Anthrozoology Symposium

5TH - 7TH NOVEMBER 2026

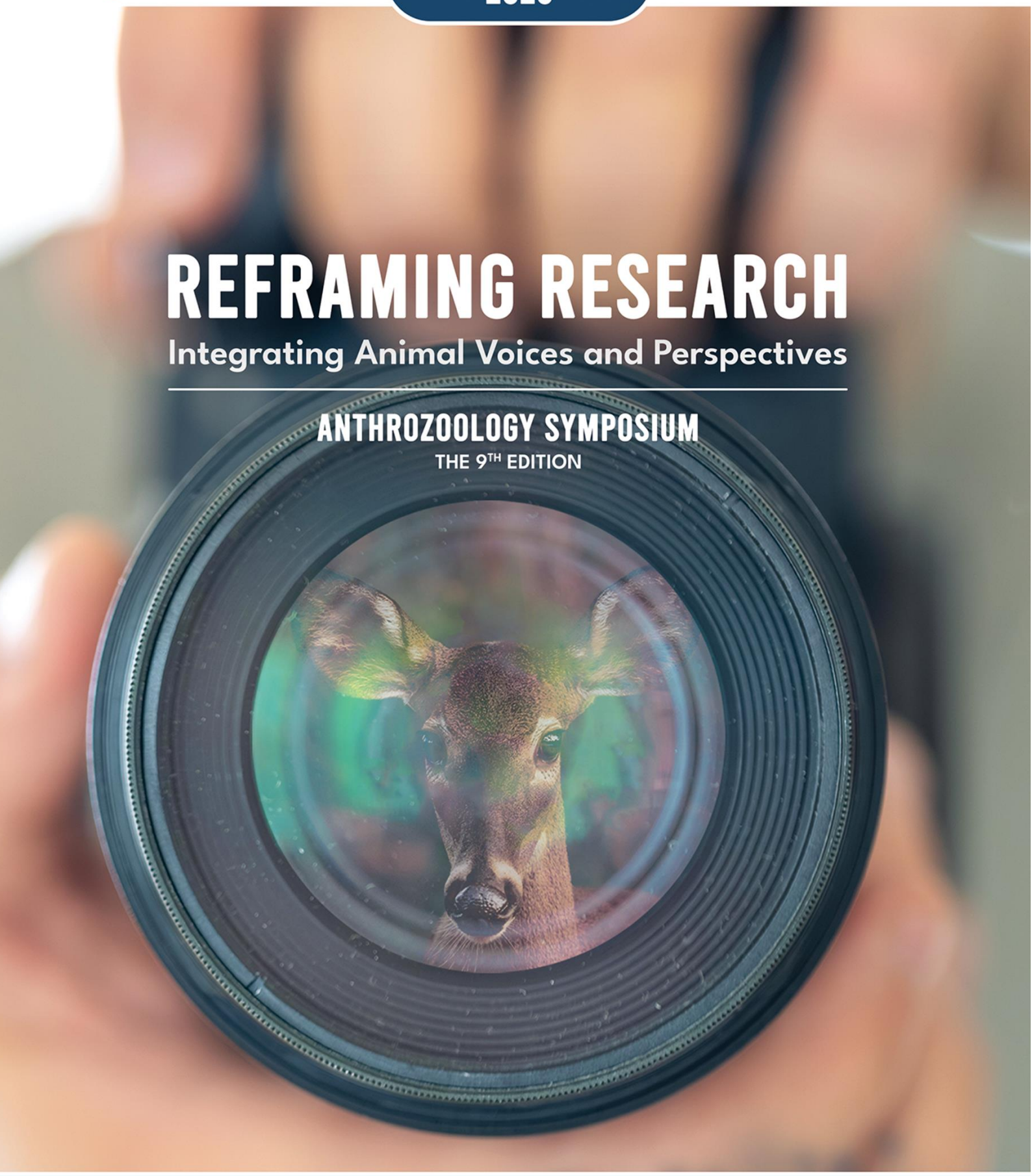
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REFRAMING RESEARCH

Integrating Animal Voices and Perspectives

ANTHROZOOLOGY SYMPOSIUM

THE 9TH EDITION



ORGANIZERS

- Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research (Romanian Academy, Iași Branch)
- Faculty of Animal Sciences and Biotechnology (University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca)
- Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (Iași University of Life Sciences Ion Ionescu de la Brad)
- AEDC Anthrozoology Education Dogs Canines
- TIES Interspecies Hub
- Moldavia's History Museum ("Moldova" National Museum Complex)

Anthrozoology Symposium

Ninth Edition – 5-7 November 2026 – Iași, Romania

https://anthrozoology.acad-is.ro/

Reframing Research: Integrating Animal Voices and Perspectives

Programme
&
Book of Abstracts

Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research,

Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine

"Ion Ionescu de la Brad" Iași University of Life Sciences

Faculty of Animal Science and Biotechnologies

University of Agricultural Studies and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca

History Museum of Moldavia, "Moldova" National Museum Complex

AEDC Anthrozoology Education Dogs Canines

TIES Interspecies Hub

Scientific committee

Dr. Irina Frasin, Scientific Researcher II, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Dr. George Bodi, Scientific Researcher II, Institute of Archaeology, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Dr. Alina Simona Rusu, Professor, University of Agricultural Studies and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

Dr. Codrin Dinu-Vasiliu, Scientific Researcher II, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Marco Adda, Invited Professor, University of Agricultural Studies and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca and AEDC Anthrozoology Education Dogs Canines

Dr. Aurora Hrițuleac, Associate Researcher, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Dr. Cătălina Daniela Răducu, Scientific Researcher I, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Dr. Liviu Adrian Măgurianu, Scientific Researcher III, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Dr. Luminița-Iuliana Ailincăi, Lecturer, "Ion Ionescu de la Brad" Iași University of Life Sciences

Dr. Luminița Bejenaru, **Professor**, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași and Olga Necrasov Center for Anthropological Research, Romanian Academy, Iaşi Branch

Dr. Senica Țurcanu, History Museum of the "Moldova" National Museum Complex

Dr. Lavinia Andreea Bejan, Scientific Researcher, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Dr. Ionuț-Alexandru Bârliba, Scientific Researcher III, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Organizing board

Dr. Irina Frasin, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

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Dr. Ionuț-Alexandru Bârliba, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

CONTENT

PROGRAMME..... 2

5th of NOVEMBER..... 3

6th of NOVEMBER..... 6

7th of NOVEMBER..... 9

ABSTRACTS 11

5th of NOVEMBER..... 12

6th of NOVEMBER..... 25

7th of NOVEMBER..... 40

PROGRAMME

5th of NOVEMBER

Welcome of the participants and opening of the Symposium
7:30 – 8:00 UTC / 9:30 – 10:00 EET

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION
8:00 – 9:00 UTC / 10:00 – 11:00 EET

Eva Meijer
When Cultures Meet: Learning with and About Other Animals Beyond Species

Eva Meijer is a philosopher, visual artist, writer and singer-songwriter. They wrote over twenty books, including novels, philosophical essays, academic texts, and poetry. Their work has been translated into over twenty languages. Recurring themes are language including silence, madness, nonhuman animals, and politics. Meijer also writes essays and columns for Dutch newspapers, and are a member of the Multispecies Collective, a multispecies art collective. Recent books in English include *Multispecies Assemblies* (Vine Press, 2025), *Multispecies Dialogues. Doing Philosophy with Animals, Children, the Sea and Others* (Amsterdam University Press, 2025) and the novel *Sea Now* (Pereine Press, 2025). www.evameijer.nl

Session chair: **Irina Frasin**

Break 9:00 – 9:15 UTC / 11:00 – 11:15 EET

SESSION 1
09:15 – 10:45 UTC / 11:15 – 12:45 EET

Joshua de Paiva
Interspecific Animal Aesthetics? Reframing the Philosophical Inquiry for Holding Continuity and Difference
Isabella Clarke
The Cuckoo's Challenge: Wild Ethics for Damaged/Damaging Worlds

Gordon Meade
De-extinction: Science-fact or Science-fiction

Session chair: **Ionuț Bârliba**

Break 10:45 – 11:00 UTC / 12:45 – 13:00 EET

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION
11:00 – 12:00 UTC / 13:00 – 14:00 EET

Corey Wrenn
Vegan Witchcraft

Dr Corey Wrenn is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Kent. She is the author of *A Rational Approach to Animal Rights* (Palgrave 2016), *Piecemeal Protest: Animal Rights in the Age of Nonprofits* (University of Michigan Press 2019), *Animals in Irish Society* (SUNY Press 2021), *Vegan Witchcraft* (Routledge 2026), and *Vegan Feminism* (Bloomsbury 2027). Dr Wrenn is the past Chair of the Animals and Society Section of the American Sociological Association, Research Advisor for The Vegan Society, Book Review Editor for the *Society & Animals* Journal, and the Co-Founder of the International Association of Vegan Sociologists.

