

MEDIA RELEASE

1 July 2009

Minding Animals Conference: Animal Woodstock



The Animals and Society (Australia) Study Group announced today that the 2009 International Academic and Community Conference on Animals and Society will be held in Newcastle over the week between 12 and 19 July. Known as the Minding Animals Conference, the conference is the first international conference dedicated to the emerging discipline of animal studies, and a momentous event for Newcastle.

Leading animal advocate and conference keynote, Professor **Dale Jamieson**, from New York University, said, **“the conference is the largest and most eclectic celebration of animals that has ever occurred. It is the Woodstock of the animal rights movement”**.

Newcastle will see an influx of over 400 delegates from Australia and overseas who will join activists and academics from several Australian universities to discuss such varied topics as animals in sociology, religion, history, literature, the law, and zoo and veterinary science. The conference will also examine the complex philosophical and theoretical foundations of the interrelationship between humans and animals, examining animal welfare and protection measures taken by governments, universities and the community.

The conference is also significant in being held in Australia. One of the world’s leading thinkers, Professor **Peter Singer**, said **“Australia is falling behind Europe and the United States in our animal protection standards. This major international conference in Newcastle should serve as a wake-up call”**.

Also present will be some of the world’s leading wildlife and animal advocates, such as the Nobel Laureate Professor John Coetzee and Jill Robinson MBE (famous for rescuing bears from bear bile farms in China and Vietnam). Also present will be **Carol Adams**, the world’s leading ecofeminist and author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, who stated that, “this conference offers the best of many worlds: from animal protection to scholarship on human-animal relationships; from understanding laws and other texts, to recognising animal realities; from deconstructing human superiority to celebrating the diversity of animal relationships; scholars, activists, and artists will be sharing their work in a supportive environment”.

Ms **Jill Robinson** added to the sentiments by stating that “Minding Animals means understanding animals, and failing them if we do not, so this conference is playing a critical role in acknowledging the intricate lives and emotions of other species, and helping us respect and protect them as they so urgently deserve”.

“Animals have active minds, passionate hearts, and moral codes and knowing this demands that we treat them with respect, compassion, and love” noted Professor **Marc Bekoff**, distinguished animal behaviourist and colleague of Dr Jane Goodall. This will be clearly demonstrated in the depth of study that will be exhibited in fifteen art spaces made available for the Animals and Art Festival held during and after the Minding Animals Conference week. Newcastle galleries will be showcasing art from nearly 100 leading contemporary artists from Australia and overseas, including Patricia Picinnini, Hayden Fowler, Yvette Watt, Mark Wilson and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir, Chris O'Doherty (aka. Reg Mombassa), Belle Brooks and Michael Bell.

Key aspects of the conference will be the Animals and Art Festival, as well as the Minding Animals Documentaries Festival and an Animals Interfaith Service at Christ Church Cathedral led by the new Anglican Dean of Newcastle, the Very Reverend Dr James Rigney, the Reverend Barbara Allen, and members of the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu faiths, amongst others. As such, **“the conference will undoubtedly help educate the public on the subtlety, complexity, and variety of moral issues society must engage in dealing fairly with animals”**, noted Professor **Bernie Rollin**, Professor of Biomedical Sciences and Bioethicist from Colorado State University.

Information regarding the conference, or contact with Conference Keynote Presenters, can be arranged by contacting Conference Co-convenors, Dr Rod Bennison, on 0414 914 040, or Dr Jill Bough, on (02)4367 6729.

Further information regarding the conference can be obtained by visiting the dedicated Conference Website: www.mindinganimals.com