

What Would *Tasmanian Devils* Say About Humans If They Could

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The Tasmanian Devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*), a carnivorous marsupial found nowadays only in the island of Tasmania (south of Australia), has been considered by humanity a cruel beast with bad temper and excessive belligerence. However, these characteristics were based on prejudice ideas and Aborigine myths raised due to the terrible screeching and spine-chilling screams, fierce snarls and high-pitched yelling when fighting over hunted food, as well as their nauseating odor secreted under stress, when trapped or attacked. However, meticulous scrutiny of their life habits and behavior has shown that this belief is unjustified. Actually, Tasmanian devils (comparable with medium-size dogs) are quite timid and not only that they presently do not endanger humans, they are excellent scavengers as they clean out their habitat by eating most anything eatable no matter how old or rotten. Their frightening yawning, large heads and necks (well suited to crushing bones), and sharp teeth and jaws, resembling those of hyena, are unusual and scary, but actually their manners are a display of fear, probably as a result of their massive extinction either by Australian settlers, or due to a Facial Tumor Disease, with only 25000 individuals left in Tasmania (90% of their large population was obliterated) (ref. 1). Notably, the terrible image of Tasmanian Devils has been formulated according to humans' criteria, raising questions of whether such categorization was vindicated.

Humans are considered the top developed ape in the Animalia evolutionary tree, and indeed, reached cognitive abilities enabling dominance on the entire planet. The question here raised is how would *Homo sapiens* be categorized by other animal species, such as *Sarcophilus harrisii*, on a ladder of dangerous, belligerent and cruel, should they have the means to express themselves (developed brain, almost unlimited resources, speech ability and high technology). It seems quite evident that despite the excessive self-esteem, humans might be categorized as the worst beast on the planet adopting their own criteria: (1) Considering cruelty: *Homo sapiens* has proven this built-in evil trait along thousands of years of modern history, in wars as well as in a large variety of episodes during daily life (ref. 2); (2) Bad temper and blood thirst: These characteristics are evident from the killing habits and terrible fights between nations and terror activities, such as extermination of entire populations, killing of women, children and even babies (by Nazi soldiers and their allies during World War II, and by Al Qaeda, ISIS and Hamas terrorists in recent years), as well as the ease of killing during struggles between individuals over matters of ego, power, courtship, resources, or unbelievably, even over parking priority. In addition, hunting animals has been always a popular sport practiced especially by nobles. Even nowadays, bull killing by matadors for the pleasure of large crowds is still practiced; (3) Excessive belligerence and violence: Evident for example from Russian aggression against Ukraine, or China's past aggression against Tibet and present assaults of Taiwan, or the colonial aspirations in the Middle East of Iran, and worldwide terror instigated by North Korea, all raising fears of a chaotic future with increased probability of enflaming World War III (ref. 3);

(4) Largest-scale carnivores: Not only that humans eat meat. To comply with their growing need for this food they grow large numbers of animals (e.g., cattle, poultry) intended for slaughter; (5) Humans overuse natural resources and despite all warnings by experts, continue to contaminate the environment, thus risking themselves and most life forms on Earth. In so doing, *Homo sapiens* impose an increasing danger on the survival of all other animal and plant species, while actually, expediting the destruction of nature on Earth (ref. 4).

Of note is the fact that categorization like the above could be performed only by humans, while the entire animal world is speechless and cares for simple survival needs like food, comfort, and gene transfer to the next generation. Therefore, the above categorization of humanity by the Tasmanian Devils or by any other group of animals is just a fiction and follows human criteria. Still, not only that the purported critique of *Sarcophilus harrisii* pinpoint *Homo sapiens* as the most violent, cruel and belligerent animal on Earth, it actually enlightens the need to restrict the harassment of our planet by humanity and the urgent need of nature conservation. Finally, there is no doubt about the fact that all other carnivores do not endanger all other life forms on Earth as does *Homo sapiens*, the allegedly top animal in the evolutionary tree of life.

References

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