Session chair: **Marco Adda**

Lunch break 12:00 – 13:00UTC / 14:00 – 15:00 EET

SESSION 2
13:00 – 15:00 UTC / 15:00 – 17:00 EET

Marius Dumitrescu
An Enigma on the Origin of Civilization: Domestication or Self-domestication
Milica Mitrović
Human–Animal Coevolution Through Interspecies Affective Dynamics
George Bodi, Loredana Solcan
Beyond Calories: Prehistoric Animal Taboos as Windows into Human–Animal Relationships
Jenna R. Rice
HAS & Diodorus: Understanding Ancient Texts with Modern Science

Session chair: **Isabella Clarke**

Break 15:00 – 15:15 UTC / 17:00 – 17:15 EET

SESSION 3

15:15 – 17:15 UTC / 17:15 – 19:15 EET

Stephanie Perkins

From Subjects to Stakeholders: Integrating Animal Perspectives in Animal-Assisted Services Research

Sarah M. Schlote

Animal PTSD: Adapting Diagnostic Criteria for Other Species

Ruthana Slob

Humans and Other Animals in the Realm of Applied Theatre

Laura Cardwell

Listening Through Touch: Somatic Support for Therapy Dogs in Animal-Assisted Interventions

Alina Simona Rusu

Voices in the Network: Agency, Safety, and Communication in Animal-Assisted Services

Session chair: **Florina Hica**

6th of NOVEMBER

SESSION 4 (Mixed session)
08:00 – 10:00 UTC / 10:00 – 12:00 EET

Flash presentations (08:00 – 08:30 UTC / 10:00 – 10:30 EET)

Petrean Adina-Dumitrita
Reciprocal Behavioural Modulation in Child–Rescued Animal Interactions: A Naturalistic Case Study
Olivia Pamfil
Dogilibrium: Exploring the Dog as a Relational Mirror and Active Participant in Human Personal Development
Marco Adda
Zoosomatics: Double Perspective and Animal Resonance

João Miguel Alves Ferreira; Sergii Tukaiev
The Nihilist Penguin: Viral Animality, Anthropomorphic Projection, and Burnout Narratives in the Digital Age
Mare Kõiva
The Siuru Bird and the Blue Bird in Mythology and Nature
Aditi Basu
Anthropocentrism Versus Animal Sovereignty: A Critical Analysis of "Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron"

Session chair: **Lavinia Bejan**

Break 10:00 – 10:15 UTC / 12:00 – 12:15 EET

SESSION 5
10:15 – 11:45UTC / 12:15 – 13:45 EET

Marcin Urbaniak
Reframing Research on Animal Emotions: The Question of Animal Jealousy
Florina Ileana Hica, Alina S. Rusu, Ionel Papuc
Cannibalism Beyond Species: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of How Animals Become Companions or Cuisine

Luigi Sacchettino, Susanne Garzillo, Luca Esposito, Viviana Orsola Giuliano, Vincenza Panico, Alina Simona Rusu, Rosaria Ponticiello, Alice Nese, Natascia Rizzo, Giuseppe Nese, Francesco Napolitano, Danila d'Angelo
Integrated Canine-Assisted Services and Art Therapy in Prison: Pilot Study of Animal Well-Being Aspects

Session chair: **Aurora Hrițuleac**

Lunch break 11:45 – 13:00 UTC / 13:45 – 15:00 EET

SESSION 6
13:00 – 14:30 UTC / 15:00 – 16:30 EET

Anna E. Holloway, Michael A. Kisley
Human Understanding of Animal Emotions Predicts Likelihood to Use Corrective Strategies Following Defensive Behaviors from Cats and Dogs
Sarah May Lindsay, Abe Oudshoorn
Who Cares? Identifying the Homeless Companion Animal Care Sector (HCACS) in Ontario, Canada
María Francisca Tapia Thenoux
Animals and the Law in Latin America: A Comparative Study of the Legal Framework for Animals Across Ten Jurisdictions

Session chair: **Kris Hill**

Break 14:30 – 14:45 UTC / 16:30 – 16:45 EET

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION
14:45 – 15:45 UTC / 16:45 – 17:45 EET

Sarah M. Schlote
Trauma and Anthropocentrism: Reclaiming Our Animal Selves

Sarah Schlote, MA, RP, CCC, SEP is Registered Psychotherapist, Canadian Certified Counsellor, and Somatic Experiencing® Practitioner. Her master's degree in counselling psychology is supplemented by fifteen years of training, clinical experience, teaching, and consulting focused on complex trauma and attachment difficulties in humans and other species, comparative psychology, psychophysiology, ethology, interspecies neurobiology, and intersectionality. She is the founder of EQUUSOMA® Horse-Human Trauma

Recovery, a rigorous training program looking at interspecies trauma resolution in multiple personal and professional contexts, offered with licensing permission from Somatic Experiencing® International.

Session chair: **Cătălina Răducu**

Break 15:45 – 16:00 UTC / 17:45 – 18:00 EET

SESSION 7 (Mixed session)
16:00 – 16:50 UTC / 18:00 - 18:50 EET

Flash presentations (16:00 – 16:20 UTC / 18:00 – 18:20 EET)

Isabel Melton, Michael Kisley
Do Companion Animals Reciprocate Love? Beliefs and Attachment in Human–Pet Bonds
Liviu Adrian Măgurianu, Daniel-Oliver Măgurianu
Subjective Experience in Insects: Current Evidence and Theoretical Perspectives

Avantika Mathur
From Subjects to Partners: Toward a Multispecies Participatory Research Approach Through Intuitive Interspecies Communication

Session chair: **Cătălina Răducu**

Break 16:50 – 17:00 UTC / 18:50 – 19:00 EET

ROUND TABLE 17:00 – 18:00 UTC / 19:00 – 20:00 EET
Exploring Intuitive Interspecies Communication as Practice and Method to Connect with Animal Perspectives (coordinator: **Malena Mogwitz**)

7th of NOVEMBER

SESSION 8
08:00 – 10:00 UTC / 10:00 – 12:00 EET

Irina Frasin, Sarah Oxley Heaney
Co-produced Multispecies Healthcare Epistemology: Feline Appeals, Consent and Interspecies Response
Therese Lilliesköld
Animals Acting as Individuals: Resisting the Methods of Measurement
Surabhi Baijal
Caring Without Infrastructure: Multispecies Care Labour in a Toxic City
Kris Hill, Michelle Szydlowski, Sarah Oxley Heaney
Shared Space and Place: Community Cats & Emerging Humanocat Cultures in Sauraha, Nepal

Session chair: **Milica Mitrović**

Break 10:00 – 10:15 UTC / 12:00 – 12:15 EET

SESSION 8 – Flash presentations
10:15 – 11:30 UTC / 12:15 – 13:30 EET

Vanessa Della Libera
Rocky's Case Study: Where Vulnerability and Independence Meet on the Streets of Sri Lanka
Ada Rus
Self-Medication in Wild and Domestic Animals
Mărtinaș Cosmin
Aesop's Archetypes of Animals in Animated Films
Aurora Hrițuleac
Monetizing Animal Abuse. Petfluencers, Platforms, Advertising, and Corporate Greed
Emilia-Miruna Boitos
The Impact of the Eurasian Beaver (Castor fiber) on Biodiversity and Human–Wildlife Interactions
Madalina Mincu-Iorga, Marinela Enculescu, Stelian Sertu, Daniel Radeanu, Dinu Gavojdian
TransformDairyNet project: Piloting Cow-Calf Contact Under Tie-stall Dairy Systems in Romania

Cătălina Răducu
Shared Companionship and Interspecies Care: An Empirically Grounded Case for Minimal Moral Empathy
Lavinia Bejan
Animals in Courts – A Paradigm Shift?

Session chair: **George Bodi**

11:30 – 11:45 UTC / 13:30 – 13:45 EET
Closing of the Symposium

ABSTRACTS

When Cultures Meet: Learning With and About Other Animals Beyond Species

(Keynote speaker)

Dr. Eva Meijer, University of Amsterdam

Humans in academia and public discourse often overestimate the importance of species membership. Like race, species is a human cultural construction presented as natural, and one that functions to oppress other-than-human animals and deem them inferior. In this paper I argue that animals (including humans) are not stuck in their species-specific Umwelts, but actively co-create life-worlds, landscapes, and cultural practices with others, such as their neighbors. Focusing on cultural expressions (like language, art, tradition and norms) instead of species membership brings out the agency of nonhumans in shared multispecies communities and can reformulate relations between communities. To further conceptualize a non-anthropocentric view of culture I draw on Donaldson and Kymlicka's (2025) ontology of overlapping political and social more-than-human communities, and I discuss several examples of cultural practices in which human communities interact with nonhuman communities (street dogs in Valparaiso, kittiwakes in Tromsø and nonhuman animal art). I argue attention for nonhuman and shared multispecies cultures leads to better research and can help humans learn to live better with other animals on shared land.

Keywords: animal cultures, animal politics, animal research, multispecies communities

Eva Meijer is a philosopher, visual artist, writer and singer-songwriter. They wrote over twenty books, including novels, philosophical essays, academic texts, and poetry. Their work has been translated into over twenty languages. Recurring themes are language including silence, madness, nonhuman animals, and politics. Meijer also writes essays and columns for Dutch newspapers, and are a member of the Multispecies Collective, a multispecies art collective. Recent books in English include *Multispecies Assemblies* (Vine Press, 2025), *Multispecies Dialogues. Doing Philosophy with Animals, Children, the Sea and Others* (Amsterdam University Press, 2025) and the novel *Sea Now* (Pereine Press, 2025). www.evameijer.nl

Interspecific Animal Aesthetics? Reframing the Philosophical Inquiry for Holding Continuity and Difference

Joshua de Paiva, Université Grenoble Alpes and Sorbonne Université

The question of whether non-human animals possess artistic and/or aesthetic capacities is both compelling and, in many respects, aporetic within our modern Western cultural context. Yet engaging with it illuminates how our inherited philosophical definitions of art and aesthetics – as debated as they may be even when it comes to humans alone – are deeply anthropocentric, making these domains paradigmatic markers of alleged human exceptionality (Schaeffer 2007): on the side of culture, interiority and intentionality, as opposed to the realm of nature defined by merely material and mechanical laws (Descola 2005). This is why both philosophy and the life sciences have shown such strong resistance to attributing aesthetic and artistic sense to non-humans: to do so would always seem to grant them too much – namely forms of interiority that have been traditionally defined as distinctively, supremely and exclusively human (intentions, disinterestedness, non-pragmatic behaviours). But even granting them such interiority, we would never have any real access to the lived experience of other species (Nagel 1974), that is in this case, to what kind of intentions actually guide their apparently creative behaviour, or what they feel when attending to a conspecific's mating display, a colourful flower, or a sunset.

Rather than remaining trapped in these aporias, I propose to start by reframing the question of the beauty of living forms from our perspective – what we appreciate as beautiful in animal appearances. Not only is this what we actually have access to, but it is most likely what prompts us to wonder about other animal aesthetic capacities in the first place. Why such beauty if not to be seen and appreciated by others? Thinking of the human as a living animal who shares an eco-evolutionary history with all other species might allow us to sidestep a priori unresolvable questions while remaining open to non-human aesthetic behaviours, beyond exceptionalist prejudice.

To think through the potential singularity of our experience of living beauty, I return to a generally overlooked Kantian insight. Living beings are Kant's preferred examples of "free" natural beauty (1790); yet he remained somehow trapped in a double analogy between art and organism, while acknowledging that judging the organism by analogy with art says "far too little" about a being that is both organised and self-organising – there is an "inscrutable property" animating it from within that eludes this framework. But what if Kant had written after Darwin (1859)?

Evolutionary theory and non-reductionist perspectives in contemporary life sciences allow us to think the agency of organisms beyond the opposition between natural necessity and human intentionality.

