

**Animals
in Transdisciplinary Environmental History
Altmoisa, Estonia**

Rachel
Carson
Center

An ESEH Summer School

12–16 May 2015, Altmoisa, Estonia

Conveners: Rob Emmett (Rachel Carson Center, LMU Munich, Germany), Dolly Jörgensen (ex officio, President of European Society for Environmental History), Kati Lindström (KTH Royal Institute of Technology Stockholm and University of Tartu), Ulrike Plath (RCC / KAJAK Tallinn University, Estonia), Kadri Tüür (University of Tartu)

Participants: Kevin Armitage (Miami University of Ohio), Veit Braun (RCC), Thomas Doran (UC Santa Barbara), Andrew Flack (University of Bristol), Andrea Gaynor (University of Western Australia /RCC), Sylvia Gierlinger (University of Vienna, ZUG), Phillip Homan (Idaho State University), Ken Ird (University of Tallinn), Karel Kleisner (Charles University, Prague), Kalevi Kull (University of Tartu) Riin Magnus (University of Tartu), Nelly Mäekivi (University of Tartu), Timo Maran (University of Tartu), John Mittermeier (University of Oxford), Anna Mossolova (Tallinn University), Anna Olenenko (Kyiv National University, Ukraine), Hannes Pehlak (Estonian University of Life Sciences), Eve Rannamäe (University of Tartu), Carina Schmitz (RCC), Filipa Soares (University of Oxford), Ingvar Svanberg (Uppsala University), Junzo Uchiyama (Mt. Fuji World Heritage Center, Kyoto), Viktor Ulicsni (University of Szeged), Julie Weissmann (RCC), Amir Zelinger (RCC/LMU Munich)

The Carson Center sponsored a week-long graduate training in transdisciplinary environmental history with our partners at the Estonian center for environmental history (KAJAK) and with co-sponsorship of the European Society for Environmental History. Two dozen Masters-level students, including three participants from the LMU Environmental Studies certificate program, convened for a block seminar on environmental humanities on 12 May led by **ROB EMMETT, ULRIKE PLATH**, and **KALEVI KULL**. The remaining doctoral candidates, post-doctoral scholars, and senior plenary speakers arrived at the end of the Masters seminar for three intense days of plenary papers, presentations of graduate work in progress, and field study. Two writing skills workshops focused on preparing doctoral research submissions to the Arcadia project, a digital publication of media-rich, short environmental histories on the Environment & Society Portal. The combination of

diverse fields and international backgrounds made for a rich workshop as all participants strove to revise their work for a broader, transdisciplinary audience.

On 13 May, the doctoral workshop began with a more theoretical panel on “Turning Towards Other Animals.” Carson fellow **ANDREA GAYNOR** launched the first day with a talk emphasizing how the multi-species turn calls us to explore agency as no longer a property of humans alone and challenges our conceptions of political practice and ethics. In a case study of a suburban dairy at Wembley, Gaynor read neighbors’ official complaints, legal cases, and advertisements for scaled-up industrial production to show how animals came to be excluded from suburbs and urban spaces in Australia. **JOHN MITTERMEIER** presented a method of using text mining (“big data” for humanities) to construct a “cultural profile” for individual species; a better understanding of the cultural context of each animal could help conservation professionals optimize their efforts. **AMIR ZELINGER** invited the audience to see the practices of children turning wild frogs, lizards, crows, and sparrows into pets in imperial Germany as part of “bestly social history,” where the wild erupted in supposedly domesticated bourgeois spaces. Through iconographical analysis of two centuries of oil paintings and travelers’ narratives, **ANNA OLENENKO** explored the orientalist European perceptions of camels on the Ukrainian steppe during their period of ubiquity, which ended with the Soviet Russification campaign of 1944.

Professor **JUNZO UCHIYAMA** opened the second panel with a claim: “Transdisciplinary work is an opportunity to discuss universal matters on an equal footing with everyday life.” Uchiyama described his archaeological work to reconstruct 5,000 years of seasonal hunting and habitation practices in Torihama, Japan, as a process of making bones meaningful, and passed sheep mandibles around the room to encourage the uninitiated to “Use Animal Remains as Resources for Historical Research.” Zoologist **EVE RANNAMÄE** described how extracting mitochondrial DNA enables her lab to reconstruct maternal lineages for domesticated sheep, tracing the general movement of breeds from the Bronze Age across central and eastern Europe. For historians interested in settlement patterns in deeper time, linking the average withers’ height of sheep in relation to proximity to known fortified areas in the late Bronze Age raises questions: Why were ancient sheep larger than their medieval descendants? From sheep we moved to swine and the urban reforms that centralized slaughterhouses in late nineteenth century Vienna, as **SYLVIA GIERLINGER** guided us through a series of detailed maps pinpointing where water infrastructure enabled concentrated and more sanitary slaughtering, replacing 600 dispersed small butchers with two main centers. We ended the first day of the workshop with a writing workshop, with **ROB EMMETT** presenting the concept and scope of Arcadia and **ULRIKE PLATH** and **KATI LINDSTRÖM** guiding the participants to revise their 500-word submissions into effective multimedia-enhanced narratives.

