

Living with Animals 6: Invisibilities
Eastern Kentucky University
March 13th – 15th, 2025

Organizers: Robert W. Mitchell, Radhika N. Makecha, & Michał Piotr Pręgowski

Location: Perkins Conference Center, 4436 Kit Carson Drive, Richmond, KY 40475. Perkins is distinctive, as it is attached to a round Planetarium.

Co-Conferences:

Living with Horses, Co-organized by Gala Argent & Jeannette Vaught

Living with Art and Animals, Organized by Julia Schlosser

Conference Overview:

Each day begins with a keynote speaker in the main hall of the Perkins Center, and follows with two tracks that run concurrently on either side of the main hall. Thursday and Friday also end with a keynote speaker.

Food and Drink:

Most food and drink will be served in the AB Hallway outside room AB. Each day, a light assortment of breakfast food will be served. Additionally, snacks will be available on each day during the afternoon break and coffee/tea/water will be served throughout the day.

On Thursday, we will have a vegan and vegetarian lunch buffet of Middle Eastern food. On Friday, lunch can be purchased across the street from Perkins Conference Center, at the Stratton Café in the Stratton Building. Stratton Café has vegan and vegetarian options, and closes at 1pm on Friday. On Saturday, an Ethiopian vegan and vegetarian lunch buffet will be served in the main lobby of Perkins during the Poster Session.

The **conference dinner** is on **Saturday night** at Masala Restaurant, which features a buffet of all types of Indian food.

NOTE: Breakfast foods, snacks, and drinks as well the buffet lunches (Thursday and Saturday) and the conference dinner (Saturday) are included in registration fee.

Book Displays:

Throughout the conference in Room 212/220, books will be displayed. Several university presses and others have generously provided books for your perusal (as well as order sheets). In addition, you can purchase for only \$25 + tax the Co-Existence art book edited by Julia Schlosser celebrating the artists and artworks from the 2017 conference. This represents an ~30% reduction in price.

Room 212/220 is also a place to take a break or have conversations with conferees. There will be tables and chairs set up there.

Optional Excursions:

- **Thursday, March 13th:** Social warmer at the Paddy Wagon in Richmond, Kentucky. Drinks and dinner can be purchased here.
- **Friday, March 14th:** Optional trip to Berea, where dinner at Boone Tavern or Papaleno's Pizza can be purchased.
- **Sunday, March 16th:** Meeting with birds from the Liberty Nature Center in the Cammack Building on the EKU campus from 10-11:30. Potentially, we may lunch at a restaurant afterward.

Parking:

Parking is free at the Perkins Conference Center. It is a short walk to the entrance of the building.

NOTE: Do not park on the street or in the parking lot across the street from the Perkins building, as you may be towed.

Shuttle: The shuttle service will pick up at the conference hotels in the morning starting around 8am until 9:30am, will return people to their conference hotels after the conference events, and will take you to conference events (as described above). There will be no shuttle service after the morning pickup until the end of the conference each day. Shuttles will also be taking us to optional excursions, and the dinner on Saturday.

Posters:

Posters can be put up on Thursday. Posters can be attached to a 3 feet x 4 feet poster board on an easel. Pushpins will be provided.

Presentations:

Some time before your talk, please go to the room you are going to be giving your talk to download your presentation or explain how you plan to proceed. Your session moderator and a tech person should be able to help you if there are problems. Talks (other than hour-long keynotes) will be 20 minutes long, presumably 15 minutes for the presentation, and 5 minutes for questions. If you wish to arrange your 20 minutes differently (e.g., 18 minutes for presentation, 2 minutes for questions, or 20 minutes with no questions), speak with your session moderator before your session. After 20 minutes, your talk will end. Roundtables and workshops may have organized their sessions differently.

Zoom:

Some talks will be on zoom. We will provide the zoom account via email: we're still getting them set up.

**Living with Animals 6:
Invisibilities**

Thursday, 13 March

8:50-9:00 Announcements & Welcome (Dr. Mercy Cannon, Dean, CLASS)

9:00-10:00 Keynote: **Understanding Animals: What's Up with Animal Research Currently?**
John Hartigan

10:00-10:20 BREAK

*The conference splits into two concurrent conferences: one **Living with Horses**, the other **Living with Animals**. *Living with Horses* is in room AB, and *Living with Animals* is in room CD.*

Living with Horses (Room AB)

10:20-11:00 **Revealing Unseen Human-Horses Connections (moderator: Jeannette Vaught)**

Creating Meaningful Partnerships with Horses: The Unseen Disruptors and Obstacles of Connection
Ciara Bennett

The Invisible Herstory: Women, Horses, and the Divine Feminine Archetype
Arieahn Matamonasa-Bennett

Living with Animals (Room CD)

10:20-11:00 **Understanding Invertebrates (moderator: Preston Foerder)**

Who's Yer Daddy Longlegs? A Research Program on Perception and Learning in Harvesters (*Opiliones*)
Preston Foerder & Gabrielle Makonnen

Invisible Signals and Intuitive Interspecies Communication
Megan Tucker & Stephen Smith

11:00-11:20 BREAK

Living with Horses (Room AB)

11:20-12:20 **Making Horses Visible in Catastrophe, Recovery, and Memory (moderator: Jeannette Vaught)**

Rebuilt Homes, Empty Barns: How the Marshall Fire Impacts Equine Care in Boulder County, Colorado
Tamar McKee

The Human Story Has Dominated: Including More-than-human Narratives in Industrial Heritage
Hannah Ellis

From Moor to Market: Challenging Anthropocentric Narratives at a British Pony Sale
Lucy Horswill

Living with Animals (Room CD)

11:20-12:20 Intersubjectivities (moderator: Robert W. Mitchell)

Shared Worlds, Different Perceptions: The Potentials of High Tech Explorations of Non-human Animal Worlds

Jane Desmond & Christopher Lueg

The Invisible, Ancient Mind meets Modern Science: Using the ‘Metaphoric’ Mind for Exploring Animal-Human Relationships

Aricahn Matamonasa Bennett

Becoming with Wolf/dogs: Intersubjectivity across Ontologies and Sensoriums

August D. Hoffman

12:20-2:00 LUNCH (provided in hallway next to room AB)

Living with Horses (Room AB)

2:00-3:20 Visualizing and Theorizing Human-Equine Worlds (moderator: Jeannette Vaught)

Beyond the Visible: Horse-Human Imaginings

Carole Baker

Towards a Creative Ethology: Making Horses’ Lives Visible on the Page

Abby Letteri

Teaching the Horse: Arts-Enhanced Curriculum

Marie Suthers

Living with Animals (Room CD)

2:00-3:20 Agency and Self-Control (moderator: Ziba Rashidian)

Resistance: Thinking Animal Agency in the Anthropocene

Ziba Rashidian

Dog and the Doppelganger: Invisibility, metaphor and commodification

Jill Morstad

Training Does Not Uniformly Increase Canine Self-Control

Ellen Furlong, Rebecca Singer, Zach Silver, Riley Welch, Isabella Perry, Caitlyn Jones & Ahna Cates

Unleashing the Truth: Training a Long Stay Fails to Enhance Canine Self-Control

Rebecca Singer, Caitlyn Jones, Riley Welch, Isabella Perry, Zach Silver & Ellen Furlong

3:20-3:40 BREAK

3:40-4:40 Keynote: Avian Cognition—from Invisibility to Center Stage

Irene M. Pepperberg

6:00-8:00 Icebreaker at Paddy Wagon Irish Pub (150 E Main St)

Friday, 14 March

9:00-10:00 Keynote: **Terra Sancta: Pet Cemeteries and Animal Memorials**
Paul Koudounaris

10:00-10:20 BREAK

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Living with Horses (Room AB)

10:20-11:40 **Relationality, Equine Behavior, and Equine Assisted Services (moderator: Jeannette Vaught)**

Incorporating Equine Choice, Consent, Communication, and Agency into Equine-Assisted Services and Therapeutic Riding Programs: Preliminary Concepts in Practice

Emily Kieson, Anna Nolan, Helen Sabolek-Consiglio & Laura Ryan

The Impact of an Interpersonal Neurobiology Play Therapy Based Curriculum with Horses with Veteran and First Responders and Grieving Families

Kate Nicoll

The Development and Application of a Hierarchical Model of Decision-Making When Interacting with Horses

Jessie Sams

Living with Art & Animals (Room CD)

10:20-11:40 **Animal Presences (moderator: Shannon Johnstone)**

Roadside Zoo: Captive Glow

Shannon Johnstone

Honoring the Nearly Extinct: Animal Presence and Persistence in August Gaul's Wisent Sculptures at the Kunsthalle in Kiel, Germany

Kathleen Chapman

Bodying Forth, Poems About Other Animals

Kathryn Kirkpatrick

Redefining National Identity in Great Britain through the Representation of Non-Human Animals in Underground Experimental Short Films

Esther Igual Lafuente

11:40-1:00 **LUNCH** (*available at Stratton across from Perkins*)

Living with Horses (Room AB)

1:00-2:00 **The Invisibilities of Age and Disability (moderator: Jeannette Vaught)**

Ableism and Equines 'Good to Mistreat' in Eighteenth-Century England

Monica Mattfeld

Growing Old Together: Equine-Enhanced Wellness in Later Life

Stephen Smith & Megan Tucker

Invisible Intimacies: Fear and Philosophy in Unbridled Conversations

Angela Hofstetter

*Living with Art & Animals (Room CD)***1:00-2:00** **Animals in History (moderator: Tom Aiello)****The Pig in Pornocrates**

Thomas Aiello

Hard Work, Hidden History: A Photographic and Historical Journey of Working Animals in the White Mountains

Clarissa M. Palmer

"Where Sleeping Dogs Lie": Dr. Eugene C. Jones and The Los Angeles Pet Memorial Park

Julia Schlosser

2:00-2:20 BREAK*Living with Horses (Room AB)***2:20-3:20** **Invisibilities: A LwH Gathering and Roundtable on zoom (moderators: Jeannette Vaught & Gala Argent)***Living with Art & Animals (Room CD)***2:20-3:20** **Living with Bugs (moderator: Shannon Johnstone)****Spiders, Cockroaches, Ants, and Bees: A Critical Animal Studies Perspective on Insects & Arachnids in Contemporary Art**

Shannon Johnstone

The Sacred Underground: Earthworms, Belonging, and the American Mythos

Lauren Ruiz

Crossing the Abyss: Considering the Insect in Contemporary Human Artistic Relationships

Julia Clark

3:20-3:40 BREAK**3:40-4:40** **Keynote: Animal Sentience – A Key Invisibility!**

Andrew Rowan

5:00-7:30 **Dinner in Berea (Optional)**

Saturday, 15 March

9:00-10:00 Keynote: **Liminal Worlds: The Secret Lives of Urban Coyotes and Hidden Structures of Oppression**

Shelley M. Alexander

10:00-10:20 BREAK

*The conference splits into two concurrent sessions of **Living with Animals**, one in room AB, the other in room CD.*

Living with Animals (Room AB)

10:20-11:40 **Humans Learning with and through Animals (moderator: Melissa Burns-Cusato)**

Hanging with Humans: Evaluating Welfare in Sloth Ambassadors

Melissa Burns-Cusato et al.