I propose to consider how living forms are shaped through inter-attentional relations over evolutionary time – their appearances having been partly selected through how they have, or have not, appeared to others as meaningful. This is particularly striking in the case of "secondary sexual characteristics" (Darwin 1871) – the peacock's tail is the canonical example. If peahens are partly guided by some kind of aesthetic taste when preferring one male over another – as Darwin himself suggested – could our own appreciation result from a harmony of taste with the many females who, across countless generations, paid more attention to this arrangement of colour and shape? The systematic resistance to the hypothesis of non-human aesthetic sense throughout the 20th century itself reveals the depth of our anthropocentric and exceptionalist biases. Broadening the inquiry: flowers designed by pollinator attention, birdsong composed because it was heard and deemed significant by mates or neighbours, a nudibranch's aposematic colours painted by predator perception, swift flight shaped by the atmospheric milieu – all suggest that living beauty is relational, dynamic, and irreducible to formal appearance alone.

My working hypothesis is that our sense of the beauty of living forms may be linked to an intuitive understanding of their temporal and relational "depth" – their forms appearing to us as expressive indices, not of artistic intentionality, but of the countless agencies that have shaped them through intra- and inter-specific attentional relations: incorporated "alter-attentionalities", diversified ways of attending and responding to what matters in the world, embodied perspectives different from our own. Pursuing these questions may help us think living beauty without a creator, and an aesthetic subject not as an exceptional human mind, but as a situated, embodied, and evolutionarily embedded living perspective among a myriad of others – a reframing that calls, methodologically, for forms of inquiry that are themselves situated and open to the non-human perspectives they seek to understand.

Keywords: non-humans; animal aesthetics; artistic / aesthetic sense; attentionality; ethology; philosophy of evolution; philosophical aesthetics; intra- and inter-specific relationality

The Cuckoo's Challenge: Wild Ethics for Damaged/Damaging Worlds

Isabella Clarke, Independent researcher

The common cuckoo (Cuculus canorus) is often cast as a figure of deception: a bird who lays her eggs in the nests of others, leaving her young to displace their hosts' offspring. This paper argues that such interpretations are not neutral descriptions but patterned moral framings that foreground certain aspects of cuckoo life while obscuring others. Bringing together animal ethics and multispecies environmental humanities, it uses cuckoo–host relations to explore the limits of ethical frameworks that reduce ecological entanglement to isolated scenes of harm. Reading brood parasitism diffractively through wider avian, insect, and plant lifeways, the paper does not deny that eggs are ejected and chicks perish, but asks how acts of description shape what comes to matter ethically. Drawing on Donna Haraway, Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, Vinciane Despret, and other multispecies thinkers, it shows how beings emerge within uneven relations of dependence in which harm and flourishing are distributed across overlapping ecological worlds. Rather than treating the cuckoo as a moral exception or ecological villain, the paper situates brood parasitism within broader processes of ecological interdependence, including declining insect populations, habitat fragmentation, migratory vulnerability, and multispecies forms of care. In doing so, it challenges anthropocentric assumptions about parenthood, innocence, responsibility, and ethical judgement. Rather than proposing a new ethical rule or solution, the paper develops a "wild ethics": an approach that stays with ecological complexity without collapsing into either condemnation or justification. In conversation with cuckoos, it calls for openness to forms of life and relation that unfold beyond human expectations and moral certainties.

Keywords: cuckoo, brood parasitism, multispecies ethics, distributed care, environmental humanities

De-extinction: Science-fact or Science-fiction

Gordon Meade, University of Dundee

It is my intention to read a number of poems from my most recent work in progress; a collection of poems entitled The Resurrectionists which looks at De-extinction, initially from the perspective of a number of non-human animals, both extinct and endangered, and in the closing section of the collection extends that area

to include what may or may not be a fictional expansion of the work of The Resurrectionists regarding humans

Keywords: extinction, de-extinction, non-human Animals, humans, poetry

Vegan Witchcraft

(Keynote speaker)

Dr Corey Wrenn, University of Kent

Witchcraft is a pagan practice that encompasses numerous variations and affiliations (both religious and non-religious), most of which are attuned to nature, glorify femininity, and ascribe to some degree of humanism. Witchcraft makes the personal political: it demands the practitioner recognize how their actions are linked to the wider wellbeing of the world. In practice, however, witchcraft systematically fails to realize this responsibility to the self, society, and even nature.

Witchcraft today is marked by a very particular paradox. On one hand, it seeks to legitimate nature-based spirituality and the divine feminine. Seasonal and weather changes, moon phases, water patterns, nonhuman animals, and even unseen mythological creatures of the wild such as faeries the Green Man are recognized and revered. Adherents (many of whom are women) are encouraged to acknowledge the power within themselves as an extension of these natural forces, a power long denied by institutions of patriarchy. On the other hand, the sentient inhabitants of witchcraft's sanctified nature are often objectified or even harmed and killed in religious and secular practices. Many tools and rituals call for bones, feathers, bees' wax, or flesh procured from supermarkets or "hunting," for instance. And, while ritual sacrifice is a thing of the past, major holiday observances and recipes regularly advise the use of animal's "meat," breastmilk, or eggs. Witchcraft may celebrate feminine power, care, and connection but it also makes space for patriarchal power with its frequently oppressive, nonvegan relationships with other animals.

Perhaps the most foundational of all ethics in modern witchcraft is the creed: "Do no harm." How might this philosophy be expanded to include other species? The multispecies suffering that persists in nonvegan witchcraft is, from a vegan feminist, religious studies, critical animal studies, and even social movement studies perspective, theoretically intriguing. What shared historical conditions might account for contemporary manifestations of veganism and witchcraft? How have the two intersected? Why have they failed to collaborate and coevolve, and what could

be gained by embracing an alliance? Vegan Witchcraft examines the role of nonhuman animals and veganism in modern witchcraft from a Critical Animal Studies perspective with the aim of illuminating inequalities that persist in alternative spiritual practices in the West. Vegan witchcraft recognizes nonhuman animals as persons and rejects the harm that nonvegan social institutions impose on nature, humans, and other animals. Vegan witchcraft sees witchery as a powerful conduit for social change that draws its energy from plant-based foods, multispecies solidarity, and feminine power. It charges that the witch's path could and should be directed toward a just world, and that world can be manifested without the symbolic or material exploitation of nonhuman animals.

Keywords: witchcraft, ecofeminism, veganism, animal ethics, feminist spirituality

Dr Corey Wrenn is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Kent. She is the author of *A Rational Approach to Animal Rights* (Palgrave 2016), *Piecemeal Protest: Animal Rights in the Age of Nonprofits* (University of Michigan Press 2019), *Animals in Irish Society* (SUNY Press 2021), *Vegan Witchcraft* (Routledge 2026), and *Vegan Feminism* (Bloomsbury 2027). Dr Wrenn is the past Chair of the Animals and Society Section of the American Sociological Association, Research Advisor for The Vegan Society, Book Review Editor for the *Society & Animals* Journal, and the Co-Founder of the International Association of Vegan Sociologists.

An Enigma on the Origin of Civilization: Domestication or Self-domestication

Marius Dumitrescu, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași

In this paper, we aim to present the elements underlying the phenomenon of domestication through which a unique trans-species bond is established between humans and animals.

Firstly, we will show that through domestication, a wild animal is accustomed to living alongside humans, thus opening the door to interpreting this extremely complex phenomenon through which the primary instincts of animals have been altered by living together in a common perimeter with humans. The word "domestic" attached to an animal (horse, dog, cat) defines its quality of being linked to the owner's home, household and family. Therefore, domestication of an animal

means, in fact, a taming of a species. In this aspect of human-animal common coexistence is found the origin of civilization.

In the case of animals, they become domesticated when their aggressive instinct, which ensures their survival in the wild, is amputated. The domesticated animal accepts the human program by taming itself, becoming somewhat like humans. Through domestication, animals acquire a second nature, which annihilates the first, the wild, aggressive one.

Secondly, we will show that the keystone of domestication is assent, the fact that different beings, taken under the authority of the same "domus", become capable of organizing themselves in a society, of understanding certain social terms and behaviors in the same way, and thus of being able to achieve a "society".

Finally, we will show that the unification of language becomes an essential factor in achieving assent for certain behaviors that allow the domestication of species.

Keywords: domestic, assent, trans-species, language, second nature

Human–Animal Coevolution Through Interspecies Affective Dynamics

Milica Mitrović, University of Belgrade

Human–animal relationships are usually explained through hunting, domestication, subsistence, and adaptation to the environment. Although these approaches have greatly improved our understanding of the past, they often pay less attention to the emotional side of these relationships. Here, I present the idea of interspecies affective dynamics as a potential framework to understand how long-term interactions between humans and animals may have influenced the development of both.

The main idea is that emotions and affect were not only human experiences but were also shaped through everyday encounters with animals. Feelings such as trust, fear, attachment, curiosity, or caution may have affected the way people hunted, cared for, or lived alongside animals. At the same time, animals also changed their behaviour through repeated contact with humans, creating long-term patterns of mutual adaptation.

This study incorporates concepts from the archaeology of emotions, affect theory, and contemporary perspectives on animal agency to argue that archaeological remains represent more than just indicators of economic behavior. It

may also reflect long-lasting affective relationships between humans and animals. If we look at these relationships from an emotional perspective, we can obtain new insights into human–animal coevolution and recognize animals as active participants in the past.

Rather than offering definitive answers, here I propose a conceptual framework that could broaden archaeological interpretations of human–animal relationships.

Keywords: human–animal coevolution, interspecies dynamics, archaeology of emotions, animal agency, affect theory

Beyond Calories: Prehistoric Animal Taboos as Windows into Human–Animal Relationships

George Bodi, Institute of Archaeology, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Loredana Solcan, Moldavia's History Museum, "Moldova" National Museum Complex

Animal taboos are not merely dietary prohibitions, but profound relational statements through which past communities negotiated the fluid boundaries between human and other-than-human persons. They reveal how past communities met animals as kin, prey, unclean, sacred, or dangerous, and how they negotiated the shifting boundaries between human and non-human worlds. Zooarchaeology offers a uniquely material route into these relationships, though taboos are difficult to identify because the absence, or extreme rarity, of a species can also result from environmental availability, recovery bias, or taphonomic loss. Animal remains are not passive refuse but the material endpoints of socially and cosmologically governed pathways. Taboos, in this light, become windows into a prehistoric world where humans and animals existed in a state of mutual becoming, co-shaping the landscape, the social order, and the very definition of what it means to be alive.

