HUMANIMALIA

Vol. 15, No. 2 (Summer 2025)

Humanimalia is a biannual journal devoted to the study of human–animal relations. It is interdisciplinary, open-access, and peer-reviewed, publishing original articles from a wide range of cultural, historical, philosophical, political, and aesthetic perspectives.

Humanimalia has three aims: (1) to explore and advance the vast range of scholarship on human–animal relations; (2) to encourage exchange among scholars working from a variety of disciplinary perspectives; and (3) to promote dialogue between the academic community and those working closely with animals in non-academic fields.

We invite innovative works that situate these topics within contemporary culture via a variety of critical approaches. Ideally, we seek papers that combine approaches, or at the very least draw upon research in other disciplines to contextualize their arguments.

We are particularly interested in papers that acknowledge and seek to advance a more-than-human conception of aesthetics, culture, society, and politics.

https://humanimalia.org

Cover: *Crow*, Talitha May (2025)

We are pleased to present the latest issue of *Humanimalia*—a "summer" rather than a "spring" issue, in recognition of the fact that our publishing rhythm has been gradually drifting away from the equinox and toward the solstice. This issue features five original research articles, plus a translation and accompanying introduction, as well as five book reviews.

Monica Mattfeld's essay, "The Spanish Horse and the Thunder Drum", opens the issue with a meditation on memorialization and nonhuman agency. Mattfeld reconstructs the life, death, and curious afterlife of the "Spanish Horse", a star performer at Astley's Amphitheatre whose tanned hide was transformed into a thunder drum after his death circa 1824. Challenging conventional understandings of taxidermy and objecthood, Mattfeld argues that the drum constitutes an "animal-made-object" which retains traces of the Spanish Horse's subjectivity and agency even beyond death. Through a synthesis of new materialism, ecofeminism, and taxidermy theory, she critiques models that either erase animal individuality or treat animal remains as ethically indistinct from other matter. Proposing an expanded definition of taxidermy, Mattfeld shows how the horse's disarticulated form continued to speak—literally and symbolically—within the theatre's affective soundscape, as both a memento mori and a sublime, politically charged memorial.

If Mattfeld's Spanish Horse finds a strange kind of afterlife, Paul G. Keil's "The Feral at Home" brings us back to the compromised vitality of the living. In his ethnographic account of a wild-caught pig named Pig-pig, raised by an Australian pig hunter, Keil destabilizes the dominant narrative of the feral as irredeemably invasive and unlivable. Pig-pig's presence within—and resistance to—this narrative illuminates an "unauthorized multispecies home", where feral agency flickers, if briefly, outside frameworks of control. The article explores the unexpected attachments and ethical entanglements that arise when a being defined by its killability is, temporarily, allowed to become someone. But as Keil's conclusion reminds us, these alternate trajectories remain precarious, forever shadowed by the lethal scripts of biosecurity and belonging.

Shifting from individual animals to collective movements, Marco Reggio's "'Happy Goats, or, Taking Embarrassment Seriously", appearing here in English for the first time, takes as its point of departure the life and death of Agitu Ideo Gudeta — an Ethiopian refugee, feminist entrepreneur, and goat farmer, whose 2020 murder became a *cause célèbre* in the Italian media. Originally published in Italian as the first chapter in his book *Cospirazione animale*, Reggio's essay resists both celebration and simple condemnation, instead confronting the ethical and political contradictions that emerge where questions of species, gender, race, and coloniality intersect. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's "zone of non-being" and Judith Butler's remarks on the "embarrassed 'etc.'" that invariably comes at the end of lists of intersectional identity markers, Reggio proposes a politics grounded not in certainty but in discomfort — a willingness to sit with paradox, to resist both moral purity and political disavowal. What emerges is a vision of an anti-speciesism that is intersectional, historically situated, and radically open to complexities of the more-than-human. *In the* accompanying introduction, Suleiman McShane and Erin Clancy offer a critical entry point into Reggio's thought, situating his work within the broader landscape of Italian animal rights activism and anti-speciesist critique.

