

COK talks with Mark Hawthorne



Mark Hawthorne is a long-time, committed animal advocate whose experiences throughout the years lend personal insight and practical knowledge to his new book, *Striking at the Roots: A Practical Guide to Animal Activism*. Written to reach out to both newcomers to the animal movement as well as seasoned activists, Mark's book examines a variety of advocacy strategies, offers the tools and resources needed to increase effectiveness, and motivates readers to start making a difference for animals today. When he's not writing articles or opinion pieces for publication in various newspapers or magazines, Mark spends time with his five rescued rabbits at home and volunteering for Animal Place, a farmed animal sanctuary in Vacaville, California.

Q: What motivated you to become involved in animal activism?

A: It was a long journey that began while traveling the world nearly 20 years ago. I was in Pamplona with thousands of other knuckleheads for the running of the bulls. After I had completed the run and made it to the bullring, I felt ashamed. A couple months later I was in India, living with a Buddhist family in the Himalayas. Almost everything I ate was from their vegetable garden, and I felt better than I had in my life, both physically and spiritually. One day a cow came into the garden. It was the first time I had really considered a cow. I was just captivated by her, and she held my gaze for some time. It changed me somehow.

I had pretty much stopped eating meat when I got back to the US. I began educating myself about factory farming and other animal abuse, read *Diet for a New America* and discovered an animal sanctuary near me called Animal Place.

One visit to Animal Place was all I needed to go vegan and decide I wanted to be an activist.

Q: What was your inspiration for writing *Striking at the Roots*?

A: I couldn't find anything like it when I got into the movement—a book that explains each model of activism and how to get involved. I thought we needed a resource like this. A 2006 survey asked young people which non-profit they are most interested in volunteering for. Nearly 30% of those who responded said PETA. This was by a wide margin the most popular answer, so obviously there is a strong interest among this demographic in being active for animals. But what really caught my eye was that when this same group was asked why they are not already active, the number-two open-ended answer was “I don't know how to get started.” Clearly, many people want to take action for animals

but either don't have the necessary knowledge or don't know where to look for it. I'm hoping *Striking at the Roots* will give people a place to go for answers.

Q: Your book discusses a variety of tools for animal advocacy from leafletting to corporate campaigning and more. What forms of activism do you wish our movement would focus more on?

A: I think all the forms are important, and they all have an impact, since you never know what is going to move someone to change their habits. What I would like is for the animal rights movement to reach out more to other progressive movements, like human rights, environmentalism, the peace movement, feminism and the labor movement. The exploitation of animals affects all these other issues. If we can come together with these other movements, I believe we can influence even more hearts and minds.

Q: What do you believe are some of the biggest obstacles the movement faces?

A: Well, obviously we're battling the sense of entitlement most people have about animals, whether it's corporate hegemony or consumer behavior. And that's all backed by multi-billion-dollar marketing campaigns.

But another big obstacle, I'm afraid, is the animal rights movement itself. We're supposedly all working to advance the interests of animals, yet there are many in our movement—and they know who they are—who spend more time criticizing other activists or groups than doing any kind of meaningful outreach or activism. The animal exploiters must surely be laughing at us. It certainly does the animals no good. I'd like to see solidarity and a unified front.

Q: How have your views on animal activism changed since you first got involved in the movement?

A: More than anything, I've learned the critical role young people play in this movement—both reaching out to them to lead cruelty-free lives and inspiring them to engage in activism. Incidentally, that's one reason I have so much respect for the work Compassion Over Killing is doing.

I feel much more empowered than ever before. We're making real progress, and it's energized me to do even more.

Q: What advice can you offer those who are new to the movement and not sure where to get started?

A: Well, there's this great new book.... (Laughs)

Begin with yourself: go vegan. For those wanting to get active, I advise

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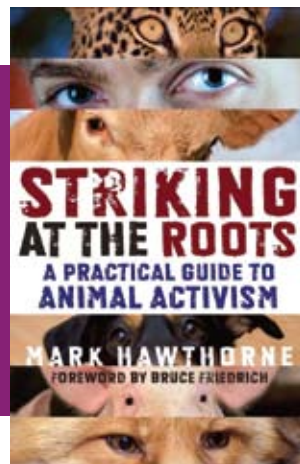
them to find ways to apply their own personality to activism. What do you like to do? Are you comfortable addressing a large group, for example, or are you better talking one on one? I do think we should strive to push some of our own boundaries as activists, though – get out of our comfort zones when possible.

Leafletting is probably the perfect combination of ease and effectiveness. Contact Vegan Outreach and get some leaflets you can hand out at a local college. If you don't think that's for you, see if there's an animal rights organization in your city or on your school campus. Doing a bit of volunteer work with them is a great way to get your feet

wet and meet other activists. If there's nothing in your area, contact groups like Compassion Over Killing, Mercy For Animals or PETA—groups with campaigns activists can get involved with. There is no shortage of things to do.

Also, join the online forum for your nearest vegan or vegetarian society. This will connect you with other activists and be a place to go for support and advice.

Finally, I highly recommend that activists do some kind of direct work with animals, whether it's helping out at a shelter, fostering a rescued rabbit, volunteering at an animal sanctuary or whatever. This will give you firsthand experience with animals and nurture your dedication to the movement. ■



Striking at the Roots: A Practical Guide to Animal Activism

By Mark Hawthorne

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StrikingattheRoots.com