Based on archaeozoological evidence related to the Cucuteni - Trypillia world, this presentation will reframe human–animal relationships as windows into prehistoric ontological worlds, where human–animal boundaries were permeable, and negotiated through careful avoidance, respect, and restraint.

Keywords: social zooarchaeology, taboo, relational ontologies, human–animal entanglement, prehistoric ritual, other-than-human persons

HAS & Diodorus: Understanding Ancient Texts with Modern Science

Jenna R. Rice, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Elephas Maximus Indicus, or the Indian elephant, was the first species of elephant introduced into Macedonian phalangite combat following Alexander the Great's invasion of the Punjab in 326 BCE. This animal remained a core part of both the Ptolemaic and Seleucid armies through the second century bce and was utilized by shorter-lived dynasts like Pyrrhus of Epirus as well. Among the limited ancient record of elephants' role in battle, the most detailed comes from Diodorus Siculus, who tends to attribute victory to the elephants by default. In this paper, I will demonstrate how the use of human-animal studies (HAS) can shed new light on the records of Diodorus and reveal the many weaknesses of elephants in the context of Macedonian phalangite warfare.

HAS straddles the sciences and the humanities in order to understand interactions between humans and animals in the past. Relying on the work of zoologist Raman Sukumar, Fowler et al., and Csuti et al., I will define four particular weakness of elephants in battle that are a product of their biology and behavior. Most of these weaknesses were clearly understood by the generals deploying them, but are not well defined or even noticed by Diodorus, obscuring their assumed impact on the battle in extant records. In particular, the paper will examine ancient armies' abuse of knowledge regarding (1) the weakness of elephant feet, undermined in siege and battle by caltrops (charakes); (2) the herding tendencies of the species and (3) unique infrasonic communication methods often contributed to the elephants' ability to organize a mass retreat, much to the surprise of their supporting regiments. Finally, (4) the unusually extended calf dependency period of sexually immature elephants will also be examined in the case of Pyrrhus' invasion of Italy (280-275 bce).

Keywords: ancient historiography, war elephants, ancient Greece, ancient Macedonia, Diodorus Siculus, elephant medicine

From Subjects to Stakeholders: Integrating Animal Perspectives in Animal-Assisted Services Research

Stephanie Perkins, Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, Inc.

Animal-Assisted Services (AAS) research has traditionally focused on human outcomes, measuring the benefits of animal involvement for patients, clients, students, and communities. While this work has contributed substantially to the

field, it often leaves unexamined the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of the animals themselves. As calls grow across disciplines to recognize nonhuman animals as sentient, communicative beings, researchers must reconsider how animal perspectives can be meaningfully incorporated into both research and practice.

Drawing on the development and oversight of a large healthcare-based Animal-Assisted Services program, this presentation explores practical and conceptual approaches to integrating animal voices into AAS research. Through attention to behavioral communication, choice, preference, engagement, and withdrawal, animals can be understood not merely as intervention components but as active participants whose experiences shape therapeutic interactions. Such an approach challenges anthropocentric models of research and invites a more reciprocal understanding of human-animal relationships.

Situated within emerging conversations in multispecies anthropology, animal studies, and welfare science, this presentation examines how researchers might recognize and interpret animal expressions of agency while remaining attentive to the methodological challenges of representing nonhuman perspectives. Rather than asking only what animals do for humans, I propose that AAS research should also investigate what animals communicate about the conditions under which interspecies interactions are meaningful, beneficial, or burdensome.

Keywords: Animal-Assisted Services (AAS), animal agency, animal perspectives, human-animal relationships, animal consciousness

Animal PTSD: Adapting Diagnostic Criteria for Other Species

Sarah M. Schlote, EQUUSOMA® Horse-Human Trauma Recovery

The discussion of whether other species besides humans can experience trauma, depression, anxiety, OCD, and other mental health challenges is a passionate one, fraught with complexity. While the broader issues concerning the psychiatric paradigm, the pathology-based disease model, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) are beyond the scope of this presentation, what is of interest is the question of how human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism influence the split between human medical and animal veterinary diagnostic categories. Of note is the double standard whereby animal models are used to develop diagnostic criteria for human mental health conditions, which in turn are either not applied to the animals that they were derived from or minimized as “PTSD-like”, “depression-like”, etc. While human

mental health diagnoses can be associated with stigma and judgment, especially when the underlying adverse conditions and trauma are not acknowledged or addressed, the lack of diagnostic recognition of similar challenges in other species can result in equally problematic issues. A review of the literature, considerations for adapting diagnostic criteria, examples of proposed adaptations using equines as an example, and the value of the (as of yet) unadopted diagnosis of Developmental Trauma Disorder for other species will be discussed.

Keywords: anthropocentrism, human exceptionalism, trauma, DSM, ICD, diagnosis, PTSD, Complex PTSD, animal models, diagnostic criteria

Humans and Other Animals in the Realm of Applied Theatre

Ruthana Slob, University of Victoria and Nest of Kin

The way in which animals are represented in society has a direct impact on how humans understand and treat animals. In many Euro-Western societies, animals have long been portrayed from a human viewpoint: from non-sensical to inferior, from an anthropocentric lens to an anthropomorphised angle, raising different ethical questions. Applied Theatre (AT), as an art form that is explicitly developed to bring about social change, can play a role in exploring these ethical questions. Although we might never know what it is really like to be a bat, wolf, shrimp, snail or other animal, AT can help us explore, imagine, embody and potentially care for these other animals. AT, I argue, can support the development of compassion and a relational ecological identity in humans as well as promote agency for and ethical guidance around animals. Its creative framework can disrupt and challenge; it offers a chance to gain insight into other ways of being in the world, especially into those who do not speak a human language.

This (interactive) presentation will look at applied theatre as a way to explore the world beyond-human; beyond individual identity and instead focus on ways to develop a relational ecological identity and an awareness for the interconnectedness between humans, other animals and nature.

Keywords: applied theatre, animal studies, ecopsychology, imagination, embodiment, compassion

Supporting the Dogs Who Support Us: A Preventative Approach to Canine Wellness and Human–Dog Connection

Laura Cardwell, 4CanineCare, Birmingham, Alabama

Dogs enrich human lives in countless ways through companionship, assistance, emotional support, and shared experiences. While humans often focus on what dogs do for us, less attention is given to the physical experiences of dogs themselves and the everyday practices that contribute to their comfort, mobility, and well-being.

This presentation explores a preventative approach to canine wellness that encourages greater awareness of the dog's body and lived experience. Drawing from canine anatomy, bodywork, and movement principles, participants will be introduced to practical considerations that influence canine comfort and quality of life. Topics include body condition, harness and collar fit, nail length, movement, muscular health, and the role of intentional touch in supporting physical well-being.

The presentation invites participants to consider how greater awareness of the canine body can deepen understanding, strengthen the human-dog relationship, and foster more thoughtful care. By viewing dogs as active participants in their relationships with humans, attendees will be encouraged to recognize the importance of supporting canine wellness not only when problems arise, but through everyday observation, prevention, and compassionate attention.

Through this lens, canine well-being becomes an essential part of honoring the animals who share their lives and work alongside us.

Keywords: somatic support, Animal Assisted Services (AAS)

Voices in the Network: Agency, Safety, and Communication in Animal-Assisted Services

Alina Simona Rusu, Human-Animal Interaction Research Lab, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca

The inclusion of animals in therapeutic contexts is often explained from a human centered perspective, such as triangle or diamond models, with little attention paid to the dynamic of the interspecific social network(s) and the variety of sensorial modalities involved in the communication process. Also, the voices of animals in relation to their well-being is usually considered in the direction of risk prevention in connection to the human actors, particularly the beneficiaries. However, the analysis of the recent literature indicates the emergence of explanatory

models in the field of multispecies interactions, such as the Interdisciplinary Model of Human-Animal Interactions (Leconstant & Spitz, 2022), the Interspecies Relational theory (Kieson, 2025) and the multidimensional model of animal consciousness (Birch, Schnell, & Clayton, 2020). The aim of this presentation is to connect these models in the direction of a developing a conceptual framework regarding the multispecies communication process in the context of animal-assisted services. This framework will address the importance of focusing on the perceived affordances by both animals and humans involved in communication, that allow the building of physical and psychological safety.

Keywords: multispecies communication, social networks, psychological safety, animal assisted services

Reciprocal Behavioural Modulation in Child–Rescued Animal Interactions: A Naturalistic Case Study

Petrean Adina Dumitrita, USAMV Cluj-Napoca

The paper investigates the impact of interactions between children and rescued dogs on both children's socio-emotional development and the behavioral responses of the animals within the activities organised by the Association "Dumbrava lui Patrocle". The study used a mixed-methods approach combining questionnaires completed by children, parents, and teachers with behavioural observations and video analysis of child–dog interactions. The findings suggest that participation in activities involving rescued animals may support the development of empathy, responsibility, emotional sensitivity, and prosocial behaviour in children, while many dogs displayed signs of increased sociability, relaxation, affiliative behaviour, and positive engagement during interactions with children. However, the effects varied between participants and animals and were influenced by multiple external factors, including previous experiences, individual temperament, and environmental context. The study is exploratory in nature and limited by the relatively small sample size, reliance on self-reported data, and the absence of objective clinical or physiological assessments. Nevertheless, the research highlights the reciprocal emotional and behavioural value of human–animal interactions and contributes to the growing field of human–animal interaction research.

Keywords: human–animal interaction, rescued dogs, children, empathy, socio-emotional development, behavioral observation

Dogilibrium: Exploring the Dog as a Relational Mirror and Active Participant in Human Personal Development

Olivia Pamfil, USAMV Cluj-Napoca

Human–animal interaction research has traditionally focused on the benefits that companion animals provide to humans, often positioning animals as passive recipients of care or as therapeutic tools. Recent developments in anthrozoology, however, emphasize the importance of recognizing animals as active participants with agency within human–animal relationships.

This paper introduces Dogilibrium, a novel dog-mediated personal development method based on the premise that dogs not only influence human well-being but also provide meaningful feedback regarding human emotional states, behavioral patterns, and relational dynamics. The method conceptualizes the dog as both a relational mirror and an active participant in the process of self-awareness and personal growth.

Dogilibrium combines principles from ethology, human–animal interaction, experiential learning, emotional regulation, and reflective practice. Through structured exercises involving participants and their own dogs, the method encourages individuals to observe how their emotions, communication styles, consistency, frustration tolerance, and self-regulation affect canine behavior. Simultaneously, dogs are viewed as expressing preferences, responses, and adaptations that provide valuable information about the interaction itself.