Using Contemplative Practices to Help Students Connect to Animals

Dave Aftandilian

Enhancing Education and Engagement with Animals in the Classroom

Maximus Moberly & William Thornburgh

Experimental Animals as Affect's First Lesson in Writing Classrooms

Heather Palmer

Living with Animals (Room CD)

10:20-11:40 **Co-existence (moderator: Radhika Makecha)**

Covert cats: The (Very Modern) Appearance of *Felis catus* in Sauraha, Nepal

Michelle Szydlowski, Kris Hill & Sarah Oxley Heaney

Invisible Thoughts and Concrete Experiences: Differing Perspectives on Coyote Encounters among Public, Hunting, and Agricultural Samples

Kristina M. Slagle, Rachel Henry & Jeremy T. Bruskotter

Nuisance and Invasive Species: Probing Human-Animal Conflicts in an Undergraduate Classroom

Boguslaw Gatarek & Andrew Domzalski

Variation in Traditions: Consequences for the Conservation of Endangered Lemurs in Northern Madagascar

Benjamin Z. Freed

11:40-12:00 BREAK

Living with Animals (Room AB)

12:00-1:00 Care and Animals (moderator: Rita Bouwens)

Saving Companion Animals, Reconstituting the Multispecies Family, and the Neoliberalization of Care in American Animal Sheltering

Rita Bouwens

“I Told Y’all- White Women Ain’t Scared of St”: The Emotional Importance of Gendered Work Culture and Feminist Practices in Animal Sheltering**

Tami Harbolt

‘Joy is an Ethical Obligation’: Invisible Labor in Veterinary Medicine

Katharine Mershon

Living with Animals (Room CD)

12:00-1:00 Defining Co-existence: A Panel

Radhika N. Makecha, Kristina Slagle, Yoshie Nakai & Shelly Alexander

1:00-2:20 Lunch and Posters

POSTERS:

Barking Up the Wrong Tree: Construct Validity of Canine Self-Control Methodologies

Zach Silver, Rebecca Singer, Nataly Barrera, Taegan Berkshire, Tully Daire, Jasmine Grooms, Nyx Nichols, Mataiya Reese, Chandon Thomson, Yasmin Velasco-Allaney, Danielle Levin & Ellen Furlong

Human Attitudes Toward the Use of Non-Human Animals in Research, for Consumption, and as Pets

Ranell Mueller

From Fear to Fascination: Using Environmental Education to Transform Perceptions of Misunderstood Wildlife

Kelly Watson & Destiny Cornett

Art for Animal Conservation: Challenging Social Constructions of Animals

Ashlyn Osborn

Living with Animals (Room AB)

2:20-3:20 Diversities (moderator: Benjamin Freed)

13 Ways of Looking at a Cat

Laura Wright

The More-than-human City: Recognizing our Fellow Urbanites through Multi-species Urban Planning and Design

Connie Johnston

Siamangs (*Symphalangus syndactylus*) Modify Travel Behavior in Response to Playback Experiments of Anthropogenic Sound Events

Justin D’Agostino, Dena J. Clink, Abdullah Abdullah & Stephanie Spehar

Living with Animals (Room CD)

2:20-3:20 **Wild, Captive, Feral, Stray (moderator: Jeanne Dubino)**

Rodents of Unusual Size: Nutria, Consumerism, and Animal Agency in the Cultural and Ecological Transformation of Wetlands in Louisiana and the United States

Brett Mizelle

Going Feral as an Evolutionary Adaptation to Novel Ecosystems: Hogs and Horses

Mary Trachsel

The Global Presence of Stray Dogs in Twentieth-Century Short Stories

Jeanne Dubino

3:20-3:40 **BREAK**

Living with Animals (Room AB)

3:40-4:40 *Workshop* on **The Invisible Side of Animal Law: From Theory to Practice**

Debra Hamilton & Bee Friedlander

Living with Animals (Room CD)

3:40-4:00 **Death and Memory (moderator: Michał Piotr Pręgowski)**

The Deaths of Dogs

Karla Armbruster

Who Rests Here? Invisibility and Inclusion at Pet Cemeteries

Michał Piotr Pręgowski

6:00-9:00 Conference **dinner** at Masala Indian Restaurant

ABSTRACTS

Using Contemplative Practices to Help Students Connect to Animals

Dave Aftandilian, Anthropology, Human-Animal Relationships Program, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX, d.aftandilian@tcu.edu

In this presentation I will discuss how I use contemplative practices inside and outside of the classroom to help students feel our often invisible bonds to animals more strongly. I will begin by explaining some of the pedagogical and personal benefits of contemplative practices involving animals for undergraduates. I will then introduce philosopher Matthew Calarco's helpful categorization of different paths that can be used to help people come closer to animals—same, other, and indistinct—and discuss practices that fit within each of these categories. For example, I will discuss various breath practices, including Thich Nhat Hanh's meditative gatha, as ways to connect to animals through our shared creaturely habit of breathing. I will also cover a number of other indoor contemplative practices I use, from Three World circle breathing to the So Hum meditation to gesture drawing to Loving-Kindness (*Mettā*) for animals. But I also ask my students to engage contemplatively with animals outside of class, and I will share quotes from some of their written reflections based on these outdoor meditations to show you what they learn from them. And I will end by sharing some best practices and lessons I have learned from teaching these practices in a secular context for more than a decade. And yes, we will try out at least one animal-focused contemplative practice together during my talk.

The Pig in Pornocrates

Thomas Aiello, History, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA, taiello@valdosta.edu

Pornocrates (1878) is the most influential work of Belgian artist Félicien Rops. Featuring a naked woman with a blindfold walking behind a tethered pig on a marble floor, as angels fly away, the work caused controversy on its first appearance. It has been interpreted by critics and art historians as representing various possibilities. Perhaps the pig is representative of men leading along women, perhaps the pig is a stand-in for luxury and sloth. For Bram Dijkstra, the woman “was the human animal viciously depicted by Félicien Rops as ‘Pornocrates’ ruler of Proudhon's ‘Pornocracy,’ a creature blindly guided by a hog, the symbol of Circe, the bestial representative of all sexual evil.” While the evolution of how critics and scholars have interpreted the relationship between woman and pig is important, what none of them acknowledge is the existing status of the human relationship with pigs at the turn of the century, or the phenomenon of blind pig races that mirrored the action taken in the painting. Nor do they mention that the common appellation “blind pig” was used to describe bars and pubs at the same time. This presentation will describe the history and criticism of *Pornocrates* in relation to interpretations of human-animal difference and compare the work to the largely unknown story of blind pig races and blind pigs, themselves--like the finery presented in Rops's painting--arbiters of social standing in fin-de-siecle United States and Europe.

Liminal Worlds: The Secret Lives of Urban Coyotes and Hidden Structures of Oppression

Shelley M. Alexander, Geography, University of Calgary, Alberta, CANADA smalexan@ucalgary.ca

As a keystone species important to ecological resilience and biodiversity yet designated a ‘pest’, coyotes are an excellent entry point to understand the hidden mechanisms that entrain human actions towards many wild animals. I will share a journey of discovery, tracing my entanglements with three urban coyote families surviving in an urban-to-rural habitat gradient near Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Using ground tracking, opportunistic interactions, and continuous sampling with remote cameras (2020-present), I learned about the coyote families’ secret lives: their behaviours, adaptive processes, social intelligence and lived experiences – their *telos*. To provide a window into the oppression experienced by these coyotes, I touch on select local management actions and their negative consequences, and present societal drivers of coexistence or killing identified through interviews with regional landowners (2015-2018). The latter expose worldviews and discourses that bolster group solidarity and entrain violence towards coyotes (and other ‘political’ animals). The previous inquiries led me also to explore the nexus of animal ethics, laws and human behaviours and its relationship to the persecution of coyotes. By exposing the contradictions inherent between what we know about coyotes’ lived experience versus the lack of moral consideration given to them, I reveal the mostly hidden colonial structures that lead to wildlife oppression. I argue that contesting these ideologies is one path to restore proper relationships with more-than-human worlds.

The Deaths of Dogs

Karla Armbruster, English, Webster University, Webster Groves, MO, armbruka@webster.edu

With lifespans far shorter than our own, dogs confront us with the reality of death in ways that few other species do, especially in today’s United States, where we have insulated ourselves from the deaths of both our human loved ones and animals raised for food. You might say we’ve made death largely invisible, with our companion dogs remaining an important exception to this trend. Even before we pushed death into the corners of life, dogs were often associated with death, despised for eating corpses but also treasured as guides into the afterlife. In this presentation, I will explore the death of dogs as represented in literary and cultural narratives, asking how they challenge a humanist sense of control over nature by confronting humans with the limits of our power over not just other animals but also our own bodies and lives.

In mainstream U.S. culture today, it’s common for humans to manage and control the deaths of dogs, whether they are beloved companions whose humans agonize over the right time and way to euthanize them or some of the 1.5 million dogs killed in shelters annually. Many narratives similarly control and even exploit the deaths of dogs, sacrificing them to achieve authenticity or meaning without killing off a human character, but others present the death of a dog as an opportunity to learn about and reconcile oneself to death. I will focus on analyzing examples of this second type of narrative, including George Pitcher’s *The Dogs Who Came to Stay* (1995) and Mark Doty’s *Dog Years* (2007), exploring the ways these accounts allow dogs to lead us into that ambiguous, liminal space between life and death and encourage us to explore that territory psychologically, emotionally, and metaphysically.

Conceptually, dogs are border creatures, often viewed as mediating between humans and other animals as well as between life and death. As Colin Dayan asserts in *With Dogs on the Edge of Life*, dogs are a “bridge that joins persons to things, life to death, both in our nightmares and in our daily lives.” In other words, dogs wed us to the world in its radical interrelatedness, including the ways that makes us profoundly vulnerable and, in the end, mortal. As I will argue and demonstrate with literary examples, providing us with the opportunity to reconcile ourselves to the ultimate limitation of death is yet another gift our canine companions offer us.

Beyond the Visible: Horse-Human Imaginings

Carole Baker, Photography, University of Plymouth, UK, carole.baker@plymouth.ac.uk

What if the time spent with our horses was not considered ‘training’, in the sense of the imparting of pre-existing knowledge and skills dictated by the rational intentions of the ‘superior’ human trainer, but instead, viewed through a posthumanist interdisciplinary lens, was a time of mutual becoming, a learning together and through one another, a merging in entangled intra-active experience? This speculative paper, through the medium of experimental photography and writing that draws on philosophy, the arts, the sciences and the humanities, proposes a re-imagining of the horse-human encounter. It seeks to break down anthropocentric positionings and to foreground the correspondences and differences that are revealed and the connections that are forged, through practices of attentiveness and attunement from which empathy and sympathy emerge.

Narratives of lived experience are intertwined with learning theory and theories of consciousness, affect and materiality to avoid reductionist common-sense accounts of horse-human relations and to allow alternative ways of knowing to evolve. Paying close attention to the detail of the non-rational, intuitive, evanescent, nuanced, in the form of enigmatic gestures, movements, play, energies, feelings, seeks to avoid pre-conceived essentialist categorisations and to instead open up the dynamic potentialities of such interspecies encounters to encourage more complex, ethical and non-violent approaches towards living with horses.

Creating Meaningful Partnerships with Horses: The unseen disruptors and obstacles of connection

Ciara Bennett, The Horse Immersion Experience, and Empress Farm, Kinosh, WI,
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The major obstacles and disruptors to connection in horse-human relationships may be best described by the Buddhist philosophical concept of ‘near enemies.’ It is believed that there are near enemies of our emotions – those that look and seem like the desired emotions and virtues necessary for connection, but in fact diminish them. The desired emotions and their accompanying skills in horse-human relationships may at times seem subtle and, as a result, often go unnoticed. In the professional horse world, near enemies and true emotions and virtues themselves are treated the same, making it much more challenging to recognize and change the thoughts and behaviors that disrupt connection with our horses. As an example, a significant revelation in my training journey has been recognizing that the near enemy of connection is control, which has been largely idealized and rewarded in traditional horse training methodologies. There is wide-spread use and promotion of training techniques that rely on high levels of control to force compliance of the horse, effectively disrupting and potentially destroying partnership through connection and presence – arguably the most powerful and necessary component of effective training. Through intentional effort, we are able to recognize these silent, unseen disruptors of connection and create meaningful, harmonious partnerships with our horses. The goal of this presentation is to illuminate a pathway for bringing our most mindful and enlightened selves into the arena and into our relationship with horses.

Saving Companion Animals, Reconstituting the Multispecies Family, and the Neoliberalization of Care in American Animal Sheltering

Rita Bouwens, Anthropology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, IL bouwens2@illinois.edu

Contemporary animal sheltering in the U.S. results from post-Civil War multispecies surveillance, where animal controls and well-to-do humanitarians policed stray animals, impoverished pet owners, and pet owners of color. A burgeoning white middle class concerned with the humane treatment of companion animals amidst a backdrop of increasing wealth inequalities and urbanization wanted to “save” stray animals and the animals of the poor from destitution, which led to the creation of animal shelters and humane societies. How might this legacy of classist and racist policing and increasing wealth inequalities continue to shape multispecies families today? My dissertation research proposes to explore the entanglements of an American animal shelter as it operates at the junction of human-animal sociopolitical worlds, the politics of care, and the fates of human and animal lives. The mainstream model of care in animal shelters today separates multispecies families at shelters, often due to housing instability or financial hardship. I ask why actors in the private and public sectors invest time and energy policing other people’s relationships with pets; what is at stake in managing those relationships? Do these actors view their work as policing multispecies relationships and families? In what ways has the management of multispecies families been central to the reproduction of inequalities in care work? Does the animal shelter become a site where the lives of neglected multispecies families, struggling shelter workers, and the state intersect to reconstitute the American multispecies family, perhaps as an act of care?

