

The evolution of animal rights groups in Spain

From the first animal rights group founded in 1975 to the present day, the Spanish animal rights movement have rarely resorted to criminal acts.

The rise of the animal rights movement in Spain took place at the beginning of the historical transition to democracy in the seventies. The first group devoted to defend animal rights was founded in 1975 by a railway employee, Benito de Benito, who proposed the creation of an organization with the aim of 'promoting the welfare to all animals'.

With no national predecessors, this pioneer group, NGO ADDA (association for the defense of animal rights) adopted the policies of the international animal rights movement and in 1977 became a member of the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and participated in writing the universal declaration of animal rights, announced in October the 17th 1978.

ADDA

Over its 30 years of history [ADDA](#) mounted numerous activities to condemn the use of animals in research and to propose alternatives. In 1989, this organization produced its first information booklet, with the title *Holocaust or science?*, it was about the experimental procedures applied to animals in biomedical research.

Over the course of the nineties, alone in the animal rights movement in Spain, ADDA participated in negotiating and developing animal rights protection policies. In 1996 ADDA produced and submitted a draft law to the government aimed to control 'conscientious objection in scientific issues' in order to guarantee the individual freedom of every professional when deciding whether to use animals for teaching and science or not.

In 1999 ADDA organized the first conference on technical alternatives to vivisection during which they proposed a drastic reduction in the number of animals used to test cleaning products and cosmetics.

Peaceful civil disobedience

At the turn of the century, in 2003, the first political party against animal cruelty, [PACMA](#), was created in Spain, but so far has never reached representation in the national parliament. This party has presented its candidates to the

last regional elections in five autonomic communities and is now the second largest extra-parliamentary political force in Spain. The formation of this group and other organizations left ADDA without its previous monopoly position. Perhaps in response, its strategy became mainly focused on public dramatizations of animal cruelty, by means of public actions such as humans confined in animal cages and bleeding naked bodies piled up or packed in plastic trays.

Veganism emerged as one of the underlying philosophies in the new groups that appeared in the last decade such as [Igualdad animal](#) (Animal Equality) and [Equanimal](#). As well as using demonstrations that dramatise animal experimentation these new organizations are characterised by illegal protest actions, such as the mass release of animals.

In 2007 activists of Animal Equality were the first to remove animals when they broke into a pig farm and stole three animals. This signalled the beginning of a new tendency towards civil disobedience in which, unlike in previous demonstrations, activists did not hide their faces and also publicised all their actions, with videos posted on the internet and the production of leaflets describing their moves.

Also in 2007, 11 activists from ALF (Animal Liberation Front), with which the group Animal Equality sympathises, were detained after releasing 20.000 mink from a fur breeding farm.

In January 2011, a group of unknown activists removed 36 Beagle dogs from the premises of Isoquimem (Sant Feliu de Codines, Barcelona), a company that specialises in breeding animals for research. This last action generated the most media coverage in Spain of any animal rights event in the history of the Spanish animal rights movement. Since then, Isoquimem has been the target of many peaceful demonstrations demanding its closure.

Violent action

Violence is rarely chosen as a strategy by animals rights activists in Spain. Nevertheless, some isolated actions have occurred. In 2004 a new French owned breeding facility for non-human primates - destined to biomedical research, NOVEPRIM Ltd– was established at Camarles, Tarragona. This facility became the target of a series of demonstrations and a legal case. In 2005, a few days after the Spanish Supreme Court ruled in favor of the business being allowed to continue breeding primates, the breeding facility was the subject of an arson attack which fortunately caused little damage.

Spanish scientists or scientists working in Spain have rarely been personally harassed by animal rights activists. The worst example is that of a director of an animal facility in Barcelona who received threatening letters in 2009.

Judicial response

In June 22, 2011, a police raid against 12 members of associations for the protection of animal rights including Animal Equality took place simultaneously in three Spanish cities. In all cases national police officers of the rapid response brigades (specialized in anti-terrorist operations) turned up to private homes of activists with search warrants. The result was the confiscation of protest material and the detention of activists who remained in jail for 19 days and were subsequently released. They were charged with breaking and entering into business premises, stealing animals and practicing 'eco-terrorism'.