The paper presents the theoretical foundations of the method together with preliminary exploratory findings from a mixed-methods study conducted as part of a master's research project in Ethology and Human–Animal Interaction. Data sources include an online survey of dog owners, focus groups, participant self-reflection exercises, and structured behavioral observations of both humans and dogs during interaction tasks.

By reframing the dog from a passive beneficiary of human actions to an active contributor to the learning process, Dogilibrium offers a novel perspective on personal development and human–dog relationships. The method contributes to ongoing discussions regarding animal agency, interspecies communication, and the integration of animal perspectives into research and practice. It further suggests that meaningful personal change may emerge not only from reflecting on oneself, but also from attending to the behavioral feedback continuously provided by a non-human social partner.

Keywords: anthrozoology, human–dog relationship, animal agency, personal development, emotional regulation, dog-mediated intervention, human–animal interaction, interspecies communication

Zoosomatics: Double Perspective and Animal Resonance

Marco Adda, Human-Animal Interaction Research Lab, Faculty of Animal Science and Biotechnologies, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca and AEDC Anthrozoology Education Dogs Canines

Can humans engage with animal perspectives without claiming direct access to nonhuman experience? The project presents an embodied and post-anthropocentric way of engaging with human animal–nonhuman animal relations based on the notion of the double perspective. This type of experience, fundamental for the study of zoosomatics, helps practitioners develop a relational way of perception wherein the practitioner is anchored in his or her subjective body while at the same time being open to the animal beings and working with them in behaviorally aware, emotionally coherent, and ecologically mindful ways.

Through movement practices, somatic engagement, imaginative thinking, and engagement with the lifeworlds of other species, zoosomatics can be seen as an embodied method for examining interspecies perception. The framework intersects phenomenology, enactivism, ecological psychology and biosemiotics, including animals' perspectives and modes of being into research. It offers an embodied experience of ecological consciousness and animal ethics.

Keywords: zoosomatics, anthrozoology, post-anthropocentrism, animal perspectives, embodiment, perception

The Nihilist Penguin: Viral Animality, Anthropomorphic Projection, and Burnout Narratives in the Digital Age

João Miguel Alves Ferreira, Sergii Tukaiev, University of Coimbra

In early 2026, a short clip from Encounters at the End of the World resurfaced and went viral on TikTok, portraying a solitary penguin deviating from its colony and walking toward an apparently fatal trajectory. Popularly reframed online as the "nihilist penguin," the clip rapidly became a meme through which users projected existential despair, absurdity, and, notably, burnout. This paper develops a narrative review that situates this viral phenomenon at the intersection of anthrozoology, digital culture, and affect theory, interrogating how animal representations are mobilized to articulate human psychological states. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature on anthropomorphism, interspecies empathy, and media virality, the review examines how Herzog's framing—already imbued with philosophical narration—facilitates the reinterpretation of the penguin as a figure of existential

resistance or collapse. The analysis then traces how social media users appropriate this image to narrativize contemporary experiences of exhaustion, alienation, and meaninglessness associated with late-capitalist burnout. In doing so, the penguin becomes less an animal subject and more a symbolic vessel for human affect, raising critical questions about the erasure of animal agency. Engaging with the call to integrate animal voices and perspectives, this paper problematizes the epistemic limits of such projections. While the meme fosters widespread empathy toward non-human life, it simultaneously reinscribes anthropocentric frameworks by subordinating animal experience to human emotional discourse. The "nihilist penguin" thus exemplifies the tension between visibility and misrepresentation in animal-focused research and media. Ultimately, this review argues that viral animal imagery offers a productive yet ethically ambivalent site for examining how human psychological crises are externalized through interspecies narratives. By critically reframing this case, the paper advocates for methodologies that acknowledge both the cultural productivity of anthropomorphic storytelling and the need to decenter the human in interpreting animal lives.

Keywords: anthrozoology, anthropomorphism, burnout, digital culture, viral media, interspecies empathy, animal representation, affect theory, social media, nihilism, TikTok culture, animal agency

The Siuru Bird and the Blue Bird in Mythology and Nature

Mare Kõiva, ELM, Tartu

The Siuru bird is a mythical creature in the Estonian national epic Kalevipoeg, where it appears in Song 19—a section that brings together several widely recognized symbolic motifs, including the tale of the book of wisdom. The Blue Bird, by contrast, can be traced back to the oldest layers of folk songs and belief traditions. It gained particular prominence in the 20th century, when a literary youth movement adopted the name Siuru, and it has since remained influential in modern music and song.

Today, the Blue Bird has come to symbolize something unattainable—an unfulfilled dream, a deep longing, or a distant hope. In this study, I explore the meanings and associations of the Blue Bird in belief systems and concepts of the soul, while also seeking parallels in broader mythological traditions. I further consider which real Estonian bird might have served as a model for the Siuru: the European roller, the kingfisher, the blue tit, the swallow, or perhaps a creature belonging to the realm of mythical birds.

Keywords: mythical bird, blue bird in folklore, birds in folk ornithology, symbol

Anthropocentrism Versus Animal Sovereignty: A Critical Analysis of "Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron"

Aditi Basu, Independent researcher

The persistent human-animal dichotomy is a highly debated issue in social sciences since traditional anthropocentric frameworks consider humans at a higher position than non-human animals in the social hierarchical structure, where the latter are inherently subjugated and viewed primarily in terms of their utility to the human race. Additionally, modern approaches to animal sovereignty consider nonhuman animals as possessing human-like feelings and cognitive autonomy, thus entitled to a fundamental right to self-determination, which is completely independent of human intervention. This paper critically analyses how this human-non-human divide is constructed, challenged, and negotiated in DreamWorks' animated film, Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron, which was theatrically released in 2002. In the absence of human dialogues, the film is set in a backdrop of sweeping landscape aesthetics and features the world from the eyes of a wild horse, who is the protagonist, thus attempting to dismantle the traditional human-centred hierarchy. By reframing the wild animal not as a human tool but as an innocent living creature that possesses territorial and physical autonomy and desires to live in unison with the human race, the film highlights the need to deconstruct traditional narratives of the human-nonhuman divide beyond mere welfare-based paradigms.

Through the methodology of critical animal studies and ecocriticism, this paper investigates how the film subverts standard anthropocentric narratives by centring the nonhuman animal's subjective perspective. By utilising a first-person internal narrative and omitting spoken English dialogue among animals, the film rejects the anthropomorphic impulse to evaluate nonhuman cognition strictly through human linguistic terms. Instead, it attempts to represent an authentic ethological reality, granting the equine protagonist, Spirit, an autonomous voice expressed through non-verbal behaviour, facial expressions, physical movement, and sensory perception, especially through songs like "You can't take me, I'm free" sung by Brian Adams. This directorial choice highlights a profound juxtaposition: the wilderness represents an ecosystem of animal sovereignty, egalitarian social structures, and emotional complexity, whereas human civilisation—specifically the Manifest Destiny-driven U.S. cavalry and the transcontinental railway builders— epitomises a strict anthropocentric worldview wherein animals are reduced to instrumental commodities, assets to be conquered.

Research question: What imagery does Spirit, through the lens of an animal protagonist, employ to depict the human-animal clash by considering human beings as "ecological invaders"?

Keywords: animal sovereignty, anthropocentrism, domestication, horse, media representation

Reframing Research on Animal Emotions: The Question of Animal Jealousy

Marcin Urbaniak, University of the National Education Commission, Krakow

Rethinking which animals experience emotional states, what kinds of affects they feel, and how these can be reliably studied is a challenge that researchers in the field of comparative animal cognition have been tackling for decades. One of the most difficult emotions to explain is jealousy, which is commonly attributed to dogs, cats, and primates. Some birds and mammals - including crows, ravens, mice, rats, dogs, bonobos, and marmosets - appear to exhibit states that humans categorize as the emotion of jealousy. At the same time, examples are given of parrots, gorillas, orangutans, and chimpanzees that do not react with jealousy to unequal access to resources. Dogs are the most problematic group of mammals in this context. As examples of animal jealousy, anecdotal evidence (involving dogs, horses, and cats) is most often cited, or de Waal's specific experiment in which one capuchin monkey attacks another for receiving a lower-quality treat. Expressions of anger and seeking the caregiver's attention serve as behavioral markers of experiencing affective inequity aversion, or a dislike of injustice. However, meta-analyses of behavioral patterns across numerous animal species - examining the contexts in which this inequity aversion manifested - have raised certain concerns. Methodologically unreliable results stem from overly small sample sizes and a biased, anthropomorphic interpretation of behavioral patterns of jealousy, which appeared even in contexts where, in theory, they should not have occurred. Additionally, human feelings of justice, injustice, and jealousy are classified as moral emotions, generated in the context of social interaction, resource distribution, and competition for resources, which requires higher socio-cognitive competencies. Using a zoosemiotic approach, the emotion of jealousy is interpreted based on the observation of two behavioral patterns: social interactions and competitive communication or the signaling of emotions, specifically (a) intentional communication of anger; (b) instinctive signaling of frustration or negative affects;

and (c) behavioral expression of surprise in situations involving the loss of expected (based on learned associations) resources. The point of reference for these observations and interpretations is the behavioral manifestation of jealousy in human children. A number of interpretive doubts of a cognitive nature arise here, which I will discuss during my presentation.

Keywords: animal emotions, animal affect, animal jealousy, animal communication, animal inequity aversion, animal cognition

Cannibalism Beyond Species: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of How Animals Become Companions or Cuisine

Florina Ileana Hica, Alina S. Rusu, Ionel Papuc, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Cluj-Napoca

Recent debates in anthrozoology and animal ethics have highlighted the instability of the distinction between animals regarded as companions and those regarded as food, raising questions about the moral foundations of animal consumption. Cannibalism is conventionally defined as the consumption of a member of one's own species. The article proposes a conceptual extension of the notion of cannibalism, suggesting that the taboo may be grounded not exclusively in species membership but also in perceived inclusion within a moral community. This study argues, however, that its ethical force does not lie only in species membership, but also in the violation of a being recognised as "one of us": a subject whose body has been withdrawn from the category of edible things. Drawing on the special status often assigned to companion animals in domestic life, the study provides critical reflections on how naming, emotional bonding, and integration into family structures can place domesticated species, such as dogs and cats, and similar animals within a moral category that resembles the one normally reserved for humans. In this framework, eating such animals is not merely the consumption of non-human flesh, but the conversion of a being with a particular social and emotional role in the household into meat.