Hanging with Humans: Evaluating Welfare in Sloth Ambassadors

Melissa Burns-Cusato, Psychology, Centre College, Danville, KY, m.cusato@centre.edu

Arabella Fowler, Psychology, Centre College, Danville, KY, arabella.fowler@centre.edu

Brent White, Psychology, Centre College, Danville, KY, Brent.white@centre.edu

Steve Taylor, Louisville Zoo, Louisville, KY, Steven.Taylor@louisvilleky.gov

Over 75% of zoos worldwide provide opportunities for visitors to engage in one-on-one interactions with animals, often referred to as Animal Ambassadors. These interactions are believed to foster a sense of connection with the species and may inspire conservation efforts. However, human-animal interactions (HAIs) can potentially cause stress to the animals, compromising their physical and psychological well-being. Alternatively, some HAIs may serve as enrichment, improving the animals' quality of life. The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums recommends regular evaluation of HAIs for both positive and negative effects but does not provide a standardized assessment framework. In the present study, we take a multifaceted approach to evaluate the impact of HAIs on two Linnaeus’s sloths (*Choloepus didactylus*) participating in the “Sloth Experience” at the Louisville Zoo. During these sessions, visitors spend 10-15 minutes inside the sloth habitat, where they may gently pet a sloth as it is hand-fed by a familiar trainer. Cameras recorded randomly selected Sloth Experiences and control feeding sessions over several months to assess whether visitor presence influenced feeding latency or duration. We also measured activity level, the proportion of time the sloths spent on branches associated with HAIs, and salivary cortisol levels as indicators of stress. Results indicate that the overall impact of the Sloth Experience was largely neutral, but some behavioral cues suggest that HAIs may be a positive experience for the sloths.

Honoring the Nearly Extinct: Animal Presence and Persistence in August Gaul's Wisent Sculptures at the Kunsthalle in Kiel, Germany

Kathleen Chapman, Art History, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA,
kchapman4@vcu.edu

My paper considers what artworks from the past that depict species on the brink of extinction might contribute to contemporary discussions of the alarming decline in levels of biodiversity. I focus on late 19th- and early 20th-century German depictions of the European bison (Wisent), a species made nearly extinct in the wild in Central Europe at the close of World War I. Surviving primarily in zoos, Wisents already had, for the most part, vanished from German forests by the time that WWI began. Despite—or perhaps because of—its dwindling numbers, this species became a popular subject for German artists from Germany's unification as a modern nation-state in 1871 through World War II. Many of these depictions can be understood as part of a wider movement celebrating (and even attempting to recover or reintroduce) Germany's lost world of "primeval nature," and as implicit support for efforts to protect the land and wildlife that inhabited it. While this interest in protection of the natural environment indicated a level of ecological awareness, it also served nationalist purposes. Most of these works adhered to standards of academic realism and highlighted features that underscored the bison's massiveness and strength, transforming it into a clearly legible allegory for the German nation and people. However, these same representations of the Wisent can be understood as more than symbols, as more than ammunition in ideological battles among European nations during this period. By examining the two sculptures of Wisent that the artist August Gaul created to frame the entrance to the Kunsthalle zu Kiel, the art museum in the northern German city of Kiel, I argue that with these representations of Wisents, which avoid the typical nationalist symbolism that most of his contemporaries used, Gaul conveys his encounters with live models, which he observed most probably at Berlin's Tiergarten, in a way that opens an intersubjective space that invites viewers to discover the traces of the artist-Wisent encounter and to find "tracks" that honor the presence of the once-living animal. Additionally, I will demonstrate that, through his choice of shell-bearing limestone as medium to sculpt these artworks, Gaul not only memorializes the Wisents he observed, but also offers some optimism that these vanishing animals, rendered invisible in the wild, can continue to survive—not merely as sculptures, but as visibly thriving wildlife.

Crossing the Abyss: Considering the Insect in Contemporary Human Artistic Relationships

Julia Clark, Art History, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, clarkjk5@vcu.edu

Within human society, insects are treated as disposable nuisances, unworthy of empathy and respect; I contend that this understanding and treatment not only influences the attitudes regarding insects within art but facilitates their mistreatment and exploitation. Human animals ground their understanding of nonhuman animals around their humanity, and an animal's relationship and similarities to humanity; this has favored mammals at the expense of other animals namely invertebrates. Human disinterest and aversion have pushed a narrative of insects as mindless and invasive mechanical beings. Given these misconceptions it is not surprising that in terms of art, insects are primarily represented by the materials they make: beeswax and silk, or by the mediums they can be turned into: cochineal dye and shellac. The insect's true form is often hidden through physical manipulation or sanitized through human representation. Their natural appearance is rarely included in art, and is often used to serve the human artist's narrative. Focusing solely on art that uses insects, this paper intends to explore their possible roles in human and insect artistic relationships. The artist may ignore the insect's needs and objectify and exploit them; alternatively, the artist may unsuccessfully attempt a fair and compassionate relationship. On the other, hand, the artist may strive for this style of partnership, and succeed. Through the examination of the different methodologies and practices of multiple artists, this paper considers the possibilities of working in partnership with significant communication barriers. I draw on examples of insect art to problematize some manners of insect inclusion in art, and question why insect cruelty is so accepted by many humans. Finally, this paper considers if an insect can ever be an artist, or if the work

merely reflects human manipulation. Humans have not made a significant effort to usurp the inherent power imbalances that come from working with insects, nor has there been sustained contemplation on the insect's othered status in art. As a result, much of insect art is at their expense.

Siamangs (*Symphalangus syndactylus*) Modify Travel Behavior in Response to Playback Experiments of Anthropogenic Sound Events

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Anthropogenic noise is a pervasive byproduct of human activity that increasingly impacts wildlife behavior and ecology. This study examines the travel behavior of wild siamang (*Symphalangus syndactylus*) in response to playback experiments simulating the anthropogenic noises of a jackhammer, traffic, music, and a natural sound control of cicada calls. Over the course of 12 months, seven siamang groups from four field sites in northern Sumatra were studied using GPS-tracked movement patterns pre- and post-playback experiments. We found that siamangs traveled substantially farther following anthropogenic noise playbacks compared to baseline conditions, with the strongest responses to traffic and jackhammer stimuli. Although no significant group level differences between playback types were observed, there was anecdotal evidence with one group that separated in response to noise events suggests that anthropogenic noise has the potential to disrupt pair bonds and influence home range usage, with potential fitness consequences. This research underscores the need for further investigation into the ecological impacts of anthropogenic noise and its implications for wildlife conservation.

Shared Worlds, Different Perceptions: The Potentials of High Tech Explorations of Non-human Animal Worlds

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Researchers in human-animal studies are well aware that non-human animals may experience our shared world in radically different ways than humans do. Beyond the complexities of human interpretations of experiences shaped by diverse social histories and cultural frameworks, our sensory apparatus at times overlaps with and at times diverges dramatically, even incomprehensibly, from that of non-human animals. Ever since key work by Jakob von Uexküll on animal's "umwelt," and Thomas Nigel's publication "What is it like to be a bat?" this question has both driven a portion of research and confronted us with the limits of our knowing. Popular works like Ed Yong's *Immense World* (2022) and Alexandra Horowitz's *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know* (2010) have brought these issues to a wider public.

In this talk we take up some of these questions of knowability and interpretation with an eye to articulating the intersections and divergences of human and non-human sensoriums. We ask: how can high tech renderings of these differences potentially help human interlocutors cultivate not only a greater understanding of how our shared world is shared differently across species, but also ask if such technical renderings—or translations—can help us cultivate empathy that could drive both ethical concerns and practical ones, like multi-species urban design.

Specifically we will examine recent games and VR productions, drawing on theories of computer-interaction design and robotics, especially those that focus on non-human animal's visuality, from simple catcams to more sophisticated concepts like Lueg's proposal of "viewsonas" (2023). The latter doesn't pretend to present what a non-human animal actually sees, but rather what he/she might be seeing when mapped onto human visual capabilities. That is, we approach the concept of translation across species

sensoriums. This becomes most dramatic when we approach senses, like echolocation or geolocation that humans do not possess.

The Global Presence of Stray Dogs in Twentieth-Century Short Stories

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The modern fabulous short story, with its tight, tripartite structure of introductory sketch, action, and concluding comment (Korhonen 4), can serve as the latest incarnation of the genre of the fable, or what Sheila Roberts calls the “grim contemporary animal fable” (74). It is grounded in realism, offers an “indeterminate” moral (Danta 17), and invites readers to consider the animals’ perspectives. Stray dogs play an especially relevant role in this genre. By definition, strays of any kind do not inhabit any one place or position. Along the canine scale, they fall somewhere between the domestic and the wild. More than any other kind of dog, the stray is a “stateless refugee, tolerated and occasionally pitied as a hanger-on, but never properly assimilated or accepted” (Serpell 254). The moral of classical fables leans to “might makes right.” In contemporary animal fables by global writers such as the Indian R. K. Narayan, Pakistani Saadat Hasan Manto, Iranian Sadegh Hedayat, and Turkish Orhan Pamuk, the visibility of stray dogs tends to evoke readerly sympathy—but not only that. In a world where, now, more than 280 million people live in countries outside of their birth (World Migration Report), these stories suggest how both stray dogs and displaced people represent threats to social orders premised on the notion of status and stasis.

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The Human Story Has Dominated: Including More-Than-Human Narratives in Industrial Heritage

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Although UK heritage sites often aim to include the nonhuman in their narrative, the extent of their agency has been minimised. Nonhumans such as horses and canaries worked alongside humans in dangerous conditions and there are accounts of abuse, with many living and dying in unnatural circumstances. However, the human story has dominated; nonhumans have remained voiceless and their accounts largely invisible from the stories of heritage.

In 1912, Norton Colliery in Stoke-on-Trent experienced one of the largest explosions of the time. The explosion has not been classified as a ‘disaster’; one man was killed, and a further 2 injured. However, if all 500 of the men employed underground at this mine had been working, it would have been classed as such. The acknowledged emphasis on this incident remains centred on the relief that the men’s lives were spared, not on the 50 horses in the mine who were killed in the incident, and documentation covering the event is minimal as a result.

Chatterley Whitfield Colliery in Stoke-on-Trent suffered a major explosion in 1881, which killed 24 men and boys, and 4 of the 12 horses who were living and working in the mine. Archival documentation and cultural memories of the disaster focus on the heroic efforts of some men, and the negligence of others,

who were criticised for putting the horses' lives before those of the men. It is now a heritage site, one of the most complete former colliery sites in Europe and is being naturally rewilded; the more-than-human (human and nonhuman) story here spans the past and present, with the future still in question. Investigating how more-than-human relationships are remembered and memorialised in industrial heritage, and highlighting hidden narratives, are integral to fostering a future where humans value nonhumans. Continuing research into nonhuman welfare highlights outdated accounts in heritage of what is often still viewed as excellent care. Industrial heritage is fraught with trauma, involving both humans and nonhumans, and it is essential moving forward that the triumph as well as the trauma is presented. Conversations regarding whether the equestrian element should be included in the Olympic triathlon provide an example of the growing concern for domesticated nonhuman welfare. Discussions involving the environment and human's impact on it are at the fore. This conference will provide the opportunity to discuss overlooked agents of the past and inclusion for the future.

Who's Yer Daddy Longlegs? A Research Program on Perception and Learning in Harvesters (*Opilionidae*)

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People are very familiar with spiders but there is another arachnid order that is virtually invisible despite their common familiarity: harvesters (*Opilionidae*) a.k.a. daddy longlegs. Most people assume that they are spiders. Despite their similarity, harvesters, which comprise more than 6500 species, have many differences from spiders in their behavior and anatomy. Harvesters are more closely related to mites, ticks, and scorpions. There is a broad range of research on spider cognition. Spiders have been found capable of spatial and associative learning, planning, and counting. However, little research has been conducted on harvesters' cognition and visual perception. Harvesters have two eyes, and it is believed that they distinguish light from dark although the extent of their vision is unknown. Harvesters are autotomous, releasing their legs under pressure. After they lose a leg, they go through a short period of learning to walk on the remaining legs. They have also been shown capable of chemosensory associative learning, associating a scent with a goal. To expand on our knowledge of harvesters, we have started a project examining learning and perception in the opilionid species, *Phalangium opilio*. We have determined that unlike most harvester species, *P. opilio* is not negative phototactic (afraid of light). We are currently using a T-maze to investigate their capabilities for spatial learning. We will also investigate their visual perception by examining their abilities to associate various visual and physical stimuli to a goal in one arm of the maze. Through our research, we hope to bring attention to these overlooked species.

Variation in Traditions: Consequences for the Conservation of Endangered Lemurs in Northern Madagascar

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In northern Madagascar, people have diverse perspectives and traditions about the local forests, especially regarding the crowned lemurs (*Eulemur coronatus*) and Sanford's lemurs (*Eulemur sanfordi*) that inhabit them. Forests vary as to their histories, use, and accessibility. While local Atankarana and Sakalava *fady* (traditions) about the lemurs may help protect lemurs, people in the region do not belong to just these two ethnic groups. In this paper, I review two case studies in which changes in the human response and traditions about lemurs have led to different conservation outcomes. In Analabe, neighboring small villages of rice farmers held strong Atankarana traditions, although several households maintained nonlocal ethnic traditions. From 2004 through 2017, forest cover remained fairly unchanged,

except for neighboring tobacco and farm fields. Upon return in 2023, the region experienced drought, tobacco was much less of a common cash crop, forest cover dropped significantly, and lemurs were much less common. In 2004, I surveyed lemurs in Befotaka, a mostly Atankarana/Sakalava town of about 1500 people (in 2024). While crowned lemurs and Sanford's lemurs were common, I did locate one lemur trap used by a non-Atankarana villager. Over the next ten years, the lone lemur trap was removed, its owner left town, and a local villager-based environmental protection group formed. In 2024, healthy populations of crowned lemurs and Sanford's lemurs were found within a 5 km radius of the town. While Atankarana and Sakalava traditions are important potential indicators of where lemur groups live, changes in recent history, shifting populations, and the migration of people throughout Madagascar may play an even greater role in indicating conservation threats to these rare and endangered primates.

