

Ghosts and Things: Trajectories of Animal Life

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The core premise of this book project is that the fast-changing conditions of both wild and domesticated animals and their interrelation are extremely important yet often underappreciated aspects of global environmental change. The title tries to evoke the context in a bold way: indicating how the populations of many wild animal species are crashing, leaving landscapes of “ghosts,” at the same time as the populations of a small range of animal species are soaring, while individuals are reduced to little more than fungible “things” without any control over their own lives.

The first part of the book focuses on the positions of wild animals within shrinking and modified habitats, and varying efforts to manage their survival in some instances and population dynamics in others. This begins by considering contemporary patterns of endangerment and extinction risk as well as the drastic population losses that are occurring among many non-threatened species and across non-domesticated vertebrates as a whole, a phenomenon described as de-faunation in conservation biology. The discussion also aims to situate the dynamics of endangerment and de-faunation historically, with attention to accelerating deforestation and agricultural expansion from the onset of European imperialism onwards, examining the role of animals on resource frontiers as well as their place in the rise of the modern conservation movement, both strategically and symbolically. This will consider how threatened and endangered animals have historically been treated as both a key objective in (setting priorities) and a means to (as “ambassadors”) wilderness conservation, and how contemporary struggles to save animals from the brink now also increasingly involve desperate efforts to contain poaching threats and black markets, as well as sophisticated networks of animal breeding and relocation.

The second part of the book focuses on the vast and growing populations of a few animal species raised for human consumption. The historical context starts with the long course of animal domestication and the central role of animal labor in human societies for most of the history of civilization and agriculture, as well the global expansion of livestock wrought by European imperialism. The primary subject is the industrial grain-oilseed-livestock complex, building upon the conceptual framework I set out in *The Ecological Hoofprint: The Global Burden of Industrial Livestock*, as well as extending certain elements in new directions. In *The Ecological Hoofprint*, the focus was on the expansive ecological impacts of industrial livestock production and the dietary change it braces; in *Ghosts and Things*, the focus is on understanding how productive environments are organized in relation to the conditions of life for animals. Different forms of animal production are analyzed, but livestock gets most attention as it is by far the most central to the trajectory of animal life on earth.

The ultimate aim of *Ghosts and Things* is to help foreground animals and interspecies relations in conceptions of contemporary environmental change, and highlight crucial struggles and ethical concerns that—though they remain marginal within many streams of environmentalism—are fundamental to prospects of building a more sustainable and peaceful world.