

Too cute to kill? From the depiction of animals in children's literature to the framing of government policy by adults

21-22 July 2016, University of Surrey, UK

Workshop Report

'Too cute to kill? From the depiction of animals in children's literature to the framing of government policy by adults' was a two day workshop held at the University of Surrey from 21-22 July 2016. The event was co-organised by Prof Mark Chambers, Professor of Veterinary Bacteriology (School of Veterinary Medicine), Dr Adeline Johns-Putra, Reader in English (School of English and Languages) and Dr Birgitta Gatersleben, Senior lecturer in Environmental Psychology (School of Psychology) from the University of Surrey and Dr Sophie Heywood, Lecturer, (Department of Modern Languages & European Studies) from the University of Reading. 28 participants from 5 countries, including five keynote speakers, attended the workshop which included presentations, panel discussions and interactive working groups.

Workshop objectives

This two day multidisciplinary workshop sought to:

- Develop an understanding of how the framing of animal species can help or hinder policy development and public engagement by government in the areas of disease control, animal welfare, and biodiversity.
- Form of a novel national/international network between complementary disciplines with an interest in exploring the concept and origin of how animal species are framed and the impact this has on policy development.
- Identify research questions and provide an opportunity to develop research plans.

Summary of Presentations

Our workshop was opened by **Mark Chambers**, Professor of Veterinary Bacteriology at the University of Surrey who then introduced our first keynote speaker, **Mr Alick Simmons**, former Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer and Director of Plant and Animal Health for England who presented an engaging and compelling case for the development of an ethical framework for the treatment of wildlife in the UK similar to that applied to experimental animals. Our second keynote speaker was **Professor Wyn Grant**, from the University of Warwick. Drawing on extensive analysis of documents in the National Archives and their Scottish counterpart, he argued that cultural constructions of the badger treat it as a cherished species endowed with elements of magic and mystery. In particular, emotional symbolism surrounding the badger became significant in the policy debate, making it difficult to achieve a consensus on policy and to devise feasible and effective approaches to the challenge of bovine tuberculosis.

Three submitted papers chosen by the organised committee were then presented grouped around the theme of contentious and intractable policies involving animals. **Ms Stella Chapman**, University of Surrey spoke on the importance of animal welfare researchers being engaged in ethical debate, policy formation, regulatory mechanisms and their enforcement. **Ms Jess Phoenix**, Lancaster University continued the theme of badgers and bovine tuberculosis through an examination of interview material within local, regional and European assemblages of badgers as a protected species and cattle as a food resource so as to analyse the foundations of the sentimental framings of badgers, and the consequent implications for policy. **Dr Emily Porth**, University of Surrey explored how insects are perceived and asked how widespread attitudes towards insects, as opposed to other 'pest' animals in our society, may impact public perceptions of, and attitudes toward, forest management strategies.

The next session was organised around the theme of attitudes to animals and was chaired by Birgitta Gatersleben. The first keynote speaker of this session was **Professor Francine Dolins** from the University of Michigan-Dearborn, USA, who discussed ways in

which local and global conservation education projects based on reaching school children and local communities may have an impact on improving the conservation status of lemurs and their habitats in Madagascar. The next keynote speaker was **Ms Caroline Spence**, Queen Mary University of London who discussed psychological processes and forms of cognitive bias that are evident in our attitudes to nonhuman animals, both as members of the public and as scientists.

Three submitted papers chosen by the organised committee were then presented to continue the theme. **Ms Sara Owczarczak-Garstecka**, University of Liverpool presented her investigation into what YouTube video comments elucidate about how viewers perceive risk in videos of dog bites; showing that the analysis of publicly available videos can help identify attitudes and perceptions of risk around dogs that could aid bite prevention interventions and policies. **Professor Alison Sealey**, Lancaster University showed how their large electronically stored 'corpus' of language about animals in texts from a range of genres could be interrogated using specialist computer software to analyse patterns in the discourse in the use of the words 'cute' and 'kill', neatly demonstrating how these patterns reflect norms and assumptions about various kinds of animal, and people's orientations towards them. **Dr John Bradshaw**, University of Bristol was our last speaker of the first day. Using the self-evident affection that many people feel for their animal companions, he showed how efforts to assimilate such relationships into psychological frameworks developed for human-human bonds have not been entirely successful, exploring reasons why this may be the case.

Day two took the theme of the depiction of animals in literature and was chaired by **Adeline Johns-Putra** who introduced our final keynote speaker, **Dr Amy Ratelle** from the University of Toronto. Dr Ratelle examined the overlapping and often double-sided rhetorics addressing children as agents of change, and the role of children's literature in advancing the cause of animal rights. Reflecting on the ways in which texts geared to a child audience work to reconceptualise the relationships between human and animal, she unpacked what this means for interdisciplinary research and policy development. This was followed by the showing of a video interview conducted by **Sophie Heywood** with **Holly Webb**, best-selling author and former children's book editor. This insightful interview explored Ms Webb's career as a writer and publisher for children, and what attracted her to specialising in animal stories in particular. She explained what she thought was the particular appeal of animal stories for children, and what she felt were the limits of acceptable animal behaviour in such books.

