

Opportunities that come with venturing in a career in Wildlife and Animal Law in Zimbabwe.

By Helen Nare

Animals are living organisms, vertebrates or invertebrates, which are characterized by voluntary movement. They constitute domestic and wild animals (also known as wildlife). Animal advocates firmly assert that animals have rights and these rights deserve protection under the law. The fundamental purpose of wildlife and animal law in any given society therefore is to promulgate laws that ensure the protection of endangered species and to curb wildlife trade in animal and animal products.

Animal and Wildlife law is still an emerging field in Zimbabwe but it is not alien to jurisprudence. It permeates most traditional fields of law. Criminal law deals with animal cruelty prosecution and the links between animal abuse and violence to humans and other crimes. Under the law of torts there are concepts of veterinary malpractice and damages for wrongful death or injury to animals and international law addresses issues of wildlife poaching and trafficking.

The Law through relevant Acts seeks to protect animals from any form of abuse and to spread awareness on the plight of animals. It addresses questions on what constitutes animal cruelty on a legal standpoint. The common types of animal abuse include neglect, hoarding, shooting, beating, throwing, stabbing, burning, and so on. On the other hand animal cruelty constitutes illegal hunting, trapping, poisoning, capture and poaching.

For one to have an appreciation of animal rights it suffices to identify the universally acknowledged Five Freedoms of Animals. Animals are entitled to freedom from hunger or thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury or disease, freedom to express normal behavior and freedom from fear and distress. It is these freedoms/rights that Animal and Wildlife law seeks to preserve through legislation, prosecution and spreading awareness to the public in general. It is therefore crucial for interested people to undergo animal law training in order to attain the adequate skills and knowledge required in the field of animal law to protect animal rights.

As of today, Speak Out For Animals (SOFA) is the only organization offering a certificate in Animal Law in Zimbabwe. SOFA is a non-profit organization founded by Advocate E. V Chinoda

which aims at influencing the mindset and inspiring behavior change towards animal protection and preservation laws. The animal law training is open to law students, graduates, members of the legal profession and other interested parties working in the biodiversity field. The training is a one week thorough training on different facets on Animal Law. Those that would have attended and completed training are awarded certificates of participation.

It suffices to mention that SOFA is still striving towards the inclusion of Animal Law in the curriculum of universities in Zimbabwe. Law students interested in Animal and Wildlife law are generally advised to take on the course of Environmental Law because the two fields face many of the same legal and strategic challenges. Currently, SOFA is spreading awareness at universities through its Student Chapters. There are two student chapters for now, one at the University of Zimbabwe and the other at Great Zimbabwe University.

With the field of Animal and Wildlife law evolving everyday, career opportunities surface. There has emerged multiplicity of job opportunities. A number of organizations are currently offering career opportunities for those who would have undergone animal law training in Zimbabwe. These include SOFA, ZIMPARKS, National Prosecuting Authority, SPCA, Tikki Hywood Trust, Save Valley Conservancy, World Wildlife Foundation and UNESCO. Furthermore, there is a plethora of private stakeholders which specialize in biodiversity conservation.

Employment opportunities include volunteering at the above mentioned organizations. Legal officers and legal managers are also a product of the animal law training. Further holders of certificates in animal law training can be involved in litigation at non-profit organizations, prosecuting animal cruelty cases, case monitoring and participating in the legislative process. Opportunities further include attending various international conferences and workshops that advocate for animal protection and welfare. The Lewis and Clarke Law School based in Portland is offering scholarships for law graduates who want to pursue Masters in Law (LLM) at their institute.

It is apparent that animal law is evolving in Zimbabwe. One may expect an astounding career advancement in an emerging field with less congestion, undoubtedly.