This is a book about wildlife—the myriad species of animals outside of our direct sphere of influence that populate our planet and that we impact every day through our actions. It is also a book about the law and how it can be used to influence, for better and for worse, the lives of the billions of individual animals we call wildlife. However, unlike other “wildlife law” books that stop at the doors of the courthouse or the legislature, this is a book about the compelling ethical and moral issues that are inextricably intertwined with our legal treatment of wild animals. In approaching the subject and wanting to provide a new and broader perspective than previously attempted, we acknowledge at the outset that the subject matter is much too complex and variegated to be covered in one book by one author. For this reason, we have carefully chosen a few especially illustrative and focused issues that have broad implications for many species and authors who have special knowledge in those areas. The result is a book that is a distinct collection of essays on select areas by some of the most knowledgeable and experienced wildlife lawyers and advocates in the country. It addresses some of the most crucial and topical issues in wildlife law today.

We envisioned a book that was informative but also approachable and understandable, not only to lawyers and educators, but also to the increasing numbers of citizens who care about the future of the wild
animals on our planet. We hope that readers find that we have met that challenge.

A Different Approach to Wildlife Issues

While most books covering wildlife law include a survey of international laws, this book takes a different approach—focusing instead on the power of U.S. law to influence wildlife protections around the world. Each chapter demonstrates that, contrary to some perceptions, the United States plays a significant and often unrealized role in international wildlife issues. As authors, we demonstrate this by presenting the issues almost exclusively through the lens of U.S. law. We look at federal and state laws, as well as the policies and procedures that affect the lives of wild animals here and abroad.

As stated, our approach is first to provide the law as a solid background and then to provide social context regarding the circumstances facing all members of the global community. To this end, the book is framed around specific issues (not laws), such as extinction or animals in captivity. By organizing the chapters around these focused areas of influence, we hope to make the related legal complexities understandable and avoid becoming too focused on specific animals or the acts of certain industries or individuals. Once the issues are laid out, each chapter includes one or more case studies. The case studies are based on both public reporting and related legal materials that demonstrate the tensions arising in this area and how the law has been applied, or manipulated, to serve desired ends. For lawyers, the case studies include helpful detail in footnotes providing references for further research. For lay readers, the cases are clearly presented in a hopefully enjoyable and easy to comprehend manner. The facts and relevant laws in each case speak volumes about the threats to wildlife, such as the competition for habitat, the pollution of the oceans, climate change, and the exploitation of species themselves.

Finally, the essays include considerations that are inherent in our legal treatment of animals as property. The book’s contributors provide mean-
ingful insights into the moral dilemmas and conflicts that accompany legal decisions that greatly affect the lives of wild animals.

The Acts of Individuals

In our work as lawyers and advocates we often hear the questions: “What can I do personally to help animals in the wild? What actions can I take that will truly make a difference?” Wild animals, unlike companion animals, are usually in distant lands or public parks rather than in our own backyards. This fact makes our ability to help seem beyond the reach of an individual or local lawyer. The reality is much different. After reading this book, no one should see his or her role in wildlife protection as limited or nonexistent. By understanding the issues and the laws, it is clear how the products we buy, the entertainment we choose, and the votes we cast have a direct impact on wildlife and the environment.