In his trenchant analysis of police dogs as instruments of racial biocapitalism — spanning Civil Rights-era attacks on Black protestors, the affective copaganda of *PAW Patrol*, and the Israeli military's deployment of robot dogs in Gaza — Ishaan Selby exposes how animal life is made complicit in processes of domination, expropriation, and organized abandonment. In tracing how the figure of the dog mediates between the human and nonhuman, Selby challenges us to confront the biopolitical entanglement of species and race in the carceral logics of the modern state. His call to think Black, Palestinian, and animal liberation together does not suggest equivalence, but insists on relationality — on the need to recognize the shared infrastructures of violence, and thus the possibilities for shared resistance. As with the other contributions to this issue, Selby's essay demands that we take seriously the more-than-human dimensions of justice and the more-than-human consequences of injustice.

Eugenie van Heijgen's "*Becoming Pheasant*" offers a fitting counterpoint to these overtly political interventions by shifting the focus to the long, entangled history of hunting, landscape-making, and species formation in the Dutch countryside. Van Heijgen traces how the pheasant—bred, released, and shot for centuries—has been materially and discursively produced by human desire, rendered legible and illegible by shifting regimes of conservation and control. Today, even in the absence of sanctioned pheasant release, these birds persist: elusive, unclaimed, and actively remaking their own multispecies lifeworlds. In resisting fixed designations—wild or domestic, native or invasive—van Heijgen's pheasants exemplify what it means to inhabit Anthropocene landscapes as both more-than-human archives and speculative futures. Like the goats, dogs, pigs, and horses that traverse this issue, pheasants prompt us to reconsider the categories that govern life, death, and possibility across species lines.

Finally, Bert Theunissen's critical history of sheepdog trialling casts a long view over the development of shepherding as both practice and performance. Drawing on extensive archival sources, Theunissen traces how Border Collies were shaped not just by the demands of farm work but by the stylized masculinity and aesthetic ideals of nineteenth-century trialling culture. Far from improving practical herding, trialling produced a type of "sporting dog" optimized for spectacle, often at the expense of both sheep welfare and farm utility. Today, as many working shepherds reject the trial collie in favour of more cooperative herding styles—some even experimenting with forms of leading rather than driving—Theunissen calls on us to reconsider entrenched ideas of control, obedience, and animal labour.

Taken together, the essays in this issue traverse a range of geographies, genres, and disciplinary formations to ask how species come to matter—and to whom. They explore the fragile, fraught, and sometimes hopeful terrain of interspecies relation under conditions of ongoing ecological, colonial, and epistemic violence. Whether attending to the figure of the goat as a site of ethical contradiction, the police dog as an instrument of racial biocapitalism, or the pheasant as a product of forgotten stewardship, these essays insist on the

necessity of sustained, situated, and intersectional critique. What emerges is a portrait of a world in which the categories of species, labour, value, and resistance are contested and reconfigured across shifting ecological, colonial, and political terrains.

As usual, the issue also features a range of critical reviews of recent books in human–animal studies and related fields. Ben De Bruyn discusses the late Karen Bakker's *The Sounds of Life* and *Gaia's Web*, two popular science books that explore the intersection of digital technology, environmental science, and interspecies communication. De Bruyn appreciates Bakker's cautious optimism and her insistence on exploring digital technology's potential to aid rather than hinder human connection with the natural world. At the same time, he also raises concerns about the limits of digital environmentalism and the risk of techno-solutionism. While Bakker urges us to imagine a future of "kinship acoustics" and planetary listening, De Bruyn reminds us of the extractive logics that often underlie even the most well-intentioned ecological projects.

In their joint review of Josh Milburn's *Just Fodder* (2022) and *Food, Justice, and Animals* (2023), Carlo Salzani and Zipporah Weisberg take issue with Milburn's liberal framework, particularly its implicit endorsement of capitalism as a viable context for multispecies justice. While they welcome Milburn's detailed analyses of relational obligations across species and his commitment to finding workable solutions in a world reluctant to abandon animal products, his zoopolis, they argue, remains entangled in a logic of exploitation, presenting reformist solutions that fail to challenge systemic structures of oppression.