The argument is developed through the unstable boundary between companion animals and livestock. Dogs and cats in many households are named, spoken to, mourned, celebrated, and incorporated into family life; they may therefore acquire a form of relational personhood that makes their consumption appear morally dissonant. Rural and traditional farm settings, especially in Eastern European contexts, make this boundary still more visible. Animals raised for food

may live in close daily proximity to humans and children: chickens share the yard, cows participate in familiar routines, and pigs may occupy a position not wholly unlike that of household dogs before their ritual slaughter. For children especially, the transition from living with an animal to eating that animal may be experienced as disturbing or traumatic, revealing the moral significance of intimacy, attachment, and perceived betrayal.

This study examines the culturally constructed boundary between edible and inedible beings. Rather than being determined solely by biological classification, this boundary is shaped by social perceptions, cultural norms, and forms of relational intimacy. Drawing on an interdisciplinary framework that integrates philosophy, phenomenology, and anthrozoology, the analysis argues that the transformation of animals into meat relies on processes of objectification that contrast sharply with the anthropomorphism and moral individualization often afforded to companion animals. This perspective contributes to broader debates concerning animal personhood, moral inclusion, and the cultural construction of edibility. The result is a broader conception of cannibalism as a taboo against consuming those incorporated into one's moral community.

Keywords: animal consumption; moral community; cannibalism conceptualisation

Integrated Canine-Assisted Services and Art Therapy in Prison: Pilot Study of Animal Well-Being Aspects

Luigi Sacchettino, Susanne Garzillo, Luca Esposito, Viviana Orsola Giuliano, Vincenza Panico, Alina Simona Rusu, Rosaria Ponticiello, Alice Nese, Natascia Rizzo, Giuseppe Nese, Francesco Napolitano, Danila d'Angelo, University of Naples Federico II

Professional occupations in correctional facilities, such as prisons, present substantial psychological challenges for both personnel and inmates, necessitating innovative interventions for enhancing the institutional socio-emotional climate. This pilot study describes an integrated intervention program that combines canine-assisted treatment with art therapy to promote the well-being of inmates. A significant methodological consideration of our study was to ensure that the dogs involved were not instrumental agents, but active co-participants whose well-being must be guarded before, during and after the program. In line with this, three dogs were selected based on their individual temperaments, and their well-being was longitudinally monitored throughout the one-year program. Findings confirmed

that the dogs adapted successfully to the prison setting. This result substantiates the efficacy of the integrated protocol as a significant asset for rehabilitation, illustrating that favorable outcomes for human participation can be attained without compromising the welfare of the animals involved.

Keywords: AAS, dog welfare, human–animal relationship, art therapy

Human Understanding of Animal Emotions Predict Likelihood to Use Corrective Strategies Following Defensive Behaviors from Cats and Dogs

Anna E. Holloway, Michael A. Kisley, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Human perceptions of animal emotions vary due to many factors, including contextual information and individual differences. While many studies have established this phenomenon, little research has investigated how perceived animal emotion impacts human responses to companion animal defensive behaviors. This study investigated the influence of behavioral intensity of animal defensive behavior and participant individual differences—including beliefs about animal emotions, perceptions of animal emotions, and experience with and responsibility for cats and dogs—on participants' likelihood of using each of six intervention strategies aimed at reducing challenging behavior. Human participants recruited from Prolific (N = 194; 55% female and 44% male, and 1% nonbinary) reported perceived fear and anger of cats and dogs depicted in vignettes showing high- or low-intensity defensive behaviors. Participants also completed the Beliefs about Animal Emotions Scale and measures regarding their experience with and responsibility for cats and dogs. Results suggest that moral relevance beliefs about animal emotions may act as a protective factor against welfare-aversive human interventions, and that the perception of an animal's emotional experience can uniquely predict human use of corrective intervention strategies. Specifically, higher perceived anger predicted greater likelihood of using welfare-aversive corrective interventions for cats and dogs (e.g., corporal punishment, rehoming), while higher perceived fear predicted greater likelihood of using immediate low-cost interventions (e.g., relocating). These findings highlight the importance of human psychological processes and experiences in understanding human-animal interactions, and suggest that human beliefs about animal emotions may meaningfully influence companion-animal welfare outcomes.

Keywords: human-animal interaction, animal emotions, perception, intervention, fear, anger

Who Cares? Identifying the Homeless Companion Animal Care Sector (HCACS) in Ontario, Canada

Sarah May Lindsay, Abe Oudshoorn, Western University, London, Ontario

On any given day, there are thousands of companion animals without a home (HCAs; e.g., cats, dogs) in Ontario, Canada (Toronto Humane Society, 2026). Simultaneously, in response to what some call the "overpopulation" (BC SPCA, 2026) of CAs, there are (at least) hundreds of community members, groups, and organizations across the province working to help and house HCAs. However, little is known about what HCA care work looks like in the province. Reporting on results from an online survey, this presentation begins to fill this gap, identifying the demographics of HCA care workers, the structure and funding sources of these organizations, and how much of the work is voluntary and unpaid. We argue that HCAs must be included in Canada's definition of homelessness, and that recognition, regulation, and funding must align with the critical and essential nature of the HCA Care Sector (HCACS) in Ontario. Additionally, we wish to hear from our international and local colleagues and attendees about their experiences with and knowledge about the HCACS in their region; particularly how the caregivers and positionality of HCAs differ or are similar in their community.

Keywords: homeless companion animals, companion animal care, homelessness, shelters, rescues and fosters, Ontario, Canada, social service sector, volunteer work

Animals and the Law in Latin America: A Comparative Study of the Legal Framework for Animals Across Ten Jurisdictions

María Francisca Tapia Thenoux, LatinGroup for Animals (NGO)

This presentation introduces the findings of our comparative legal study of the legal framework concerning nonhuman animals in ten Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. The research maps and analyzes key legislative and jurisprudential developments as of January 2026, covering areas such as constitutional recognition, civil legal status, liability regimes, sentience recognition, criminalization of cruelty, and responsible guardianship. It further examines sectoral regulations related to farm animal welfare, aquatic animal protection, animal experimentation, entertainment uses, zoological facilities, live animal exports, and the emerging issue of cephalopod farming. Beyond documenting legal norms, the study identifies structural tensions within legal systems, as well as regional trends, offering an

integrated view of how the legal system frames the relationship between humans and animals in the region. The work was conducted in the context of the preparation of the Regional Report 2026 by LatinGroup for Animals, and serves as the legal foundation for evaluating the normative dimension of country-level scores. This presentation aims to share the methodology, comparative insights, and potential implications of the study, while engaging the audience in a broader discussion on the evolution and future of animal law in Latin America.

Keywords: animal law, Latin America Law, comparative law, animal welfare standards, legislative frameworks, regional policy

Trauma and Anthropocentrism: Reclaiming Our Animal Selves

(Keynote speaker)

Sarah M. Schlote, EQUUSOMA® Horse-Human Trauma Recovery

In alignment with Indigenous perspectives and proponents of the One Health, One Welfare framework, Webb (2025) argues that human exceptionalism is at the root of our current ecological crisis. In turn, various evolutionary, cognitive, religious, philosophical, political, societal, and systemic variables feed the roots of human exceptionalism. However, what lies beyond that? Adverse experiences and trauma can cause disconnection within ourselves and in relation to aspects of our experience, which is reflected in our disconnection from others and the greater whole. Trauma can be both a natural consequence of anthropocentrism and a potential contributing variable, meaning that trauma renegotiation, resolution, and recovery are not only reactionary measures but also potentially preventative ones.

Drawing from ethology, mammalian neurobiology, somatics, developmental psychology, and other areas of study, this keynote presentation will conceptualize how trauma and adverse experiences shape our patterning, functioning, and coping on multiple levels. This will set the foundation for how these imprints influence our beliefs about other species, how we relate to them, what policies and practices we establish (or not) regarding them, and what questions, variables, hypotheses, and conclusions are considered (or not) in research. Exploring mammaliomorphism as a construct will support individual, collective, and interspecies trauma recovery work as an ethical and moral imperative, supporting new directions and considerations for personal and professional application.

Keywords: anthropocentrism, human exceptionalism, trauma, adverse experiences, interspecies, ethology, mammaliomorphism, somatics, traumatology, neurobiology, research

Sarah Schlote, MA, RP, CCC, SEP is Registered Psychotherapist, Canadian Certified Counsellor, and Somatic Experiencing® Practitioner. Her master's degree in counselling psychology is supplemented by fifteen years of training, clinical experience, teaching, and consulting focused on complex trauma and attachment difficulties in humans and other species, comparative psychology, psychophysiology, ethology, interspecies neurobiology, and intersectionality. She is the founder of EQUUSOMA® Horse-Human Trauma Recovery, a rigorous training program looking at interspecies trauma resolution in multiple personal and professional contexts, offered with licensing permission from Somatic Experiencing® International.

Do Companion Animals Reciprocate Love? Beliefs and Attachment in Human–Pet Bonds

Isabel Melton, Michael Kisley, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

This research examines how beliefs about animals' capacity for love and emotional connection relate to attachment within human–pet relationships. Companion animals are often viewed as emotionally significant partners, with owners attributing to these bonds support, affection, and reciprocity. However, the extent to which such beliefs shape perceived relationship quality remains unclear. Survey data were collected from 200 pet owners. Participants completed measures of general beliefs about animals' ability to form emotional bonds, followed by assessments of attachment to their own pets. Belief in reciprocal love was measured using the Belief About the Capability of Pets Loving Owners Back scale, and attachment was assessed with the Brief Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (Brief-LAPS). Analyses revealed a significant positive correlation between bonding beliefs and attachment ($r = .53$, $p < .001$). After accounting for a ceiling effect by excluding participants with maximum scores ($n = 49$), the relationship remained significant ($r = .42$, $p = .003$). These results indicate that stronger beliefs in animals' emotional capacities are associated with greater attachment to pets. The observed ceiling effect may reflect widespread endorsement of reciprocal bonding. Future studies should

include a more diverse range of species to reduce this limitation and explore how beliefs vary across different types of relationships and pet characteristics.