Training Does Not Uniformly Increase Canine Self-Control

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Dog trainers often claim that training dogs to improve self-control will solve behavior problems (i.e., Gibeault, 2020). We investigated whether one aspect of self-control, motor inhibition, covaries in dogs with varying levels and contexts of formal training. We tested pet dogs with little formal training and dogs with high levels of training competing in scent work, barn hunt, and agility. All dogs were tested for motor inhibition on the cylinder task, a validated self-control task (Olsen, 2022). During training trials dogs watched a piece of food placed inside an opaque cylinder before being allowed to retrieve it. During test trials a transparent cylinder replaced the opaque one, requiring dogs to inhibit directly approaching the now visible food instead of immediately detouring to an open side. In contrast to the belief that highly trained dogs would uniformly demonstrate better self-control, trained dogs did not perform better compared to untrained dogs. In fact, dogs who competed in barn hunt performed significantly worse compared to untrained pet dogs. These findings suggest that self-control may involve a complex set of mental processes that does not uniformly generalize to multiple contexts.

Nuisance and Invasive Species: Probing Human-Animal Conflicts in an Undergraduate Classroom

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Presenters will discuss how a 2023 extension of the Michigan-DNR list of nuisance species to include beavers, rabbits, squirrels, muskrats, opossums, and weasels in addition to woodchucks, skunks, raccoons, and coyotes has provided a fertile ground for teaching a course titled Human-Animal Conflicts. The course is required for Animal Studies majors at Madonna University. Nuisance animals “doing damage or physically present where it could imminently cause damage” on private property can be killed without permit. This legal standing or lack thereof mirrors the treatment of non-native species deemed invasive, yet all the species listed by the DNR as nuisance are native. This parallel begs a question what various rhetorical tools are employed in calls to kill different species, and ultimately leads to probing the validity of claims used for that purpose. While one cannot use the term *invasive* in reference to Michigan opossums or raccoons, the term *nuisance* implicitly applies invasion. Analyzing motivational factors behind extending a list of nuisance species also provides an important focal point for course discussions.

Identifying the reasons for such actions, be they economic, cultural or emotional and exploring how they are framed in narratives help students formulate solutions to human-animal conflicts. Presenters will provide a set of exploratory questions probing the nature of human-animal conflicts that may prove useful in addressing such topics with college students.

The Invisible Side of Animal Law: From Theory to Practice

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When California's native tule elk started dying of thirst behind ranch fencing, and federal agencies proposed the culling of half a million barred owls to save the spotted owl, who was truly being protected? Join us as we pull back the curtain on what animal laws facilitate and their hidden consequences. Through real-world case studies, we'll explore the surprising gaps between legal theory, legislation, and practice—where well-intentioned laws create unexpected victims. Whether you're navigating nuisance animal complaints or advising clients on how to help a species survive, this interactive session offers practical strategies for balancing competing interests while avoiding the pitfalls that occur when laws designed to protect animals become the very source of their harm.

“I Told Y’all- White Women Ain’t Scared of St”: The Emotional Importance of Gendered Work Culture and Feminist Practices in Animal Sheltering**

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There is a viral comic (#BestFetchDog Jay Love) who posts Instagram and TikTok videos of white women rescuing animals. While the videos are often humorous and also have a subliminal message about privilege, race, and gender, they also highlight the courage and commitment that animal rescuers display in their work with often fractious animals. This paper will address the folk culture and emotional labor of animal shelter and rescue work and the importance of feminist and feminized spaces for that labor. My goal is to acknowledge and honor women’s contributions to animal sheltering while acknowledging the need for a positive change in practices.

Understanding Animals: What’s Up with Animal Research Currently?

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This paper surveys and discusses current trends in research on social species. New insights are emerging regarding the crucial role that friendships play for many species. As natural scientists expand their evolutionary framework beyond a narrow focus on reproductive fitness, a wider gamut of social wellbeing and bonding come into view. Whether in lab-based research or field studies, nonhuman animals demonstrate far broader behavioral repertoires than previously realized. These behaviors feature quite nuanced forms of interactive skills and sensibilities. Their variety and expansiveness prompt wider inquiries than just a set of questions about what ‘they’ can reveal about ‘us’ (as humans). Sociality, broadly, is now being framed from different analytical perspectives, decentered from rote forms of anthropocentrism. After assessing these developments, my paper will focus on the important role of ritual in animal lives, which is receiving new attention in the wake of the profound development that natural scientists now openly refer to and research “animal cultures.”

Becoming with Wolf/dogs: Intersubjectivity across Ontologies and Sensoriums

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Often referred to as “hybrids” and framed as “part-wild” or “semi-wild,” wolfdogs are increasingly coveted as pets and companion animals across North America, Europe, Japan and elsewhere. However, prospective “owners” of these canids are largely ill-equipped to care for them, particularly when they exhibit unruly, fractious and indeed “wolfy” behaviors. For wolfdogs, this assertion of agency often comes at their own peril, as many are euthanized precisely because of their intractability and genetic makeup, which is read as dangerous by dog shelters and humane societies, and as a threat to the genetic “purity” of wild wolves by state conservation agencies. While most of these canids will be subjected to truncated lives or premature death, a lucky few find placement in specialized sanctuary facilities for wild-type canids. This project is based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork and nine years of working in sanctuary and rescue for captive-born canids (e.g., wolves, wolfdogs, dingoes, coyotes), and takes up the theme of “invisibilities” from two distinct angles.

First, it examines the messy and fluctuating ontologies of canids who exist in indeterminate or liminal spaces between, or outside of, domesticity and wildness—a colonial binary that often casts liminality as aberrant and eradicable. Through the biographies of canid residents in sanctuary, the project attempts to map a proliferation of more-than-human subjectivities and lifeworlds that take shape against the grain of Western taxonomic impositions and anthropocentric biopolitical control. Rather than working along the domestic-wild “spectrum,” it sketches out constellations of marginalized or invisibilized more-than-human subject positions and modes of living which are routinely occluded by nature-culture dichotomies. The second angle of invisibility analyzes the cultivation of relationality in the context of multispecies sanctuary, asking how intra and interspecific relations among canids and humans are made possible across radical difference and asymmetries of power. For humans, this entails an acute and nuanced understanding of the multimodal forms of communication that canids employ—vocal, olfactory, and embodied—and an attunement to lupine sensibilities that pushes against the boundaries of our sensorium. Put differently, such an attunement or “becoming with” makes legible more-than-human communicative functions that otherwise occur at an invisible, intangible or even extrasensory level. Inhabiting this embodied disposition serves an anti-anthropocentric function, displacing the human—if only briefly—as the locus of power and knowledge, inviting novel forms of multispecies relations and solidarities.

Invisible Intimacies: Fear and Philosophy in Unbridled Conversations

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Heroic forms of horsemanship that speak to my equestrian imagination echo dreams of earlier selves that somehow refuse to take the desired shape because earlier narratives of madness, a bolting mare, fear, and a tentative faith in classical dressage to restore harmonious trust have been sidelined by the weight of material reality—moral, mental, physical, and financial—we both must carry. Training and lessons were no longer an option even after our annual vet checkup revealed that wearing a bit might cause considerable discomfort to Eroika, whose status as an easy keeper requires some exercise. A new chapter of bitless riding in a fenceless arena begins.

This presentation contemplates the myriad ways unseen and unconsidered older mares seek a quiet language of dignity and interspecies intimacy (with Vicki Hearne and Stanley Cavell as faithful companions).

From Moor to Market: Challenging Anthropocentric Narratives at a British Pony Sale

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This presentation explores the ‘invisible’ aspects of rural Britain's new forest pony-drift sale, using eco-feminist and critical posthuman theory as an analytical framework while centring the equine. Additionally, this inquiry draws on excerpts from experimental film and soundscapes captured at a live drift sale and an online auction where ponies are sold for the lowest bid of £10 GBP. This study offers an interdisciplinary exploration of hidden facets of problematic human-equine power dynamics and encounters.

Pony drift sales represent liminal spaces where equines transition from living freely within family groups on open moorland to being rounded up and sold for conservation and economic purposes by owners known as ‘commoners.’ Traditional pony drift sale systems date back to the sixteenth century, rendering equine individuals as ‘disposable bodies’ as they transform from semi-wild to domesticated, echoing elements of colonial practices. Additionally, New Forest ponies symbolise British rural cultural heritage, reducing them from individual beings with agency to vulnerable symbolic artefacts.

In this heightened anthropocentric environment of human-equine entanglement, ponies become objects and performers, sold under the hammer for purposes such as riding, driving, breeding, or, in some instances, for slaughter, later sold as meat abroad. Employing practice research methodologies, such as deconstructing and reinterpreting audiovisual recordings, reveals invisible aspects of the auctions and highlights normalised exploitation practices through isolated sounds, visual cues, and disruptions of conventional perspectives. Equines serve as significant markers of human identity, and examining how specific cultural groups perceive individuals in the gendered performative environment of a drift sale enables visibility into critical ethical implications for equines' physical and psychological well-being. This addresses broader global concerns of commodification and exploitation for equines and other non-human animals in the auction environment.

The More-than-human City: Recognizing our Fellow Urbanites through Multi-species Urban Planning and Design

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This presentation reflects work-in-progress research on the ethics of multi-species urban planning and design (UPD). Recognized or not, we co-exist with a multitude of other species in our cities. In their 1995 *Environment and Planning D* article, “Transspecies Urban Theory”, Wolch, West, and Gaines effectively introduced their fellow geographers and other scholars to cities as multi-species spaces, calling for an urban theory that accounts for multiple forms of life, and arguing that even human social injustices would be better addressed by this more inclusive perspective. This publication initiated a flurry of scholarly activity that has endured since (e.g., Atkins’ 2012 book *Animal Cities* and Sheik, Foth, and Mitchell’s 2023 “From legislation to obligation” article in *Urban Governance*). As cities and their environs continue to expand worldwide in the 21st century, we find our human selves increasingly thrown together with all manner of nonhuman animals—mammal, avian, insect, wild, and domestic—and our experiences with these other creatures can range from the pleasure of hearing birdsong to the (for many) revulsion of seeing a brown rat skitter across the alley. Making visible the more-than-human in our cities introduces a more expansive ethics into UPD and can help us both foster spaces for desirable species (e.g., native wildlife habitat) and discourage negative encounters with those that are less so (e.g., reducing rat infestations). Importantly, these ethics do not imply a narrow focus on the local or placing human needs in the background. According to UN-Habitat’s *World Cities Report 2022*, urban natural areas play a major role in addressing the global biodiversity crisis and climate change while also providing physical and emotional benefits to humans. However, the benefits of multi-species UPD are not universally recognized, and this approach is often underutilized in the present day. The project that is the basis for

this presentation focuses on values-oriented societal factors (e.g., favoring “cute” animals, ingrained ideas about “nuisance” species, etc.) that may enable or constrain multi-species urban planning and design.

Roadside Zoo: Captive Glow

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My PhD thesis, *The Latent Image: Exposing Suffering and Developing Change* (2025), examines the question “why create and view photographs of animal cruelty?” I am particularly interested in situations where suffering is clearly visible, but we choose not to see it, or perhaps we frame the suffering through a different lens. Since roadside zoos are legally sanctioned, open to the public and they encourage visitors to take pictures, they can be a powerful tool to examine and perhaps reframe what it means to look at animal suffering. Roadside zoos are privately owned unaccredited menageries that typically charge an admission fee. They exist in every state in the USA, and they are legal. Through my photography, I hope to picture captive animals as individuals, and create photographs that empathetically call our attention to their boredom, frustration, and suffering. In this presentation, I will discuss the evolution of my photography project “Roadside Zoo: Captive Glow” which I created while working on the dissertation. Specifically, I will discuss the ethics of creating and looking at animal suffering from a Critical Animal Studies perspective, and use the photographs to discuss issues of power, representation, perception, and empathy. With this work, I hope to dismantle our anthropocentric lens and challenge our sense of entitlement in enslaving wild animals.