This view stands in implicit critical dialogue Pablo Castelló's review of Matthew Calarco's *The Three Ethologies* (2024), in which Castelló mounts a defence of liberal political theories of animal rights — especially Donaldson and Kymlicka's *Zoopolis* — which, in his view, has been unfairly dismissed by critical animal studies scholars as being purely individualist, when in fact such accounts retain crucial tools for articulating collective territorial rights and animal subjecthood. Calarco's central claim is that forging more just and meaningful human–animal relationships requires a transformation of self and

society along three interrelated lines of "ethological" practice—mental, social, and environmental—rooted in the Greek notion of *askesis*, or disciplined ethical formation. Drawing on narrative ethnography, Indigenous thought, and everyday multispecies encounters, Calarco explores how humans might resubjectify themselves in response to animals' lives and worlds, emphasizing relationality, attentiveness, and dwelling. Castelló highlights *The Three Ethologies* not only as a philosophical intervention, but also as a call to action—one that asks readers to risk vulnerability, embrace co-becoming, and see with, rather than simply look at, the more-than-human world.

Talitha May, whose striking image of a crow building a nest of twigs graces the cover of this issue, reviews Jacqueline Emery and David Lei's *Finding Flaco: Our Year with New York City's Beloved Owl* (2024), a nonfiction account of a Eurasian eagle owl who escaped the Central Park Zoo, becoming a viral sensation. As May shows, the book is more than a lavish photo-documentary; it is a reflection on perception, urban ecology, and the contested politics of freedom. May invites us to consider what it means for a non-native, "escaped" animal to capture the human imagination, and what kinds of lives become thinkable or lovable in the urban wild. The review raises difficult questions about the sentimental logics of animal celebrity and the limits of anthropocentric empathy. And yet, Flaco's story also functions as a rupture—"a cut in the mesh of captivity"—that points toward a broader reckoning with the institutionalized confinement of nonhuman lives.

Finally, returning to the uncanny material afterlives of animal bodies with which the issue began, Poulomi Choudhury reviews Elizabeth Effinger's *Taxidermy and the Gothic: The Horror of Still Life (2024)*, a provocative exploration of taxidermy as a material and affective site of Gothic horror. Tracing how preserved animal bodies evoke stasis, dread, and ontological unease, Effinger argues that taxidermy functions as a "dark mirror" reflecting systemic violence, perverse desires, and the blurred boundary between life and death. Choudhury praises the book's ambition and interdisciplinary scope but notes its limited engagement with the material conditions of animal death. While the book provocatively critiques "critical taxidermy studies" for

sanitizing or aestheticizing taxidermy, it risks reproducing the same move by reducing animal death to metaphor and human projection. As Choudhury argues, the horror of taxidermy is not only that we might become mounts—but that the animal already has.

In addition to her book review, Talitha May also provided the image that graces the cover of this issue. It was inspired by two crows who began building a nest on a ledge of her apartment building this past spring. "Throughout the day," she writes, "the crows build their nest with malleable twigs they snip from trees. [. . .] Often, they would discard the materials they had brought to their nest, but then days after, re-visit their drop piles and methodically sift through material. The mandala-like design represents the regularity of crow time, egalitarian turn-taking, methodical choices, and graceful lines of flight. Rather than fly directly to their nest, for instance, they often circled the courtyard until a final lift to the eave. In contrast to the disruption and unpredictability of human induced global climate change, crow time and methodology characterizes a rhythmic orderliness. The starkness of the design also references how in late winter when gathering en masse at dusk, their bodies appear like crisp silhouettes." We hope other readers will feel inspired to submit their art for consideration for future issues of *Humanimalia*.

As always, I would like to thank the authors and peer reviewers, as well as all section editors, copyeditors, our intern Lotte, and our production assistant Imogen, for their hard work, egalitarian turn-taking, methodical choices, and graceful lines of flight, all of which contributed to bringing this issue to fruition—if not in time for spring, then at least before summer gives way to the stark silhouettes of winter.

On behalf of the editorial team,

Kári Driscoll
July 2025