Four submitted papers chosen by the organised committee were then presented. **Ms Kelly Hübben**, Stockholm University presented a highly entertaining discussion of the ethical and ideological implications of anthropomorphic animals that (attempt to) eat other animals in a selection of American Little Golden Books, a commercial picture book series marketed for a young readership. **Mr David Whitley**, Cambridge University, examined Pixar films, asking what the inclusion of frequently despised creatures, such as cockroaches, ants and beetles, within the repertoire of major protagonists has to tell us about the extension – and limitations – of an ecological consciousness within contemporary childhood. **Ms Helen Wang**, drew on her experience of translating children's books from Chinese into English to give an idea of the presence and type of animal stories; discussing the depiction of wild animals and domesticated animals by two bestselling authors in China. Finally, **Ms Liz West**, University of Reading discussed the construct of the talking animal in children's fiction, showing that by giving animals our voice we irrevocably humanise them, and this has implications for the way in which children build their cultural and sentimental responses to animals beyond the pages of their story books.

Key themes from the workshop

Throughout the workshop people from different disciplines were organised into focus groups. At the end of the three presentation sessions these groups broke out to discuss the following:

- What are the big/unanswered questions?
- What are the priorities for future research?
- What needs to change/be done differently?

Each group appointed a rapporteur who reported back the group's opinions on these three questions during the last session on the second day. The main points to emerge were:

What are the big/unanswered questions?

- How to change attitudes? Should we? Are we right to try to do so?
- How do we build consensus?
- What is the animal's perspective and how can we know? What are the implications for not knowing?
- How do we move forward from where we are?
- What is the role of religion? How does it influence and what are the consequences of moving to a more secular worldview?
- What criteria do we use to measure the value of animals?
- How is pain experienced by an animal?
- How do you define suffering?
- Why do some people 'care' and some people don't?
- How do we get the science and messages 'out there'?
- How do we overcome language barriers and linguistic differences for the communication of concepts?
- How do we change contemporary narratives?
- What is the impact of literature on public versus political opinion?
- How do people engage with the process of producing food?
- How do we build trust?

What are the priorities for future research?

- How does children's literature feed into the debate?
- What is the role of technology in killing animals? How does it compare with drone warfare?
- How do we understand animals without falling into the dual traps of anthropomorphism and denying what we share?
- How do we instil empathy?

What needs to change/be done differently?

- Bridge the gap between research findings and those who will implement them.
- Biosecurity – different attitudes globally to screening/introducing/movements of animals and humans.
- Rebranding of 'ethical' foods to reach a wider market.
- Use of social media to inform/educate/change behaviour (but to what?)
- Moving environmental issues higher up the global agenda.
- Humanities/arts need to be less afraid of engaging with these issues. Agree on a set of definitions and move on rather than continually debating and discussing.
- Reflect on our own biases and preconceptions.
- Address media portrayals that are misleading and inaccurate.
- Scientists need to get better at telling stories.
- Utilise peer pressure to influence behavioural change to animals in the way it has to recycling.
- Better education to allow children and adults to appreciate the food chain and where food comes from.
- Engage the public with policy development.

Next steps

Several outputs based on the workshop and other activities are planned by the organising committee. Journal editors and publishers will be contacted in order to explore the possibility of an edited special issue, or book based on the key themes of the workshop. Workshop participants will remain in contact with a view to future collaborations. A Dropbox folder has been set up, initially to share presentations but, in time, this may facilitate sharing future plans. There was an appetite to organise another workshop, but this time with the focus on understanding the religious, cultural and linguistic differences with respect to attitudes to animals. In particular it was felt that this workshop had stimulated the pursuit of a new line of investigation within the humanities – that is, the depiction of animals in children's literature. Two particularly strong research themes to emerge were 'how do people interact with the food chain?' – to be explored through the commissioning of a children's book depicting the rearing and slaughtering of animals for food, and 'the language of death' – how it depends on species, linguistics and culture?

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FROM POSTER SESSION AND EXHIBITION



FROM REALISTIC TO SYMBOLIC: DEPICTIONS OF CATS AND DOGS IN LITHUANIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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'Any study of a text on the non-human always becomes a study of humanity in some sense.'
(Timothy Clark)

I. CONTEXT INFORMATION

LITHUANIA

Officially the **Republic of Lithuania** (Lithuanian: *Lietuvos Respublika*), is a country in Northern Europe. One of the three Baltic states, it is situated along the southeastern shore of the Baltic Sea, to the east of Sweden and Denmark. It is bordered by Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east and south, Poland to the south, and Kaliningrad Oblast (a Russian enclave) to the southwest. Lithuania has an estimated population of 2.9 million people as of 2015, and its capital and largest city is Vilnius. Lithuanians are a Baltic people. The official language, Lithuanian, along with Latvian, are the only two living languages in the Baltic branch of the Indo-European language family.