Spiders, Cockroaches, Ants, and Bees: A Critical Animal Studies Perspective on Insects & Arachnids in Contemporary Art

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Insects are a growing subject matter in contemporary art. From “insect art” to jewelry made from insects, and photography and installation that utilizes live insects and arachnids—these “more than human animals” (hereafter “animals”) are cultivated and at times exploited by contemporary artists. This article takes a closer look at six artworks by four contemporary artists who work with insects and spiders, and examines the art through a Critical Animal Studies (CAS) lens. Additionally, this article discusses three sets of CAS guidelines offering advice on the ethical consideration of animals in art. The purpose of this article is to consider the lives and interests of the animals in these artworks, and to also inspire ethical practices that can be employed by artists who work with any animal(s).

Incorporating Equine Choice, Consent, Communication, and Agency into Equine-Assisted Services and Therapeutic Riding Programs: Preliminary Concepts in Practice

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Equine-assisted services (EAS), especially those that include mounted work such as therapeutic riding and hippotherapy, often incorporate horses into programs in a way that aligns with tool use (Kieson & Abramson, 2016) or instrumentalization as defined by Fine (2019). Many current practices of therapeutic riding include exercises and interactions based in horsemanship and equitation that are focused on operant

conditioning, behavioral shaping, and negative reinforcement (Goodwin et al., 2009; McGreevy, 2007) which may contribute to some of the behavioral problems seen in horses within these programs (Johnson et al., 2017; Kaiser et al., 2006). To improve equine welfare and wellbeing in EAS, programs are applying existing research in comparative and trans-species psychology, interspecies relational theories, neurobiology and neuroscience, and diversity, equity, and inclusion to reimagine equine-human interactions through the lens of mutual wellbeing in alignment with One Welfare (Leconstant & Spitz, 2022; Tarazona et al., 2020). The authors propose restructuring human-horse interactions and activities that take place within these settings to deliberately prioritize and incorporate equine choice, consent, communication, and agency as outcomes for each session. Combining these activities with the practical application and best practices of modality-specific therapeutic interventions in a riding program provides an opportunity to improve well-being, safety and welfare for both human and equine partners and aligns with the projected outcomes of compassion and empathy as outlined in One Welfare. This same concept can also be used as part of unmounted programs to further emphasize the experiential components of EAS that focus on inclusion, perspective-taking, and mutual well-being. This talk will address both the theoretical underpinnings and provide practical examples of how to incorporate these outcomes into a mounted session.

“Bodging Forth”: Poems About Other Animals

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In J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, Elizabeth Costello makes a much-debated distinction between Rilke’s poem, “The Panther,” and Ted Hughes’ poems “The Jaguar” and “Second Glance at a Jaguar.” For Costello, “Hughes is writing against Rilke” (50) with “poetry that does not try to find an idea in the animal . . . but is instead the record of an engagement with him” (51). Even though Costello acknowledges that a poem always falls “within an entirely human economy,” she still finds Hughes’ “bodying forth” in his jaguar poems an important project because such poems give us the opportunity, if briefly, to imagine another animal’s *umwelt*. As a scholar and practicing poet, I have explored encounters with other, individual animals, and I’ve developed an animal poetics for reading and writing about them. In this talk/reading I present poems from my new poetry collection, *Creature* (Jacar Press, 2025) which explore human encounters with other animals. While poems, like dreams, have a mind of their own, often revealing what the speaker doesn’t know or understand, my intention in these poems has always been to body forth as my speakers witness to a human-animal encounter.

Terra Sancta: Pet Cemeteries and Animal Memorials

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When a dog named Cherry died in 1881, his owners arranged for a grave in a nearby garden. At this time, the idea that an animal might be given a dignified burial was considered comical. But others followed suit and the world’s first urban pet cemetery was born, resulting in a revolution in the way we treat animals. I have spent the last ten years researching the history of pet cemeteries and the people who dared to believe in the face of an incredulous public that the reward at death for an animal companion should reflect the love it offered during life. Their ideal has since spread throughout the world, and he will discuss his book on pet cemeteries and animal burials, *Faithful Unto Death*, sharing stories that are sometimes weird, sometimes tragic, yet always heartwarming.

Redefining National Identity in Great Britain through the Representation of Non-Human Animals in Underground Experimental Short Films

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Non-human animals are one of the most marginalized and voiceless of all (Poirier et al., 2022). Previous research has focused on making their presence on film visible by analyzing their cinematic and mediatic representation in relation to cultural aspects (Mills, 2017 & Merskin, 2018). However, the representation of the non-human animal on underground cinema is still unaddressed. This study examines how national identity in Great Britain is (re/de)constructed through the interaction between humans and non-human animals in underground experimental cinema, highlighting how these representations intersect with other systems of oppression, particularly those concerning gender and ableism. We analyzed two film productions through the lens of Critical Animal Studies (CAS): *Derek and his brick*¹ (Lee White, 2020) and *My mother said*² (Christian Azzola, 2023). Here, experimental underground cinema functions as a reverse panopticon, making the non-human animal a visible figure. In fact, both films challenge societal taboos through the depiction of non-human animal death and the representation of disabled non-human animals. Furthermore, even if both short films use diverse cinematographic techniques and draw on different artistic movements, they feature non-human animals that are rarely depicted in mainstream cinema due to the connotations associated with them, like the rat, beetle, spider, and blind horse. Along with other non-human animals that appear in the films, they are depicted possessing agency and thus play an important role in the films' narratives. Moreover, regarding gender, the representation of the non-human animals can also be understood as a subversive response to romantic love and traditional masculinities in *Derek and his brick*. In *My mother said*, animal death can also symbolize the death of women, indicating that non-human animals and women somehow suffer from a similar kind of oppression. Finally, we can conclude that the underground experimental short films in question could challenge the national construction of Great Britain, advocating for the inclusion of non-human animals, women, and disabled species.

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¹Watch on <https://youtu.be/4A-uqV2H2PM?si=pFFt8ziED-XqJ65N>

²Watch on https://youtu.be/07J35xvi_14

Towards a Creative Ethology: Making Horses' Lives Visible on the Page

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Using imagination and empathy as guides, I explore the life of a post-career ex-racehorse, a small band of broodmares and young stock, and a pair of wild burros living sheltered on the outskirts of an American city. I consider how their lives have intersected with humans, and how each has come to be seen and understood in ways which reflect their *telos*, their natural adaptive behaviour, and also honour their individual intrinsic natures. This multi-media presentation will include photos and video footage of the horses and burros I discuss, as well as many other horses encountered on my travels who radically altered my perception of what it is to be a horse. During two years of field research, I honed an observational practice which quickened and amplified my abilities as a writer to evoke and illuminate horses' lives. Through the medium of creative non-fiction, I examine how horses are often misunderstood, how human desires and management strategies suppress their natural behaviour, and how our traditional practices of horse keeping and use impact their lives. Correspondingly, I discuss how coming to a deeper understanding of horses on their own terms allows humans to think differently about the horses we keep and how such awareness might lead to better welfare and wellbeing.

Defining Coexistence: Panel

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Historically, human and wildlife conflict is a term that has been used to label the negative interactions that occur between humans and wildlife due to limited space, resources, livestock depredation, and loss of property, amongst other consequences. However, a recent interest in acknowledging and focusing on the positive interactions between humans and wildlife has taken hold, with a concurrent shift in perspective from conflict to coexistence. Although many definitions of coexistence exist in the literature, measuring quantifiable factors of coexistence has proven difficult. For example, tolerance and co-adaptation are commonly included in definitions of coexistence, but operationalizing these ideas in consistent ways is still being negotiated in the relevant literature. In this panel, several researchers will briefly present their experience in defining and measuring coexistence, the difficulties they faced in doing so, and future directions of measuring coexistence. Following these brief presentations, the audience will be invited to partake in roundtable discussions surrounding the subject.

The Invisible Herstory: Women, horses and the divine feminine archetype

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The relationship between humans and horses is a complex 6,000-year history. Horses have lived beside us; they have carried us into battles and to our graves. There is no other animal that has had such a powerful impact on human culture. Horses in many cultures are ancient symbols of the divine feminine archetype. Until very recently, the world of horses was perceived as being dominated by men, but this is only partially (and economically) true. In the US and Great Britain, 90% of horse owners are women, 4 out of 5 equine veterinarians are women and women have begun to represent the majority of riders across disciplines. The question is why? What do women find so compelling about horses? Like much of women's lived experiences, this has been largely unexamined by sociology and psychology. This presentation the ways in which the qualities and lives of women and horses intersect. Both women and horses for the last several thousand years, have found themselves coping in a world of domination and control that is not of their own making. Through the lens of women's history and psychology, this presentation explores paths for discovering the keys to the bonds between women and the horses through deep time and the relevance of the horse and divine feminine archetype in our lives today.

The Invisible, Ancient Mind meets Modern Science: Using the 'Metaphoric' Mind for Exploring Animal-Human Relationships

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We have deep and powerful experiences with animals and nature that are difficult to describe and quantify with our rational, scientific minds. Understanding and integration happens in the *metaphoric* mind of dreams, symbols, storytelling, myth, dance, art, and music. Based on theories ranging from Jungian (Depth) psychology to the pioneering work of Samples (1976, 1993) and (ancient) indigenous scientific paradigms (Cajate, 2000; Couture, 2013; Wilson, 2008), animal-human studies are given what is often a missing or invisible lens. The metaphoric mind, or 'nature mind' is our oldest mind and has been developing for about three million years. Western society and its educational systems focus on mainly left-brain functions such as linear thinking and language. Metaphoric, symbolic perception and intuitive, right-brain activity has been neglected. As language and the rational mind develops, the holistic experience of the metaphoric mind eventually recedes into the subconscious, but it can, however, still be called on or accessed during creative or spiritual experiences. Metaphoric mind processes are tied to creativity, perception, images, physical senses, and intuition. This presentation explores the ways in which accessing and giving equal regard to the metaphoric mind holds important keys to a more whole-brained scientific paradigm, shaping, deepening, and advancing our understanding the animal-human bond and our connections to the natural world.

Ableism and Equines ‘Good to Mistreat’ in Eighteenth-Century England

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In 1726, Jonathan Swift wrote in *Gulliver’s Travels*: “when they [horses] belonged to persons of quality, employed in travelling, racing, or drawing chariots, they were treated with much kindness and care, till they fell into diseases, or became foundered in the feet, but then they were sold, and used to all kind of drudgery till they died, after which their skins were stripped and sold for what they were worth, and their bodies left to be devoured by dogs and birds of prey.” In this presentation I challenge approaches to, and definitions of, ableism that confine it to the ‘human,’ and I do so by bring animal studies and disability studies together to explore some of the many questions raised by Swift’s satire on the state of English equines during the eighteenth century. Focusing specifically on one type of horse at the bottom of the human and equine hierarchy, the carthorse, I examine the interwoven definitions of ‘disability,’ ‘disabled,’ and ‘deformity’ in relation to equines while thinking about other ableist labels that conflate equine and human under a broad, cross-species system of oppression. This system, I argue, was highly gendered, using period views towards women on society’s fringe to construct ideas of and treatment towards labouring equines. In turn, I argue, the nature of eighteenth-century ableist labels and behaviours creates and promotes ideas of who is good to be good to and who is good to mistreat, while actively constructing often violent mistreatment as expected, ‘normal’, and based upon a naturalized language influenced by period medical knowledge and moral codes. In other words, animals and humans of the eighteenth century existed within a larger ecological community where multiple species, and beings with diverse abilities and body types, were influenced by discriminatory thought that determined who was worthy of life, who should die, and who should be included under the category of cared for.

Rebuilt Homes, Empty Barns: How the Marshall Fire Impacts Equine Care in Boulder County, Colorado

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The Marshall Fire, which occurred on December 30th, 2021, in Boulder County, Colorado, was one of the most devastating wildfires in Colorado's history, destroying nearly 1,100 homes and causing widespread damage. The lands and neighborhoods that burned were where I grew up. While my childhood home still stands in the neighborhood of Spanish Hills, most (but not all) homes are being rebuilt in the aftermath of the historic conflagration. Upon a recent visit to the neighborhood, however, I noticed that while the buzz of home construction permeated the area, there was a palpable absence of horses in a neighborhood that had been originally zoned to accompany small acreage homesteads for small livestock care, especially horses. While the cessation of equine care began during my childhood in Spanish Hills from the early 1980s – mid-1990s, so struck I was by the empty barns and pastures in the aftermath of the Marshall Fire that I have begun investigating the impact the fire has had on this neighborhood. Using Spanish Hills as a case study, my presentation will explore how catastrophes like the Marshall Fire accelerate the phasing out of equine care - and therefore visibility - in areas where land and homes are not only in high demand but being re-imagined and -designed from their historic roots in horse power and care.

‘Joy is an Ethical Obligation’: Invisible Labor in Veterinary Medicine

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This paper explores the religious and ethical questions raised by Rivka Galchen’s short story, “[How I Became a Vet](#).” Narrated by a woman trained in emergency veterinary medicine, the story revolves around two plot points: the first, the fact that the narrator repeatedly receives scathing online reviews from disgruntled clients; the second, the local dogs keep jumping off the same bridge as though attempting to die by suicide (this references [a real-life phenomenon](#) in Scotland).

