK: Oh, when I was talking earlier before we started?

MARIANN: Yeah, before we started recording, yeah.

MARK: Yeah, well, you don't -- if you're reading this book and you're in a section where you feel it's gonna traumatize you, then stop reading it. I'm not asking anybody to get burned out reading this book, or I don't want anybody to become traumatized. There are sections that I cried when I was writing. And I don't want -- I mean, to shed a few tears is one thing, but to feel that you're gonna have nightmares is not something that I want for anybody. I want people to be moved to take action. I don't want them to be traumatized, so feel free to skip over a section. It's written in pretty small sections, so it's very easy to go onto the next one.

MARIANN: Yeah, and then you'll have it on your shelf in case you do need to find out about that or somebody asks you a question. It'll be a great resource, so you'll always have it on your shelf to get that information when you need it.

MARK: Absolutely.

JASMIN: Totally agree. Well, thank you again, Mark. We're so thrilled about this new publication. And we'll have the information on our website for how people can get this for themselves. And we hope that you'll stay in touch with us and keep us posted on your next projects, so that you can come back on.

MARK: You can count on that. Thank you so much for having me back.

MARIANN: And before we get off, I think we should tell people that it's b-l-e-a-t-i-n-g hearts.

JASMIN: Yeah.

MARK: Yeah, it's "bleating" like a sheep.

MARIANN: Yeah.

MARK: Or a goat. Yeah.

JASMIN: Awesome. Thanks, Mark.

MARK: Thank you.

JASMIN: That was Mark Hawthorne. Go to [markhawthorne.com](http://markhawthorne.com) to get *Bleating Hearts* and to see more of Mark's writing.