Keywords: human–animal bond, pet attachment, animal emotional capacity, beliefs about animal emotions

Subjective Experience in Insects: Current Evidence and Theoretical Perspectives

Liviu Adrian Măgurianu, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași branch

Daniel-Oliver Măgurianu, Ensorinstituut, Oostende

Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that insects exhibit non-reflexive behaviours associated with a complex inner life. The selective attention they display suggests an internal affective evaluation of stimuli, going beyond mere automatism. The hedonic and learning dimensions are illustrated by the autonomy play behaviours of honeybees (Apis mellifera), which manipulate spherical objects without external rewards, indicating states similar to pleasure or joy. Furthermore, nocturnal neural activity in the fruit fly (Drosophila melanogaster) suggests dreamlike processes in response to subjective daytime experiences. Individuality is reflected in distinct, weighted personality traits in beetles, where subjects exhibit varying levels of boldness under identical environmental conditions. Insects also possess an internal model of their own body dimensions; for example, bumblebees adjust their flight and posture to navigate through gaps narrower than their wingspan. These mechanisms raise fundamental questions regarding the lower limits of consciousness in single-celled systems and place significant ethical pressure on the use of insects in laboratory research and in the emerging insect farming industries.

Keywords: insect sentience, subjective experience, animal consciousness, animal ethics, research ethics

From Subjects to Partners: Toward a Multispecies Participatory Research Approach Through Intuitive Interspecies Communication

Avantika Mathur, University of Liège

Despite growing recognition of animal sentience, agency, and communicative capacity, research methodologies remain largely anthropocentric, designed by

humans, for human purposes, with animals as subjects rather than partners. Multispecies scholarship has increasingly attended to animal perspectives and relationships. Yet even its most progressive frameworks have largely stopped short of asking: what would it mean to do research genuinely with animals, not merely about or for them?

Intuitive interspecies communication (IIC), a non-verbal form of communication between humans and animals practiced across many cultural and professional contexts, offers one potential methodological bridge. Understood here not merely as a technique but as a way of being with animals, involving relationship, reciprocity, and the researcher's own transformation, IIC invites a different way of imagining research with animals.

This presentation draws on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork from the ANICOM project (Animal Communicators: Intuitive Interspecies Communication as a Key to Dialogic Multispecies Methods). It proposes an emerging multispecies participatory research (MPR) approach, an extension of community-based participatory research (CBPR) logic across the species boundary. CBPR, rooted in epistemic justice and the recognition that those most affected by a question should be genuine partners in answering it, has long challenged extractive research practices within marginalized human communities. MPR asks why that logic stops at the species boundary, and what it might look like to invite animals into the research process and to receive guidance and direction from the more-than-human world.

Drawing on ethnographic case studies with two primary collaborators, a Cree Traditional Knowledge Keeper and ceremonialist from Eeyou Istchee (Northern Québec, Canada), and a professional animal communicator from Pune, India, this research explores how each practices IIC and enacts partnership with animals, and what this might mean for how research is designed and carried out. Working from different cultural and spiritual contexts, both practice forms of interspecies partnership for which Western research has few frameworks. The presentation asks whether integrating animal voices into research is less a matter of method than of ontology and epistemology: of who we understand animals to be, and what we recognize as knowledge. Taking this seriously asks researchers to move from the shore into the water by building relationships with animals, developing their own communicative capacities, and being changed by the process. Grounded in Indigenous research philosophies, epistemic pluralism and justice, and the living practices of experienced interspecies communicators, MPR is offered as an emerging

framework for research that takes animals seriously as partners in the production of knowledge.

Keywords: intuitive interspecies communication, multispecies participatory research, animal voices, epistemic justice, Indigenous research methodologies, more-than-human, animal agency, multispecies methods

Round Table – Exploring Intuitive Interspecies Communication as Practice and Method to Connect with Animal Perspectives

coordinator: **Malena Mogwitz,** Independent researcher

Intuitive Interspecies Communication (IIC), often called "animal communication" or "animal telepathy," can be described as a non-physical, non-verbal, reciprocal and universal form of communication between different species. While classical academic settings and disciplines remain skeptical towards this concept, IIC is practised across different cultures and by professional animal communicators in Western-modernised societies. It challenges current epistemologies, present hierarchies of academic knowledge and natural-scientific research standards. Despite potential limitations due to its nature, several research projects are currently exploring this phenomenon in the context of overcoming purely anthropocentric research paradigms. Following up on a discussion from last year's Anthrozoology Symposium (2025), a group of participating scholars interested in IIC has continued the conversation in the form of several online meetings to explore and reflect on this topic together. Touching on various questions, the idea for a roundtable arose. During this roundtable, we will be joined by different experts and practitioners from the field to explore the potential and challenges of IIC as a practice and method to access and include the voices of other animals more directly into our societies and research.

Co-produced Multispecies Healthcare Epistemology: Feline Appeals, Consent and Interspecies Response

Irina Frasin, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

Sarah Oxley Heaney, Exeter University

Our aim in this presentation is to argue for a re-framing of feline "rescue" as a dialogue and co-construction and not an intervention on passive felines (although it may look like this in certain cases). Drawing on rescue scenarios and autoethnographic experiences from Saudi Arabia and Romania, this presentation asks how human "rescuers" learn to co-read feline need and become attentive to what cats may be communicating. We are developing research praxis arising from prior multispecies practice and a continued commitment to marginalised (community/free/street, etc.) feline lives. We draw from Donaldson and Kymlika's Zoopolis, who argue that as humans have bred animals to be dependent on us, "we have acquired positive duties toward them" and give them a moral and political right to citizenship. We build on this using Gruen's concept of entangled empathy, which "isn't just a form of ethical attention, but a particular form: caring or loving attention, attention that is directed toward another's flourishing."

We aim to show how cats can actively participate in care, through appeals, resistence, and consent. We aim to show that human involvement in these participatory acts depends on cultivating attentiveness. Such cultivation allows need, appeals, consent and response to be mutually read and understood. Only by developing these abilities, by immersing ourselves in feline worlds and making the effort to understand their language, can we hope to facilitate real communication. And only by enabling this kind of communication and their participation can we try to reach the goal of co-produced care.

Keywords: cats, communication, knowledge, consent, perspectives, co-produced care

Animals Acting as Individuals; Resisting the Methods of Measurement

Therese Lilliesköld, Södertörn University

I am doing the empirical research for my PhD project at the Swedish Transport Administration, where I am investigating the knowledge production behind decisions affecting other animals, as well as the knowledge (and forced loss thereof) of the more-than-human world. Other-than-human animals and traffic will, for most people, be associated with roadkill, but to view other animals as nothing but victims sacrificed for the necessity of roads is, in a way, to strip them of their agency. I am drawing from examples from my empirical research, where it becomes obvious that other animals act in highly individual ways and that their behaviours cannot always be interpreted at species-level. This collides with the methods of measurement used to collect statistical data on how different species are using infrastructural developments. Seeing other animals as individual actors also raises ethical questions, such as the treatment of "trash animals" or members of invasive species.

Keywords: more-than-human, transport planning, co-production of knowledge, biodiversity-based conservation

Caring Without Infrastructure: Multispecies Care Labour in a Toxic City

Surabhi Baijal, Independent researcher

Drawing on sustained engagement with veterinarians and veterinary technicians across three independent clinics in Lucknow, India, this paper examines how animal care is produced in the context of limited and uneven public veterinary infrastructure. Rather than functioning as a supportive ecosystem, the contemporary Indian city emerges in these accounts as an environment of cumulative ecological injury—marked by noise saturation, chemical exposure, heat stress, traffic violence, and unchecked urbanisation—that routinely generates animal illness, injury, and abandonment. As the city becomes increasingly toxic and hostile to non-human life, the demand for care labour intensifies, without any corresponding expansion of state support.

Combining feminist theories of care labour, multispecies scholarship, and practice-based ethnography, the paper analyses how responsibility for animal welfare is effectively displaced onto individual practitioners operating within

informal and precarious conditions. Veterinarians work without institutional backup or referral systems, while veterinary technicians—largely trained through apprenticeship rather than formal certification—perform essential, embodied care work with little job security, recognition, or mental health support. This labour is physically demanding and emotionally exhausting, shaped by constant ethical triage, exposure to animal suffering, and the strain of mediating between animals' needs and human financial constraints.

The paper argues that independent veterinary clinics function as critical sites of repair within what can be understood as an infrastructural wasteland sustained through human and animal endurance. Animals remain central to this analysis not as abstract symbols, but as patients whose bodily vulnerability structures daily routines, decision-making, and emotional labour. In doing so, the paper responds directly to calls within anthrozoology to rethink how animal lives and voices are understood through everyday practices of care rather than abstract representations. By foregrounding the relational production of care under conditions of state absence, the paper reframes veterinary practice as a form of multispecies labour that absorbs the failures of urban governance, raising urgent questions about responsibility, sustainability, and the limits of endurance in multispecies urban life.

Keywords: multispecies care labour, veterinary practice, urban toxicity, infrastructural absence, animal welfare governance, ethical triage, veterinary technicians

Shared Space and Place: Community Cats & Emerging Humanocat Cultures in Sauraha, Nepal

Kris Hill, University of Hradec Králové

Michelle Szydlowski, Miami University

Sarah Oxley Heaney, Exeter University

This study explores the dynamic nature of the human–companion animal bond and interspecies relations between humans (Homo sapiens) and free-living domestic cats (Felis catus) within the cultural context of Sauraha, Nepal. To better understand the status of domestic cats and cat-human relations in communities increasingly being influenced by Western ideas through globalization, tourism, and wildlife conservation efforts, a thematic approach was adopted to analyze multispecies ethnographic data. The data is described in terms of cultural co-creation within multispecies communities, feline agency, and integration into human spaces, and an

emerging role of companion cats as commodities and kin. A total of 63 cats were documented and assigned codes based on their relationality to humans and human-constructed places. Namely, “Space” for cats who lived outside of, or on the periphery of human-defined places, “Place” for cats who appeared more strongly associated with a particular human-constructed place, such as a communal dwelling, restaurant, or hotel. “Person” was reserved for cats who demonstrated a connection to a particular human who might be defined as their guardian or primary caretaker. These relational categories highlighted the blurred and ambiguous boundaries between definitions, and in many cases represented a liminal or transitional state. Therefore, the discrete codes were reframed as a Space-Place-Person spectrum of cat-human interrelatedness to describe the umwelten transitions and an emerging humanocat culture (the culture of pet-keeping). This study highlights the changing relationships between cats and humans occupying shared spaces and explores how cats exert agency in the co-creation of “Place” within multispecies communities.