On the one hand, this story is a commentary on the devastating effects of neoliberal capitalism on veterinary medicine, in which a veterinarian’s performance is assessed based on consumer-driven metrics. The narrator refers to this practice as a “religious error” because it fails to recognize the moral dimensions of being a veterinarian—labor and knowledge that cannot be unquantified. Without explicitly naming it, this moment also alludes to the mental health crisis faced by those working in the veterinary profession (see, for example, the “[Not One More Vet](#)” nonprofit dedicated to this cause). On the other hand, “Becoming a Vet” offers an alternative vision of veterinary medicine through showing how the narrator solves the mystery of the so-called “suicide dogs.” Because everyone was responding like a human, the narrator is convinced that they were missing an essential part of the story. In order to solve the mystery, the veterinarian suggests that we need to think, or more accurately, smell, like the dogs. In doing so, the story envisions a profession that privileges the capacity to foreground the more-than-human world. Finally, the story places an ethical claim on the reader. As the narrator did with the dogs, we need to try to imaginatively inhabit the experiences of veterinarians. In doing so, we would see the emotional, spiritual, and physical demands they face—labor rendered invisible in an economy driven by ratings and reviews. By centering the invisible dimensions of veterinary medicine and approaching the more-than-human animals from a non-anthropocentric perspective, we can save the lives of humans and animals alike.

Rodents of Unusual Size: Nutria, Consumerism, and Animal Agency in the Cultural and Ecological Transformation of Wetlands in Louisiana and the United States

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The nutria or coypu (*Myocastor coypus*) is a semiaquatic rodent from South America that was introduced into the United States (first in California in 1899 and, most consequentially, in Louisiana in the 1930s) to provide a new source animal for the fur industry. Early optimism about the economic benefits of “nutria ranching” was quickly dashed, largely thanks to the broader collapse of the fur business starting in the 1940s. Nutria quickly transitioned from a desired species to an unwanted one when the descendants of released and escaped coypu wreaked environmental havoc on wetlands, turning them into open water. Animals which had been proudly imported by individuals such as Tabasco sauce founder E.A. McIlhenny in 1938 were “outlaws” by the late 1950s when Louisiana removed them from the list of protected furbearers. Despite a few successful examples of Nutria management over the past seventy-five years, including the Chesapeake Bay Nutria Eradication Project in Maryland, control efforts, especially in Louisiana, have largely been unsuccessful given the coypu’s ravenous appetite for vegetation, rapid reproduction, and a growing tension between the nutria’s cultural meanings and material consequences. This paper analyzes the complicated history of the nutria in the United States and the transformation of human attitudes and practices toward this introduced species that has profoundly modified ecosystems. Situating nutria introductions and management amidst larger animal studies questions about invasive species and how animals out of place are made killable, I examine texts such as *Nutria for Home Use* (1963), efforts to market the nutria as an “ethical fur” and an “edible invader” that can be consumed to save the wetlands, nutria “rodeos” and festivals such as Nutriapalooza (2011), and controversies over nutria as both pets and pet food to highlight the complex intersections of consumer culture, animal agency, and wetland ecologies. Ultimately, I suggest that the resilience of the “swamp rat” serves as a useful index to both contradictory human-animal relationships and transformations of ecosystems in the Anthropocene.

Enhancing Education and Engagement with Animals in the Classroom

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The presence of animals in classrooms offers students unique opportunities to engage with science and connect with nature. This presentation will explore the role of living organisms in science education from elementary to high school classrooms. Research supports the positive impact of living organisms on student learning and perceptions of science. One example posits that classroom animals provide opportunities for students to learn about scientific processes, principals, and content areas (Herbert and Lynch, 2017). By maintaining living organisms, teachers can create interactive and memorable learning experiences, while encouraging curiosity and responsibility. During this presentation, we will examine the benefits and challenges of keeping animals in classrooms. Topics include selecting appropriate species for different educational settings, addressing ethical considerations, and ensuring proper care and maintenance of classroom life forms. We will highlight best practices for incorporating animals into lesson plans to teach science concepts while promoting student responsibility and collaboration. Examples will demonstrate how living organisms have been successfully integrated across grade levels, enhancing engagement and scientific inquiry. This will also be an interactive session where participants will have opportunity to meet and interact with a variety of animals, such as small mammals, reptiles, and insects. Through hands-on activities, attendees will learn how to handle these creatures safely and discuss how such interactions can be adapted to their educational environments. These activities aim to empower educators with practical strategies to bring the benefits of live animals to their classrooms while addressing logistical and ethical considerations. By experiencing the presence of live animals and understanding their potential to inspire learning, participants will leave with a deeper appreciation for the role of living organisms in promoting an interest in science and improved scientific literacy.

Dog and the Doppelganger: Invisibility, metaphor and commodification

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As a rhetorician and a dog trainer who also teaches others how to train their dogs, too often I encounter people whose problems arise from not being able to see the material form of a dog at all: when they bother to look, they see an embodied collection of their own psychological projections, or a collaborative corporate projection (Labrador Retriever as Orvis hearth-rug), an object of either pity or scorn. In these moments, the dogs, persons and actions in the narrative probe uncomfortable meanings that lie outside the narrative itself, one of which is a burning and inescapable need for dogs to talk, to speak human language comprehensibly; human beings have the ability not just to reference but to invent things or states that are not in the immediate realm of the speaker before we refer to them, like inventing the idea that a dog may talk and in doing so, give us factual information.

Nothing becomes an absence until it is noticeable. When we want it to be, we have many ways to direct notice to silence – ellipses on the page, rests in musical scores, a finger pressed over the lips, the sacred moment between stimulus and response – and dog training mostly happens in silence where ‘conversation’ is the sound of human speech punctuated by meaningful silence (where the dog can act, now), marking yet another of the dramatic differences between these two forms of meaning. Dogs inhabit the semiotic system by and of human beings, and in this capacity, they “speak”. In other words, dogs can be understood as simultaneously subjects within the semiotic system they rely on in order to communicate with humans (who can be remarkably confounded about receiving their messages) and objects used within the human semiotic system. Can this duality be understood as one that engenders an illusory possibility of free transition between these two states? What to make of the messages, signs and silences where central tensions are rooted in the duality of dogs’ position vis-à-vis human language and our anthropocentric environment of invisible dogs?

Human Attitudes Toward the Use of Non-Human Animals in Research, for Consumption, and as Pets

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This project aimed to compare older adults' initial attitudes toward the use and role of non-human animals in research, for consumption, and as pets, to their attitudes after having completed a six-week course on these topics. The project aimed to identify any course content knowledge that may have been influential in changing attitudes of individuals toward the use and role of non-human animals in research, for consumption and, as pets. Participants were 11 older adults engaging in an educational course offered by the Flathead Valley Community College and taught by their psychology professor.

Participants completed the Attitudes Toward Animals Questionnaire on the initial day of class prior to reading any of the assigned literature or engaging in any class content. Participants then completed the same questionnaire at the completion of the class, six weeks later. Participants were asked to read six literature articles that covered topics from animal rights, pet ownership, aging pet ownership, and animal welfare. They were also asked to read the book *Some we Love, Some we Hate, Some we Eat*. Videos watched in class included a short documentary on *The Night of the Grizzlies* and the entirety of *Food, Inc.* Main Results: A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare pre-class attitudes to post-class attitudes. A small sample size of five was used due to dropout and non-reporting. Pre-class survey results indicate no significant change ($M = 2.65$) compared to post-class results ($M = 2.75$, $t(4) = 1.32$, $p = .257$).

The Impact of An Interpersonal Neurobiology Play Therapy Based Curriculum with Horses with Veteran and First Responders, and Grieving Families

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This workshop will explore theoretical principles and interventions that provide an interpersonal neurobiology play therapy curriculum with horses for the parent/guardian- dyad to assist in building communication skills, improving attachment and connection. Incorporating horses for the parent-child dyad has demonstrated improvements in attachment even in a high-risk population (Beetz et al, 2015). The integration of horses into clinical work often allows families to work on the development of empathic connections in an environment that feels non-judgmental and more natural (Gee, 2021). This is supported by the findings of a study that interactions with animals often provides families with a “social catalyst” effect in community settings (McNichols & Collins, 2000) The integration of animals into the clinical work often allows families to work on the development of empathic connections with an animal in an environment that feels less judgmental and more natural and while experiencing interactive activities with a therapy animal may increase body awareness and nonverbal communication (Gee, 2021).

Evidence-based best practice of child-centered play therapy, child-parent relational therapy will be incorporated within the integrated model of a 6 session phase based curriculum of family therapy with horses, where horses participate by choice and consent. This approach focuses on both human and animal welfare—and allows a natural and authentic connection with horses in attachment and somatic processing. Positive outcome measures of our equine program with veteran/military/first responder and grieving families will be presented as well as possible future research considerations. This practice model has the ability to be a powerful supplemental family therapy service to special populations and collaboration with many community agencies to provide an experiential, didactic learning experience for positive parent-child relationship building.

Art for Animal Conservation: Challenging Social Constructions of Animals

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As someone who has been creating art since a very young age, I have had the privilege of exploring many different styles and forms of art. While I have a deep appreciation for abstract art, my recent focus is on combining realism with abstract elements to create powerful pieces centered on animals. I aim to use my artwork to foster empathy and inspire advocacy for animals, especially those often misunderstood or stigmatized, like spiders, sharks, and black cats. As I near graduation with a degree in Animal Studies, I feel a growing commitment to animal conservation.

Throughout history, animals have played a significant role in art, symbolizing various aspects of nature and human emotions. I have created works that challenge harmful stereotypes, such as a collage of a black cat surrounded by flames, to combat the negative associations that lead to mistreatment. Additionally, I painted an orangutan for an auction to raise awareness about primate conservation, using art to create an emotional connection between viewers and animals. Through my work, I seek to challenge the human-animal hierarchy, creating art that not only showcases animals but also encourages reflection and change in how we view and treat them. Art can bridge the gap between humans and animals, sparking empathy and action for conservation.

Hard Work, Hidden History: A Photographic and Historical Journey of Working Animals in the White Mountains

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The history of America is inextricably linked to the labor of its animal inhabitants. This presentation will provide a framework for exploring the historical and contemporary roles of working animals, enabling attendees to apply these insights to their own research and community engagement.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, as settlers ventured into northern New Hampshire, they relied heavily on draft animals to clear land, construct infrastructure, and transport goods. Oxen, with their immense strength and endurance, were indispensable for clearing forests and building roads, while horses provided a more agile means of transportation for people and products.

Beyond their physical labor, animals also contributed to the region's economy and sustenance. Sheep, for instance, were not only valuable for their wool but also as a sustainable source of food. Cows provided milk and meat, while bees produced honey and beeswax, all vital commodities for various household and industrial uses.

As society evolved and technological advancements emerged, the role of animals in the workforce shifted. While the days of 'needing' oxen to plow fields and horses to pull carriages have long passed, the bond between humans and animals has endured. Working relationships have changed to more recreational, or companion, relationships. In recent times, animals have taken on new roles as therapy animals, providing emotional support and comfort to individuals.

This presentation will delve into the rich history of working animals in northern New Hampshire, exploring their diverse contributions to the region's development and prosperity. Through historical photographs and narratives, we will trace the evolution of animal labor, from the arduous tasks of the frontier era to the more nuanced roles they play in contemporary society. By highlighting the often-overlooked contributions of these animals, this presentation aims to shed light on their significance in shaping the landscape and culture of northern New Hampshire.

Experimental Animals as Affect's First Lesson in Writing Classrooms

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This presentation explores and complicates experiences teaching a writing-intensive, Senior Seminar Experimental Writing course at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga. Through a series of affective

encounters and modalities, this course engaged students in direct human-animal encounters while examining how animals figure into symbolic and meaning making practices that constitute and complicate the human, specifically the notion of voice. The curriculum challenged students to rethink their understanding of human and nonhuman animals, exploring how subjectivity, embodiment, and writing voice are entangled with co-inhabited ecologies, brought together through an experience of the affective dimension. The theoretical framework prompted investigations into how speciesism intersects with other forms of oppression, while connecting to affect theory and considerations of voice in writing studies. This discussion illuminates how experimental learning activities can transform students' engagement with animal studies in writing courses.

Avian Cognition—from Invisibility to Center Stage

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Even as late as the middle of the 20th century, the term “avian cognition” was considered an oxymoron. Birds were considered incapable of the kinds of complex cognitive processing that had been demonstrated in species phylogenetically close to humans such as great apes or in those at least having large brains like marine mammals. Parrots, in particular, were considered capable of little more than mindless mimicry of human speech. Research over the ensuing decades has, however, shown that Grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) can succeed at tasks involving, for example, numerical concepts, inferential and probabilistic reasoning, executive control, liquid conservation, visual working memory manipulation, and use of referential communication at levels equivalent to, and in a few instances exceeding, those of the great apes and cetaceans; their cognitive, if not their communicative, abilities are often at levels comparable to those of 5-to-8 year-old children. I will very briefly discuss the history of avian cognition and then discuss some of my more recent research in depth.

