

Q+A with Nick Sackett: Social Compassion in Legislation's Director of Legislative Affairs

Q: When did you realize animals were important to you?

A: I've had an affinity towards animals for as long as I can remember, as many people do. But my activism for animals was born out of my concern for the environment. As I dug into the causes of climate change, environmental degradation, and loss of biodiversity, I found animal agriculture as a primary driver of these issues. What shocked me was how little I (and the general public) knew about animal agriculture's big contribution to our environmental problems. Once I learned this, it wasn't long before I also learned how horrific our industrialized system of animal agriculture really is for the animals and I knew I couldn't support it. I've been vegan for a little more than five years now.

Q: What is your favorite animal memory?

A: I don't know if it's my favorite, but I laugh when I think about it. As a kid growing up in Vermont, I had a newspaper route in my small hometown. We lived on a few acres outside of town where we had chickens and roosters roam freely. The roosters would lie in wait at the end of a path through the woods from which I'd come home every morning and attack me. I would have to leap and bound past them to avoid getting wounded! Those little buggers!

Q: What is your favorite animal and why?

A: Elephants. I worked at a sanctuary in Thailand with elephants for a couple of months in 2015. Every morning I'd have to feed them and in the evenings walk with them into the jungle to let them graze. It was a magical experience getting to be so intimate with them. If you watch them closely, you will see they all have unique personalities. A note for anyone thinking about volunteering at a sanctuary, I was very naive regarding the incentives and true mission of elephant "sanctuaries." Do your research and make sure they are not contributing to the suffering of elephants by buying and selling them. Just because a place calls itself a "sanctuary", does not mean it is benefiting elephants.

Q: How did you first get involved with Social Compassion in Legislation and what is your role in the organization?



A: I had just gotten back from Thailand working with elephants when a partner at the firm I worked at sent an email saying he had a friend of a friend that needed help with some Zimbabwe elephant issue. I had no idea what exactly the issue was or how I'd be able to help, but I instantly replied. That email changed my life forever -- the friend of a friend turned out to be Judie Mancuso, SCIL's founder and president. From there I volunteered my time when I could for two years until SCIL offered me a full-time job in Sacramento as Director of Legislative Affairs. My role involves coordinating lobbying and advocacy efforts in Sacramento, while also supporting Judie in a way so she can focus on high level stuff. Basically this means researching and writing the policy, meeting with members or staff, and negotiating with stakeholders and committee consultants.

Q: When did your passion for animals turn into your career?

A: Before finding SCIL, I was a litigation attorney. My workdays weren't exactly fulfilling. It was a job that paid the bills. I can't tell you how happy I am now, getting to contribute in my small way towards making positive change for animals in this world.

Q: What is your favorite animal movie?

A: I recently watched My Octopus Teacher on Netflix - it made me cry in a good way. It reminded me that all of these animals are individuals. Sometimes when we think about animals we think of them as one entity, but in fact they are billions of separate beings. We humans inflict horrific amounts of pain and suffering on them, and each one suffers their own individual pain. When you grasp that concept, how can you not do your best to reduce that suffering?

Q: What's the most impactful law you were involved with passing?

A: That's hard to say because it takes time to really measure the impacts of any one law. With that said, working to pass SB 1249, the California Cruelty-free Cosmetic Act, is the highlight of my short career in animal advocacy. We faced an army of opposition from cosmetic, chemical, and retail companies and still won the battle for the animals. It was also my first year working as a lobbyist, and to me it felt like I'd suddenly got thrown into the Super Bowl of animal rights law. And since that bill passed, we have seen other states pass similar legislation and recently China announced that they are relaxing their animal testing requirements. It feels good to have had a hand in the positive domino effect.



Q: Who inspires you?

A: I'm inspired by the wave of young activists that are not allowing themselves to be gaslighted by the old guard. And not just for animal rights. The BLM movement, the Sunrise movement, the Me Too movement, those fighting for LGBTQ rights or common sense gun control laws-- all of these movements are being led by a younger generation. I don't think we can make the fundamental changes we need to solve our issues without the fire and clear eyes that they bring. My generation and older, we are too embedded in the system. We have too much to lose with big changes. But these kids, they aren't having that. They're not going to allow us to continue down the path that we've been on and that inspires me. They give me hope that real, fundamental change will happen.

Q: What's the most important thing you want people to know about AB 416, the CA Deforestation-Free Act?

A: I want people to know that we can't expect other countries to bear the burden of saving our tropical and boreal forests. We can't ask nations to save these forests, but then turn around and buy products that come from destroying those forests. We must put our money where our mouth is, and that's what this bill does.

Q: How does tropical forest habitat loss affect us?

A: Tropical forests are our best defense against climate change. No matter how we change our energy systems, it won't mean a thing if we continue destroying the world's tropical forests. Additionally, the destruction of tropical forests increases animal-human contact, which increases our risk of another pandemic.

Q: How can people support the bill?

A: People can support the bill by signing up on our website to send a support letter for the bill. Also, directly contacting their California state legislators to support the bill. Lastly, share news of the bill on your social media accounts. Talk to your friends and family about the importance of tropical forests and not purchasing products that destroy them.