Keywords: humanocat, cat-human relations, Nepal, Felis catus, anthrozoology, place

Rocky's Case Study: Where Vulnerability and Independence Meet on the Streets of Sri Lanka

Vanessa Della Libera, Independent researcher

Visible disability in free-roaming dogs can often be interpreted through welfare frameworks that associate impairment with vulnerability, dependence, and the need for human intervention. This presentation explores the case of “Rocky,” a free-roaming visually impaired dog living within a human-dominated environment in Sri Lanka, whose apparent ability to navigate, maintain routines, and access resources might challenge simplified assumptions surrounding impairment and survival. Initially conceived as an observational case study focused on adaptation, navigation, and welfare, the project gradually evolved into a broader ethical reflection on the process of studying vulnerable free-living animals itself.

Attempts to observe Rocky’s daily movements and interactions raised emerging questions regarding anthropocentrism, observer impact, and the ethics of knowledge production when trying to integrate non-human perspectives. Following, documenting, and potentially intervening in the life of Rocky risked disrupting the very routines and environmental familiarity that may support his survival, autonomy, and safety.

This presentation explores the tensions emerging between welfare-driven curiosity, intervention, the human–dog relationship, and the emotional complexities involved in witnessing vulnerability without certainty about what constitutes help. It further reflects on the possibility that research practices themselves may unintentionally compromise the safety and stability of study subjects. Rather than positioning Rocky solely as an object of study, this work proposes a necessary reframing of our research focus toward recognising free-living animals as active subjects whose lives, choices, and distinct voices may resist human attempts at interpretation, management, and care.

By combining preliminary field observations with reflexive ethical inquiry, this case invites broader discussion on vulnerability, intervention, autonomy, and the limitations of human-centered approaches in capturing animal perspectives within animal welfare and anthrozoological research.

Keywords: free-roaming dogs, animal autonomy, anthrozoological ethics, anthropocentrism, animal (dis)ability, Sri Lanka

Self-Medication in Wild and Domestic Animals

Ada Rus, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca

Zoopharmacognosy (animal self-medication) is the evolutionary adaptation where diverse animals use plant secondary compounds and non-nutritive substances to fight pathogens and restore biological balance. When sick, animals abandon their usual dietary caution (neophobia) to actively seek out novel, medicinal plants. Their methods include ingesting therapeutic plants, rubbing substances on their fur, fumigating nests, and consuming clay (geophagy) to neutralize toxins. Observed across species ranging from insects to great apes, these behaviors are driven by both innate biological instincts and social learning across generations. Ultimately, understanding animal self-medication offers valuable ecological insights and sustainable solutions for human and veterinary medicine, particularly in combating drug-resistant parasites.

Keywords: zoopharmacognosy, animal self-medication, plant secondary compounds, social learning, veterinary medicine

Aesop's Archetypes of Animals in Animated Films

Cosmin Mărtinaș, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași

Out of all children's or family films, a great number of animated movies are centred on animals. They can be classical animations, such as The Lion King (1994), stop motion, such as Chicken Run (2000), computer animations, such as Zootopia (2016), or even hybrid animation, such as Puss in Boots: The Last Wish (2022). Nonetheless, many such movies are also box-office successes. There are authors who argue that such visual media, especially those designed for kids, can influence the way humans perceive animals. Some of these movies are adaptations of modern stories, and some are based on original ones. However, some animated films about animals depict certain species of animals in a manner that can be recognised in classical texts, such as Aesop's fables. For example, in Puss in Boots (2011), the protagonist's origin story involves defeating a bull, after which he receives leather boots and a hat with a feather. On top of these objects that are the result of the exploitation of other animals, it can also be observed that one of the main motivations of the tomcat, the hero, is to make his adoptive mother, a human being, proud. Such depiction of cats as collaborators of humans in the subjugation of other animals can also be observed in fables attributed to Aesop such as *The Cat and the Mice* and *Belling the Cat*. Perhaps, then, such archetypes that can be found in Aesop's fables can help us better understand the depiction of animals in media, and, therefore, understand the type of view of animals that is promoted by various films.

Keywords: Aesop's fables, animal archetypes, animation, cinematography

Monetizing Animal Abuse.

Petfluencers, Platforms, Advertising, and Corporate Greed

Aurora Hrițuleac, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy Iași branch

Across spiritual traditions, the dominance of material values over moral ones is a defining sign of civilizational decline. Today, this tendency is visible not only in human lifestyle, but also in the humans' commodification of animals' lives. While for most of the population, animals - especially pets - are often understood as companions, family members, and sources of relational well-being, they are also incredibly incorporated into digital marketing systems as items with economic value. Existing scholarship on influencer marketing shows that petfluencers can

enhance perceptions of sincerity, emotional engagement, and consumer persuasion. However, less attention has been paid to the ethical implications of this commercial model for the animals whose images, behaviours, and bodies become monetized. Based on a review of interdisciplinary literature on animal abuse, advertising, platform economic policies, and human-animal relations, my communication argues that animal abuse should not be understood solely as the outcome of isolated individual cruelty. Rather, in many digital contexts, it is enabled, normalized, or intensified by organized commercial practices that aim and reward profitability. By situating petfluencer culture within broader structures of platform capitalism, the presentation examines the links between a substantial number of petfluencers, digital platforms, advertising companies, and corporate greed in the persistence and expansion of animal abuse.

Keywords: animal abuse, petfluencers, advertising, platform capitalism, corporations

The Impact of the Eurasian Beaver (Castor fiber) on Biodiversity and Human–Wildlife Interactions

Emilia-Miruna Boitos, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca

The Eurasian beaver (Castor fiber) is widely recognized as an ecosystem engineer due to its ability to modify freshwater habitats through dam construction, tree felling, and wetland creation. Following its reintroduction in Romania in 1998, the species has expanded across a variety of landscapes, generating both ecological benefits and management challenges.

This study investigates the influence of beaver activity on biodiversity and human–wildlife interactions across different Romanian landscapes, including urban, rural, and reintroduction areas. Particular attention is given to the relationship between beaver-generated habitat modifications and the diversity of birds, mammals, amphibians, aquatic macroinvertebrates, and vegetation communities. The study also explores public perceptions of beavers, experiences with beaver presence, and attitudes toward conservation and management.

By integrating ecological observations with social perspectives, this research aims to advance understanding of the role of beavers in biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, and human–wildlife coexistence. The findings are expected to

provide valuable insights for future conservation and management strategies involving this increasingly widespread species.

Keywords: Eurasian beaver, biodiversity, ecosystem engineer, wetland restoration, human–wildlife conflict, conservation

TransformDairyNet Project: Piloting Cow-Calf Contact Under Tie-stall Dairy Systems in Romania

Madalina Mincu-Iorga, Marinela Enculescu, Stelian Sertu, Daniel Radeanu, Dinu Gavojdian, Research and Development Institute for Bovine Balotesti

Cow-calf contact (CCC) systems are increasingly recognised as a promising alternative to conventional dairy production, improving animal welfare and promoting more natural behavioural expression in dairy cattle. However, in medium-sized and large farms in Romania, CCC systems remain largely unknown and are not implemented in commercial dairy farms, particularly under tied-stall housing systems, which are the most prevalent (>80%). The present pilot study was developed within the Horizon TransformDairyNet (TDN) project, aiming to evaluate the feasibility of partial CCC implementation under Romanian dairy farming conditions. The pilot study was carried out by replicating a medium-sized dairy farm using a tied-stall system and included two experimental groups: five cow-calf pairs reared under partial CCC conditions (12 h/day CCC) and five conventional cow-calf pairs separated at birth used as controls. The study focused on evaluating behavioural responses, welfare indicators, calf development, and cow performance under the two management systems. Behavioural observations and physiological indicators were collected during critical periods, including early postpartum adaptation and calf separation. Additional analyses included growth performance of calves, milk production parameters, and non-invasive welfare assessment methods such as infrared thermography and behavioural monitoring. Moreover, stress-related physiological responses were assessed through cortisol determination, while hematological and biochemical blood parameters were analysed in both experimental groups in order to evaluate health and metabolic status associated with the two rearing systems. Preliminary results indicate noticeable differences between CCC and conventional systems regarding maternal behaviour, calf activity, and stress-related responses. The implementation of CCC under tie-stall conditions proved technically feasible, despite infrastructural limitations specific to Romanian dairy farms. This pilot Living Lab represents one of the first practical

implementations of CCC systems in Romania and contributes to the development of locally adapted knowledge regarding sustainable and welfare-oriented dairy production systems. The outcomes of the study may support future adoption of CCC practices in Eastern European dairy farms operating under similar management conditions.

Keywords: animal welfare, dairy cattle, cow-calf-contact, ethical milk

Shared Companionship and Interspecies Care: An Empirically Grounded Case for Minimal Moral Empathy

Cătălina-Daniela Răducu, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy Iași branch

My presentation brings together perspectives from anthrozoology, mental health research, and moral philosophy to argue that shared companionship between humans and their nonhuman companions constitutes a form of interspecies care. Existing studies have largely interpreted relationships with companion animals through the language of therapeutic effects, emotional support, and health outcomes. I propose a complementary interpretive framework. Rather than asking what companion animals do for human well-being, I ask what kind of relationship makes these effects possible, and I suggest that the answer is a form of interspecies care, characterised by repeated responsiveness to vulnerability. This relational perspective, in turn, provides an empirical framework through which the concept of Minimal Moral Empathy can be further understood and supported.

Keywords: minimal moral empathy, interspecies care, interspecies companionship, mental health, relational ethics

Animals in Courts – A Paradigm Shift?

Lavinia Bejan, Gheorghe Zane Institute for Economic and Social Research, Romanian Academy Iași branch

Two recent cases in Romania challenged the assumption that companion animals fall under the general category of 'assets', as traditionally recognized in civil law. In these cases, related to marriage dissolutions and subsequent division of assets, the parties argued against the inclusion of companion animals in the pool of assets to be divided. Instead, they asked the courts to grant them custody of the

animals. Both courts accepted the arguments and thus granted custody, using the exact same term that is being used in cases involving the custody of minor children (in Romanian, 'încredințare'). When deciding which former spouse to grant custody to, the judges considered factors such as the emotional bond between the human and non-human animals and which former spouse was more involved in caring for the animal. This bold and welcome approach recognises the distinctive position of companion animals within a family, elevating them above the status of an asset to be divided between former spouses. Such a development in Romanian case law marks a significant shift from an economic perspective on animals to one grounded in emotional connection and animal welfare.

Keywords: companion animal, custody, division of assets, divorce, family