Who Rests Here? Invisibility and Inclusion at Pet Cemeteries

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The rise of pet cemeteries in post-industrial society reflects shifting human-animal relationships—transforming animals from property to pets, and from pets to family members. The establishment of the first modern pet cemeteries in England (Hyde Park Cemetery, 1881), the United States (Hartsdale Pet Cemetery, 1896), and France (Cimetière des Chiens et Autres Animaux Domestiques, 1899) marked the beginning of a formalized approach to commemorating beloved nonhuman companions. By the late 20th century, pet cemeteries had become increasingly common across the Western world and parts of East Asia. Today, their global expansion is mirrored by a growing body of academic research in the social sciences and humanities (e.g., Brandes 2009; Veldkamp 2009; Desmond 2016; Pręgowski 2016, 2018; Schuurman & Redmalm 2019; Tourigny 2020; Ikäheimo et al. 2022; Rujoiu & Rujoiu 2024). Traditionally focused on cats and dogs, pet cemeteries in the third decade of the 21st century now offer burial and cremation services for a wider range of animals, including rabbits, birds, rodents, and even larger animals such as horses. Increasingly, animals not typically considered companions—such as aquarium fish, snails, and reptiles—are also being interred. Many pet cemetery websites now explicitly mention the possibility of burying members of other species, signaling a broader shift toward inclusivity. This presentation examines how the spatial and symbolic invisibility of most animal species in pet cemeteries is gradually being erased by the inclusion of non-traditional companion animals. While the deaths of livestock and wild animals remain largely invisible for the society, the expanding scope of pet cemeteries reflects evolving social attitudes toward (some) animals and the increasing recognition of diverse human-animal bonds.

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Resistance: Thinking Animal Agency in the Anthropocene

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My paper will examine the current state of the “political turn in animal ethics” first announced a decade ago in *Political Animals and Animal Politics*, and variously inflected by the works of earlier thinkers such as Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka in their book *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*. It has more recently been reframed by scholars who approach questions of nonhuman animal rights and ethics through the lens of biopolitics like Dinesh Wadiwel (*The War Against Animals*) and Matthew Chrulew (*Foucault and Animals*), or through the lens of capitalism and colonialism such as Sarat Colling. What all these thinkers have in common is an insistence on nonhuman animal *resistance* to human domination and exploitation. The goal of my paper is to clarify the way these thinkers conceptualize nonhuman animal resistance and to “test” this approach through readings of select photographs published in *Hidden: Animals in the Anthropocene*, a collection of photographs described as witnessing: “the invisible animals in our lives: those with whom we have a close relationship and yet fail to see. The animals we eat and wear; the animals we use for research, work, and for entertainment; the animals we sacrifice in the name of tradition and religion.”

Animal Sentience – A Key Invisibility!

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Sentience is not an easy concept to define nor understand and identifying which species (or systems) are sentient is a major challenge. Nevertheless, sentience is a key topic for animal wellbeing but it could also be argued to be an “Invisibility” because of confusing terminology and differing definitions.

Sentience became a foundational concept for animal wellbeing when Jeremy Bentham wrote of animals in 1789 - “The question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer? Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being?” Sentience is also the core concept for Peter Singer in his 1975 landmark book, *Animal Liberation*. Singer argued that sentient beings are those that can feel pleasure and pain and thus have preference interests (i.e., desires or wants) that can be satisfied or frustrated. In a recent discussion of sentience, Jonathan Birch (another philosopher) argues that sentient beings have valenced experiences that feel good or bad and that the presence of sentience influences (or should influence) human moral behavior.

Singer focused on vertebrates in *Animal Liberation* as sentient beings, but the boundary (or “edge” of sentience) has shifted to include invertebrate species. In the UK, the 2022 Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act included two invertebrate groups, the cephalopods and decapod crustaceans, as sentient creatures whose welfare must be protected and attended to.

Jonathan Birch’s 2024 book, *The Edge of Sentience*, proposes ways in which we might address uncertainty about the terminological issues involving sentience and whether or not a particular being is sentient. He discusses how, pre-1980, fetal and neonatal surgery was routinely carried out without anesthesia. Surgeons and anesthesiologists argued that general anesthesia was too risky for fetuses and neonates and, in any case, it was not clear that fetuses and neonates experienced pain and were sentient. However, K.J. Anand, then a doctoral student at Oxford, reported that human neonates experienced massive stress responses when surgery was conducted under light anesthesia. Ongoing research then linked these stress responses to subsequent long-term development problems.

The talk will examine the terminology challenges and ways in which one might determine whether non-verbal beings, human neural organoids and artificial intelligence systems are likely to be sentient.

The Sacred Underground: Earthworms, Belonging, and the American Mythos

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I am a multimedia artist currently investigating the relationships between earthworms, labor, and the mythos of the American landscape amidst ecofeminist and ecocritical theories. This presentation explores the concept of invasion through artistic investigations of ecological and cultural transformations. It examines the parallels between nonnative earthworms and immigrant labor, questioning notions of belonging and ownership in both natural and social contexts. I will unpack multimedia projects such as "Worms on the Green" and "Zone of Loss," which delve into the umwelt of earthworms through sound-based research and the role of immersive experiences in understanding nonhuman lifeworlds. These works, created in collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, investigate the connections between animal labor, eco-colonialism, religion, and our relationship to the underground. Additionally, the presentation will discuss the ongoing photo series "The Invaders," which addresses inherited identity erasure and immigrant assimilation. By repurposing 19th-century portrait photography conventions, this work challenges the visual iconography of "nativeness" constructed during periods of increased immigration and nationalism. Through these artistic explorations, the presentation aims to provoke discussions on the systems of influence affecting human and nonhuman bodies, their relationships to labor, nature, and burial, and the broader conflicts surrounding place-based belonging and ownership.

The Development and Application of a Hierarchical Model of Decision-making When Interacting with Horses

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The practice of clinical animal behaviour and the management of "problem" behaviours in horses remains largely dominated by Equitation Science (McLean & McGreevy, 2009) and learning theory including operant-conditioning, predominantly utilising negative reinforcement (McLean & Christensen, 2017; McBride & Hemmings, 2017; Carroll et al., 2023) and the application of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) (Baer et al., 1968, Winslow et al., 2018). Such a narrow focus can contribute to the horse experiencing approach/avoidance conflict (Pereira-Figueiredo et al., 2024), frustration (Pheliphon et al., 2024) and in some cases the suppression of the behaviour response even when positive reinforcement is used (Mills, 2023; Pereira-Figueiredo et al., 2024). This is in stark contrast to within the zoo (Brando & Norman, 2023) and the canine behaviour industries where there is a paradigm shift towards an individualised and trauma-informed animal-led approach (Corridon et al., 2024; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Yamaguchi et al., 2021). In order to enhance equine well-being, horse-human interaction and improve treatment outcomes, it is important to incorporate existing research in trans-species psychology (Bradshaw, 2008), comparative psychology (Abramson, 2023), trauma-informed care principles (SAMHSA, 2014), affective neuroscience (Panksepp, 2006; Gilbert, 2009), inter-species relational theories (Kieson, 2025), the Five Domains (Mellor et al., 2020) and One Welfare models (Tarazona et al., 2020) aligning with a biopsychosocial approach (Engel, 1977) and an adaptation of Judith Herman's Stages of Trauma Recovery (Herman, 1998) widely utilised in mental health and psychiatry (Tripathi et al., 2020, Fatjo & Bowen, 2020). The latter has slowly increased in popularity in the equine industry (Mueller-Paisner & Bradshaw, 2010). The author presents an outcome-based approach and hierarchy of therapeutic interventions with a goal of increasing agency choice and consent-based interactions. Through incorporating direct and in-direct (via cameras), the integration of individualised well-being from a solid foundation of individualised physical, emotional and social safety in-line with Herman's Stages of Trauma Treatment, all individual and species-specific needs are met including agency (Littlewood, 2023) and the opportunity to exercise control over their body and environment, the inclusion of tailored enrichment, increased choice including surrounding activities such as ridden work and the creation of body-language signals and shared social strategies (e.g., the horse moves or looks away and the person stops approaching). At the top of the hierarchy of therapeutic interventions are structured training interventions. These top-tier interventions are not compulsory or intended for every individual. The hierarchy of therapeutic interventions is intended to include the vet-led team and where indicated allied professionals such as physiotherapists or farriers. Similar to Maslows Hierarchy of Needs (1987) and the Hierarchy of Dog Needs (Griffin et al., 2023) the intention is to provide caregivers, trainers, behaviour professionals and yard owners with a simple way to assess overall well-being and identify any gaps as well as providing a guide to formulating treatment planning when supporting caregivers and their horses.

“Where Sleeping Dogs Lie”: Dr. Eugene C. Jones and The Los Angeles Pet Memorial Park

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Throughout the 19th century, pet-keeping as we understand it today came into being. The components of the modern “pet industry” developed including the breeding of pet animals for sale, manufacture of commercial pet food, pet supplies like dog collars, toys and bird cages, medication and flea remediation, founding of “pure breed” associations like the American Kennel Club, dog shows, and the birth of small animal veterinary practices. During this time, however, most animal bodies, even pets, were discarded in the trash, thrown into rivers or disposed of by commercial rendering. In 1881, a Hyde Park gatekeeper in London established what was probably the first modern Western urban pet cemetery. In 1896, the first pet cemetery in the United States was founded in Hartsdale, New York. Since then, the number of pet cemeteries in the US has grown from just one to more than 600, and today there are more pet cemeteries

in the US than in the rest of the world combined. By the 1920s, a market thus emerged for commercial pet cemeteries, and one of the first and largest in California, the still existing and thriving Los Angeles Pet Memorial Park in Calabasas, CA, was opened by Hollywood veterinarian Dr. Eugene C. Jones in 1928. The Jones' family owned and operated "pet empire" spanned from the early 1920s to the early 1970s, from Hollywood, CA to Big Bear, CA to the San Fernando Valley. His empire consisted of his innovative pet hospital at 9080 Santa Monica built in 1926, his Big Bear Valley "summer resort" where the dogs and cats could "vacation" while their wealthy owners escaped the heat of the Los Angeles summer, the conveniently located (for the Hollywood crowd) pet mortuary showroom drop off location at 2500 N. Highland, and finally, the Los Angeles Pet Memorial Park. This talk will discuss the renowned pet cemetery through the graphic layout of the StoryMap format. ArcGIS StoryMap link: <https://arcgis.is/Cbemv0>

Barking Up the Wrong Tree: Construct Validity of Canine Self-Control Methodologies

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Canine cognition researchers study inhibitory control using a variety of paradigms, including perseveration tasks (e.g., A-not-B task), response inhibition tasks (e.g., the cylinder, middle cup, and V-detour tasks), and owner surveys (Dog Impulsivity Assessment Scale, DIAS; e.g., Bray et al., 2014; Brucks et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2011). However, often these tasks do not correlate: dogs may perform well on one response inhibition task and poorly on another (Bray et al., 2014; Brucks et al., 2017). Here we report results deepening methodological concerns about these tasks. First, we show learning effects in the middle cup task: dogs improve their performance on the second half of 20 trials compared to the first half. We also see learning effects in the cylinder task: dogs perform better the second time they encounter the cylinder task compared to the first. Finally, we presented dogs with a test battery including the cylinder, middle cup, V-detour, and A-not-B tasks and asked owners to complete the DIAS. These tasks do not robustly correlate with each other or with owner reported impulsivity. Our results suggest the need to explore new impulsivity tasks that perhaps have more external validity to the lives of pet dogs.

Unleashing the Truth: Training a Long Stay Fails to Enhance Canine Self-Control

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Dog owners report struggling with "problem" behaviors, such as stealing food, jumping on visitors, and leash pulling. They consult trainers who often claim that training self-control will solve these problems

across multiple contexts (Gibeault, 2020; Kaough, 2022). In the current experiment, we directly tested the claim that training dogs to remain calm in the context of increasing distractions would improve their performance on a series of tasks designed to measure self-control. Fifty-one pet dogs participated in the 4-task test battery. Experimental dogs then participated in a 15-session training program designed to improve self-control, while waitlist control dogs did not. All dogs returned and repeated the 4-task self-control test battery. Contrary to trainers' claims, there was no difference in pre- and post-training performance on any of the four self-control tasks for dogs who completed the self-control training. We suggest that self-control is not a generalizable skill; rather, it is context specific and must be trained across multiple domains.

