

Journée d'Etudes RULNAT

avec le soutien du PALOC, UMR 208 (IRD, MNHN)

Contested spaces. Animals, Activists and the Law

28 Septembre 2023, 10h-17h

Amphithéâtre de paléontologie
Galerie de paléontologie et d'anatomie comparée
Jardin des plantes, MNHN
2 rue Buffon, Paris 5



organisée par **Daniela Berti** (CNRS, CESAH) et **Anthony Good** (University of Edinburgh)

10h00 – 12h30

Welcome

Adam Reed, University of St Andrews: *Disciplines of Investigation in Animal Activism*
Discussant: **Véronique Bouillier** (CNRS, CESAH)

Krithika Srinivasan, University of Edinburgh, and **Guillem Rubio Ramon** University of Edinburgh: *Thought experiments on free-living dogs, law & planetary health*
Discussant : **Frédéric Landy** (Université Paris Nanterre)

14h30 – 17h00

Mihnea Tănăsescu, University of Mons: *Animal Reintroductions and the Politics of Purity: the case of the European Bison*
Discussant : **Sarah Benabou** (IRD, PALOC)

Kieran O'Mahony, Czech Academy of Science: *Feral landscapes and the messy (bio)politics of resurgent (porcine) life*
Discussant : **Anthony Good** (University of Edinburgh)



Recent decades have seen a growing, worldwide judicialisation of discussions concerning environmental issues, including debates over the legal status of animals, and their conservation. These arise in a variety of contexts. In some cases, the effort is to contain feral species or vermin (like street dogs or rats), and in other cases to increase numbers in the wild (wolves, bison). In other cases (wild boar, beavers) particular species are being reintroduced in some parts of the world while simultaneously facing containment measures in others. Such processes may also be motivated by economic rather than ecological considerations (birds of prey or other predators).

Such debates are likely to involve a broad spectrum of protagonists, including professional lawyers and judges, perhaps acting on their own initiative through public interest litigation, politicians, state officials functioning at different levels, NGOs and individual activists, journalists, priests, and of course, land-owners and other representatives of vested interests who feel threatened by specific proposals. Activists themselves often display strong ideological and political differences regarding strategies for rewilding, reintroducing or conserving threatened or locally-extinct species. Consequently, such issues become matters of general public debate and can only be understood by taking into account their broad institutional, socio-cultural, political and legal contexts.

Abstracts

Adam Reed, Social Anthropology – Reader, University of St Andrews

Disciplines of Investigation in Animal Activism

In the discursive field of animal activism, the role of covert investigations and the figure of the undercover investigator are vital. Indeed, the latter has a central and peculiar place in the moral imagination of animal protection. However, there is comparatively little ethnographic work done with investigators, either in the field of animal protection or conservation. Based on long-term fieldwork with an animal protection organization in Scotland, I present an account of the disciplines of investigation from the perspective of that group's investigator. This includes a consideration of the forms of expertise (often self-taught) that inform the investigator's practice of both overt and covert forms of investigation but also a consideration of the ways in which that practice requires a certain fluency in the law and responsiveness to legal precedent (in the UK context of common law, especially) and law-making opportunities. The paper will also consider the intersections between investigation and campaigning, and between investigation and legal principles of corroboration in witness testimony. Lastly, it will explore the importance of other legal instruments such as licensing in the regulation and investigation of animal protection or welfare concern.

Krithika Srinivasan, Senior Lecturer in Human Geography
Co-Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh
and **Guillem Rubio Ramon**, Researcher, University of Edinburgh

Thought experiments on free-living dogs, law & planetary health

This paper examines the socio-legal and everyday geographies of human cohabitation with free-living dogs in India. In the backdrop of fears about rabies and mauling, we investigate the contours of ground-level societal interactions with free-living or street dogs to theorise these liminal animals as

autonomous, unintentional natures. We then compare this to how free-living dogs, and their interactions with people, are debated in public platforms, especially the media and litigation. In carrying out these analyses, we ask whether the multidimensionality of people-street dog relationships can be better captured in public debates and law making. This has implications for wider concerns about planetary health and multispecies justice because the case of free-living dogs offers useful lessons about living with nonhuman difference in a planet where the social and nature are inextricably entangled.

Mihnea Tănăsescu, Research Professor, School of Human and Social Sciences
University of Mons

*Animal Reintroductions and the Politics of Purity:
the case of the European Bison*

In this paper, I take the reintroduction of the European Bison (wisent) to the Southern Carpathians as an occasion for thinking about the politics of rewilding. I detail the history of wisent conservation and juxtapose it with the more recent history of rewilding. Specifically, I am interested in how definitions of species, based on an essentialist understanding of what makes an animal worthy of protection, come into interesting conflict with functional restoration approaches that stress the role of animals within wider ecosystems. Ultimately, what falls from view are the animal themselves, and I show how their behavior calls into question both essentialist and functionalist approaches to animal reintroductions, instead suggesting an experimental stance that allows new and unpredictable situations to emerge.

Kieran O'Mahony, Research Associate, Department of Ecological Anthropology
Czech Academy of Science

Feral landscapes and the messy (bio)politics of resurgent (porcine) life

Feral landscapes form around the dynamic relations of life which has slipped from human systems pertaining control and simplification. Variously hopeful and threatening, feral landscapes not only comprise lively more-than-human ecologies, but also the emergent and often contested (bio)politics within which they become embroiled. Primarily drawing on ethnographic research conducted in the UK, as well as stories unfolding elsewhere, this paper focuses on a nonhuman protagonist- the wild boar- and explores the feral landscape(s) that have emerged around their presence. Absent from the British countryside for several centuries, the recently (and unofficially) arrivant wild boar have been reconfiguring landscapes according to their own placemaking practices and more-than-porcine relations. As they have done so, so they have become unfamiliar points of disturbance, risk, reverence, care and negotiation for their newfound (more-than-human) cohabitants. Importantly, their presence has led to an emergent feral (bio)politics, one in which formalised legal assemblages are drawn into dialogue with different communities of practice- activists, naturalists, stalkers, farmers, and wild boar themselves- who contest belonging across time and space. This messy landscape, woven through bodies, material practices, institutions and discourse, highlights how nonhuman life can disturb and regenerate social, cultural and political formations.