AREA: 65,300 km²
POPULATION: 2,872,294

There are 57 ANIMAL SHELTERS and ORGANIZATIONS working for ANIMALS WELFARE (not each of them has its own shelter) + 12 control services

NUMBER OF HOMELESS DOGS AND CATS IN SHELTERS: 5429 dogs and 6042 cats per year in 2015.

EUROBAROMETER:

93 % of Lithuanian citizens questioned consider that protecting the environment is important to them personally.

64 % of questioned Lithuanians are worried about air pollution, 53 % about water pollution and 54 % about growing amount of waste. Only 11 % of Lithuanians are worried about shortage of drinking water and the same percentage of respondents are worried about loss of extinction of species and their habitats and of natural ecosystems.

86 % of Lithuanian respondents agreed with the statement that environment issues have a direct effect in their daily life, 83 % believe that they can play a role in protecting the environment.

II. STEREOTYPES AND REALITY

There are some strong stereotypes in Lithuanians mentality, here are some of them:

'Our nature is beautiful and clear and we treat it properly.'

'[...] every Lithuanian by nature and without any special education is sensitive to nature and forests.'

'Lithuanian traditional lifestyle is closely related to a forest and its trees.'

'A strong relationship between human and nature is the main feature of our folk customs and traditions. The respect to all life forms prevails in our culture, no matter in what form it would be manifested.'

Meanwhile we pollute our beloved forests and beaches and abuse our beloved animals.

Let's examine how dogs and cats – the most abused animal species – are depicted in Lithuanian children's literature and what relationships with animals these depictions could form.

III. DEPICTIONS OF DOGS AND CATS IN LITHUANIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

There are two canonical texts in Lithuanian children's literature that every child must read in primary school and which depict two most popular animal characters – a dog and a cat. They were written by the same author – Jonas Biliūnas. One of them is a short story about abandoned homeless cat which was shot by a boy who mistreated himself as a hunter from James Cooper's books. It is called 'Alkūtelis' in Lithuanian (eng. '3 hit') and it was first published in 1906. Another story is about

'RAINIUKAI' ('THE TABBIES') by PETRAS CVIRKA, 1962



This is a wonderful story about successful co-existence and co-operation between people and animals and about how love and care for a living creature overcomes children's selfishness towards animals. A mother, whose behavior is dictated by countryside living economy rules, that talk about impartiality to keep animals, who contribute no direct value to you, values her children to show their love to them, because she considers them a 'superfamily' and they need to be protected. But compassion shown in children and instead of discarding them, they take them and care for them. The efforts are rewarded – kittens grow up strong and healthy and when the village is overthrown by mice and rats, they become true heroes. Towards

NAMES, NATURAL BEHAVIOUR AND NEOTANY: THE POLITICS OF SPEAKING FOR ANOTHER SPECIES IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT CAMPAIGNS

Animals can't speak for or collectively represent their own experiences or needs in any straightforward way. In addition, the very existence of nonhuman animal subjectivities has been under question for centuries. This represents a problem for organisations campaigning for their protection.

Ways that animal subjectivities are framed for moral shock and empathetic connection by campaigners:

This pilot research used i) website analysis and interviews with campaign professionals from three large animal protection organisations; and ii) focus groups with potential supporters to examine the role that the social construction of animal subjectivities plays in the promotion of social change. I argue that by framing animals' identities, needs, capacities and experiences in particular ways, animal protection SMOs hope to tell stories that deliver moral shocks which resonate with the frames of potential supporters. What can this tell us about the kinds of human-animal relationships they envisage? What kinds of epistemologies are relied on to understand non-human animal experience? And how do potential supporters – in this case, 'political liberals', understand and respond to their tactics?

Names and imagined individual biographies – for certain species

"Our job is to turn objects into subjects"
Ceri, Against Animal Experimentation

Sentience science and destinies denied: the rehabilitation of fundamentally wild selves at the species level

"It denies the animal the ability to be the animal it's evolved to be. And that involves a right, you know, you're taking something away. It can be a powerful story-telling mechanism, I think."
(Robert, Farm Animal Concern)

Neotany and 'cuteness' – how supporter speciesism and the appeal to 'caring, loving' core demographics cause tensions

"... we always say the bigger the eyes? Erm fur? Erm, don't talk to me about turtles? ... the UK did an appeal (on turtles) and someone said, oh it was successful, it raised 45,000 dollars, and I was like, ... we can probably raise that much money by just sending out a piece of paper ..."
(Mia, Global Animal Reach)

Displacement from 'natural' social categories compounds cultural shock

"Mice...these are wild animals, essentially, you put them into an environment that's like a prison."
Ceri, Against Animal Experimentation