Invisible Thoughts and Concrete Experiences: Differing Perspectives on Coyote Encounters among Public, Hunting, and Agricultural Samples

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Biodiversity is considered one of the key indicators of ecosystem health and organisms provide different ecosystem services that serve to keep ecosystems healthy and often supply benefits for humans. Some of these benefits include food security, natural medicines, and economic benefits from recreation and tourism, as well as aesthetic and existence values that may escape quantification. However, the connection between healthy wildlife populations, healthy ecosystems, and healthy humans is often invisible to the public. Indeed, sometimes when people become connected to nature via direct interactions, negative, concrete experiences can discount these positive, invisible, and abstract connections. Few species test this idea more than coyotes, whose adaptability brings them into contact with urban and rural human populations and serves as a reminder that humans both influence nature and are embedded within it. Here, we present data from a set of surveys conducted with hunters, agricultural producers, and the public in 2022, representing a range of experiences with coyotes and related perceptions of benefits of living with an adaptive carnivore. Among the one in four of our public respondents that reported encountering a coyote, around half did so in a residential area, versus a natural (18%), agricultural (20%), or modified area (13%). In contrast, just over half of hunters encountered coyotes (outside of hunting pursuits), and half of those encounters occurred in an agricultural area. Similarly, most producers (70%) encountered coyotes, most of those occurred in an agricultural area (86%). Feelings about the encounter skewed positively for the public but negatively for producers, and interestingly, hunters represented a range of feelings from positive to neutral to negative. Perceptions of benefits of coyotes (e.g., help return the natural environment back to the way it was, control nuisance wildlife) were significantly higher among the public that encountered coyotes versus hunters and producers that encountered coyotes. Likewise, wildlife value orientations describing feelings of mutualism with wildlife were higher for the public as compared to hunters, suggesting that guiding beliefs about relations to wildlife were different between groups perhaps prior to any interactions with coyotes, as these value orientations tend to be more enduring than highly contextualized interactions. Taken together, these results suggest that the invisible and latent psychological impressions of wildlife can differ depending on the concrete context in which these animals are encountered, and result in differing perspectives on the benefits derived from them.

Growing Older Together: Equine-Enhanced Wellness in Later Life

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Invisibility, in the sense of being, out of sight, out of mind, applies similarly to an aging human population and to horses considered past their best use-by dates. Humans and horses suffer, each in their own species-specific ways, yet through much overlapping ageism, the ills of physical decline, emotional containment, and social estrangement. What is at stake is not just a need for more care and better health outcomes; rather, it is a matter of contesting, as Byung-Chul Han (2015) has done, the reduction of health and wellness to “bare life ... stripped of all transcendental *value*” and “reduced to the immanency of vital functions and capacities, which are to be maximized by any and all means” (p. 51). Such is the case for human beings although not necessarily for horses who are put down when their lives have become too threadbare.

While we welcome the shift in animal care from welfare to wellbeing, we challenge current conceptions of wellness as being overly determined by empirical evidence of what counts as being hale and healthy. We are not proposing simply a longer bucket list of wellness quantities, but a shift in emphasis from physical, intellectual and social-emotional deficits to somatic and contemplative, eco-spiritual assets. We take our cue, phenomenological speaking, from Drew Leder (2024) who casts the aging body, ecstatically and transparently, as connected “beyond the skin” to other creatures and to the animate world at large. Self and other, human and horse, become intertwined, enfolded, in what Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968) termed “chiasmic” reciprocity and mutuality. The words of John Tarrant (1998) thus ring true: “Soul doesn’t seem to travel any faster than a horse, so it makes the spirit wait until it catches up” (p. 102). Eco-spiritual wellness, an aspiration inspired by various Indigenous cultures and Wisdom traditions, needs the dailiness of living with animals as its measure for measure practice.

The creation of equine-enhanced wellness programs for Senior Living Communities brings this theorizing down to ground. Working with the Mather Health Institute, we show how wellness in later life can be promoted beyond the present invisibility of the elderly, contest in the process the ageism inherent to active living programs, and describe how, with older people interacting with sometimes aging horses, a sustained and sustaining sense of wellbeing may be realized. *Growing old together* captions a somatic and contemplative movement toward enhanced eco-spiritual wellness in later life.

Teaching the Horse: Arts-Enhanced Curriculum

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This presentation will explore incorporating arts to enrich understanding in college level equine courses at an undergraduate Anthrozoology program. Courses include Human and Humans: A Historical Perspective, Connecting with Horses, Equine Science, and Modalities in Equine Assisted Services. I have found that including art engages the students and adds variety and aesthetic appeal. The arts in education has three distinct variations: Art as Curriculum, Arts-Enhanced Curriculum, and Arts-Integrated Curriculum. When the arts are used as a device or strategy to support other curriculum areas, but no objectives in the art form are explicit, then the approach is called Arts-Enhanced Curriculum. In this approach, the arts are used as a tool to reinforce academic skills and make the learning experience more engaging and interactive. Professors need little or no training in the art form and students are not evaluated on their artistic development. Art forms in my courses are diverse and include visual arts, performing arts, literary arts, film and other media.

Covert cats: The (Very Modern) Appearance of *Felis catus* in Sauraha, Nepal

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Pet-keeping and human relations to companion-animal species (cats and dogs) in Nepal are—unsurprisingly—very different from ‘Westernized’ societies. Prior to 2014, domestic cats (*Felis catus*) were rarely seen in Nepalese cities or villages. However, in the last decade, cats have begun to appear around agricultural land, shops, and in protected areas, such as within the boundaries of national parks. National parks are vital to the maintenance of Nepal as a ‘biodiversity hot spot,’ and the influx of domesticated cats has been met with curiosity as well as concern for the potential negative impacts on wildlife in the area.

Chitwan National Park is the busiest of Nepal’s national parks and is surrounded by small municipalities and rural villages. In these villages reside numerous livestock species, captive wildlife, free-living (owned and unowned) dogs. Sauraha, the main entry point for Chitwan NP, is a town with a permanent population of around 4000 humans but featuring 32 dogs per square km. Free-living dog populations have continued to rise over the last decades, despite major TNVRM efforts. Around 2016, domesticated cats began to appear in the area, and populations continue to expand. However, thanks to challenges in managing dog populations, the arrival and spread of cats has been largely ignored by local animal-centered organizations. This project sought to identify numbers of domestic cats in the Sauraha area, ascertain how they came to this remote area, and document community perspectives on free-living and owned cats. It also sought to identify what veterinary and cultural support exists for the keeping of domesticated companion species.

Our project explored the nature of the human-pet bond within this cultural context, focusing on potential risks and benefits to human and companion-animal (cat) health and wellbeing. Working primarily with Nepalese residents and NGOs, this project seeks to identify how veterinary and social provision can support the human-animal bond.

Going Feral as an Evolutionary Adaptation to Novel Ecosystems: Hogs and Horses

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In this, the time of the Sixth Extinction, the conservation biology approach known as “rewilding” is grounded in the moral premise that humanity’s ecological duty is to cede domestic space and other resources to “the wild.” In determining what counts as wilderness, biologists who see rewilding as *restoration* of an Edenic past equate ferality with “alien” or “invasive” presence, raising a feral species’ chances becoming known as a “pest” or “scourge” or “environmental threat” that is liable to eradication or extermination campaigns in the name of environmental conservation. A different approach to rewilding looks at species’ functions instead of their forms as they adapt to a stream of ever-changing, novel ecosystems or “Anthropocene environments.” In this framing, species’ right to continued life is pinned not to their identity as natives but to the roles they play in maintaining an ecosystem that is resilient to the ongoing spasm of extinctions.

In this presentation I take a close look at both legal and popular representations of three feral populations in the U.S.—horses, donkeys, and pigs—to discern how these representations reflect different understandings of rewilding as a conservation policy and of humanity’s environmental rights and ecological responsibilities.

Invisible Signals and Intuitive Interspecies Communication

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As animate beings, we are born with capacities to intuit, seemingly invisibly, what others sense and feel. Yet cultural conditioning and schooling tend to quell these capacities, given the emphasis on rational, logical, and egoically intellectual development (Sadowski, 2023). Rarely is there space and time for cultivating sensorially-attuned and somatically-heightened ways of relating to one another except, say, under the instructional guise of social-emotional learning and trauma-informed pedagogy, or somewhat superficially in curricular realms of physical and environmental education. We become oblivious especially to what other animals are showing and telling us and insensitive to what they would have us feel. We become estranged from our own animality and the sensations and sensitivities that could bring us in communion with other creatures.

Recent scholarship has explored intuition in contexts of interspecies communication (Barrett et al., 2021; Wijngaarden, 2023). A field of study called Intuitive Interspecies Communication (IIC) focuses on “non-verbal and non-physical forms of communication between humans and other animals” using refined intuitive skills (Barrett et al., 2021, p. 151; Wijngaarden, 2023). Such communication can be active and interactive, corporeal and intercorporeal, sensorial and extrasensory. We will demonstrate under this broad umbrella of IIC how the capacity to communicate with others of the more-than-human world can be cultivated through a “somatology” (Husserl, 1980) of movement practices (e.g., Breytenbach, 2023) along with meditative ones (e.g., Windheart, 2023). We will describe how cultivating our corporeal capacities to be enmeshed in what Merleau-Ponty (1968) termed “the flesh of the world” can be done most revealingly through essentially e/motional critter encounters.

Theoretical sense is made of IIC by drawing upon the scholarship of Edmund Husserl (1913, 1971, 1980), Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1945, 1964, 1995) writings on chiasmically enfleshed relations with others, Ted Toadvine’s (2008) explications of our inherent capacities for lateral kinships, and Jean Louise Chrétien’s (1992) “call and response” dynamic. IIC is not so much scientifically explicable as it is phenomenologically describable in terms of how we sense tactilely, kinesthetically, affectively, and energetically our affinities with other animate beings across biological, morphological, and behavioural lines of visible differentiation.

Specific critter interactions with Slug and Octopus are the foci of our rendition of IIC. Through narratively grounded instances, we aim to challenge ways of educating and cultural assumptions that maintain species separations and thereby bring to the fore caring and compassionate ways of being-with one another of our own humankind.

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From Fear to Fascination: Using Environmental Education to Transform Perceptions of Misunderstood Wildlife

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Misunderstood species—such as bats, insects, coyotes, and snakes—are often marginalized in public discourse, their ecological significance overshadowed by fear, misinformation, and negative cultural narratives. These animals play critical roles in ecosystems, yet they remain "invisible" in the sense that their true value is frequently ignored or misrepresented. Through targeted environmental education programming, the Eastern Kentucky University Center for Environmental Education is working to shift these perceptions, helping both children and the public replace fear with curiosity and understanding. Our programs focus on hands-on, science-based curricula designed to highlight the ecological importance and unique characteristics of these species. One focal point is our bat education program, which demystifies common myths, introduces participants to the benefits bats provide—such as pest control and pollination—and raises awareness of threats like White Nose Syndrome. Similarly, our "creepy crawlies" and snake-focused "Animal Ambassador" programming encourages respect for insects, arachnids, and reptiles, emphasizing their roles in biodiversity and ecosystem health.

By fostering positive emotional connections and delivering factual, engaging content, we aim to dismantle misconceptions and cultivate environmental stewardship. Early education is particularly impactful, as children's perceptions of wildlife are still malleable, offering an opportunity to nurture empathy and curiosity over fear. This approach not only helps individuals feel more comfortable around these organisms but also supports broader conservation efforts by shifting public attitudes.

Environmental education serves as a powerful tool for making the "invisible" visible—bringing hidden ecological roles, misunderstood behaviors, and conservation challenges to light. In doing so, it contributes to a more inclusive understanding of the natural world and encourages actions that benefit both people and wildlife.

13 Ways of Looking at a Cat

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The impetus for this essay arises out of an idea for a first-year seminar in literature that I will be teaching in spring of 2025, the focus of which will be on ways of seeing/knowing. The course will focus on three novels, Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962), Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001), and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008). All three texts engage with their unreliable narrator protagonists' desire for invisibility/obscure, and all engage the corporeal existence of cats – Jonas, the cat companion of Merricat, the protagonist of Jackson's narrative, Richard Parker, a Bengal tiger possibly trapped on a lifeboat for 227 days with Pi, Martel's narrator, and an unnamed white tiger caged in a zoo that Adiga's unnamed (or multi-named) narrator views as a metaphor for his own life. This essay also explores connections between these literary cats and real and metaphorical cats in my own and my students lives, including the catamount/eastern cougar that serves as my university's mascot. Despite the catamount's conspicuous presence on the campus of Western Carolina University – as a statue at the entrance to campus, as a stylized image on branded merchandise, and a slogan designating such entities as the central campus fountain (the "catafount") and as the university's intranet interface ("MyCat") -- the catamount, also known as a "ghost cat," has been invisible, extinct in North Carolina since the 1800s. Finally, I will discuss the real and animatronic cats that often serve as companions to dementia patients in care facilities, like my father and my mother, who died on December 2, 2024.