The second full day of the doctoral workshop began with a dazzling plenary by **DOLLY JÖRGENSEN** on “The Search for the Last,” which traced the scientific and rhetorical attempts to chase down the last remaining wild European beaver in Sweden between their official extinction (1871) and twentieth-century introductions of Norwegian beavers. **PHILLIP HOMAN** read a provocative paper on the equine holocaust during the Anglo-Boer War, when thousands of imported horses (from the US) went to mechanized slaughter on the imperial front. Yet colonial racism structured this equine-human story, as Homan described how besieged white English colonists denied even freshly-slaughtered horseflesh to their black South African neighbors. Migrations and re-introductions rather than military imports were the focus of **FILIPA SOARES’** research “On Vultures and Rewilding in a Changing Europe.” Soares explored vultures’ role in the trade of death and waste at sites in Iberia and Scotland, investigating interspecies competition and changing spatial distribution at “vulture filling stations” created to conserve European vultures. Earlier embodied practices of avian conservation included admiration and large-scale murder, noted **THOMAS DORAN**, who took up the hybrid genre of Alexander Wilson’s writing and the protectionist personae Wilson developed, even as he shot many of the subjects of his praise, from king birds to ivory-billed woodpeckers.

The afternoon sessions on Thursday, 14 May turned to the cultural implications of biosemiotics and zoosemiotics, where animal individuality, agency, and subjectivity are recognized through sign-making, and the human environment (*Umwelt*) comes to be understood as circumscribed by physiological and cultural contexts. **TIMO MARAN** and **KAREL KLEISNER** surveyed semiotic research pointing to super-human perception and semantic organs in birds, dogs, and butterflies and raised fundamental questions. For example: what does it mean for environmental history to propose that a biosemiotic realm precedes culture? How does acknowledging animal semiosis and communication alter our ethical responsibilities towards animals we capture, study, or attempt to protect? **NELLY MÄEKIVI** showed how human perceptions and interests (rather than understanding of animal communication and perceptual needs) continue to shape the layout of zoos and actions of zookeepers. Class and the imperial appeal of safari, according to **ANDREW FLACK**, mediated the creation of a lion zoo on a gentleman’s lawn in Longleat House, UK. **KEN IRD** analyzed court proceedings and found the emergence of a new state morality in sixteenth century Livonia (modern Estonia), which structured accusations of bestiality against young men in the countryside. And **ANNA MOSSOLOVA** interpreted the visual details of Yupik animal masks held in European museums to understand how arctic animals were seen, portrayed, and understood by the Yupik—before the masks became exotic, charismatic objects for nineteenth-century European collectors.

Following the Thursday paper sessions, participants then split into two groups for evening fieldwork, with one group heading to the reed marshes to observe insect behavior with **KAREL KLEISNER** and another observing shorebirds in the nature reserve on the coast with ornithologist **HANNES PEHLAK**. Our creative animality became most conspicuous after dinner Thursday night when, exiting the sauna, we gathered around a platter of smoked wind-pike and catfish: one host offered the elegant green bones of the wind-pike as a necklace.

INGVAR SVANBERG opened the workshop's final panel on helper animals by describing his decades of ethnological research, which has spanned the globe from Sami and Turkish herdsmen to Swedish fisher folk thieving from ospreys, to Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Sami fishermen, who domesticate otters. Folk knowledge of wild animals as helpers spans many taxa and is often preserved cultural knowledge, as among Middle-Eastern immigrants in Sweden who continue to keep canaries and pigeons. **VICTOR ULICSNI** described the depth and range of folk knowledge among Hungarian elders as he maps the folk taxonomies in relation to official scientific categories and finds that elders (avg. 85 years) have names even for useless or seemingly irrelevant species, such as the red velvet mite. **RIIN MAGNUS** presented a transnational study of guide dog teams in Estonia, Germany, and Sweden informed by semiotic analysis of canine perception and movement, particularly in urban spaces. **CARINA SCHMITZ** described her research for her environmental studies final project on PTSD and diabetes service dogs in Germany, using participant observation and qualitative interviews with experts and dog trainers. A final plenary by **KEVIN ARMITAGE** on oysters as big business and health threat in Progressive Era America ended the formal panel. Participants were invited to write anonymous evaluations; before the workshop adjourned, the conveners held a final discussion to review doctoral candidates' revisions plans for Arcadia submissions, where the suggestion was made to create a special collection on "Animals in Transdisciplinary Environmental History."

In conclusion, "Animals in Transdisciplinary Environmental History" sustained a week of contemplation of other animal lives: photographed and framed in PowerPoint slides, served at the dining table, and spotted through the scope in the woods, meadows, and coastal wetlands. Local traditions of Estonian semiotics provided a context for remembering how differently we humans become meaning making animals—one among many meaning-making animals. Doctoral students and senior researchers alike displayed great methodological diversity, including ethnozoology, ethnobotany, ethnography, bio- and zoosemiotics, history, literary studies, folklore studies, visual culture and art history, conservation biology, and human geography. A vigorous curiosity into new ways of understanding human-animal interactions unified the group.