

---

## Book Review: *Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History*

---

*Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History*, edited by Jennifer Bonnell and Sean Kheraj. University of Calgary Press, 2022, + 428 pages.

Reviewed by Ives Hartman, Ohio State University

*Traces of the Animal Past* provides a reevaluation of where to find non-humans in overwhelmingly human-centered evidence and archives. Editors Jennifer Bonnell and Sean Kheraj argue that animal studies must move beyond the well-trodden question of animal agency to the actual situations of non-humans in the very places where they are usually overlooked. This collection of essays offers a range of methodological approaches and types of sources, exploring digital and physical archives, art, biological sciences, and spatial analysis. The collection is arranged thematically, beginning with an assessment of animal bodies as living history.

In part 1, animals are interrogated through their “embodied histories.” Sandra Swart recounts her experiences with Mongolian horses and horsemanship, revealing that the hair, feces, and bodily motion of both domesticated and wild horses (particularly the famous takhi, or Przewalski’s horse) change over time, inviting a sensory reassessment of animal history records. Jennifer Bonnell explores honeybee labor in the US Great Lakes region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, utilizing archival beekeeping manuals to explain that beekeepers can “read” the bodies of their bees to better understand honeybee working environments and the opportunities and threats they presented (p. 53). Lindsay Stallones Marshall analyzes equine voice and action in historical context in the US West between 1840 and 1876, with the notable example of how a bolting horse contributed to the outcomes of the Battle of the Greasy Grass.

---

*Animal History*, volume 1, number 1, pp. 94–96. electronic ISSN: 2998-3673. © 2024 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://online.ucpress.edu/journals/pages/reprintspermissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/ah.2024.103>

Part 2 assesses “traces” of animals in unconventional narratives, beginning with Susan Nance’s assembly of a digital archive to preserve conversations surrounding the greyhound racing industry and subsequent rehoming programs in the US and Canada from the 1990s onward. Jody Hodgins charts the development of veterinary discourse in the Ontario region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, utilizing contemporary veterinary manuals to reveal the developing and evolving construction of animal health and the professionalization of veterinary science. And George Colpitts examines changing narratives about fur and the Hudson Bay Company between 1919 and 1939, detailing conversations about the ethics of wearing fur and how fur was harvested from wild animals.

Part 3 explores the “unknowable” animal, or the animal that is physically present but whose voice is ostensibly silent. Catherine McNeur’s essay details entomologist Margaritta Hare Morris and her discovery of a new variety of wheat flies in the fields near Philadelphia in the early to mid-1800s. On the basis of gender, Morris was discredited in the field, and the new breed of flies she discovered still remains largely forgotten. Joanna Dean discusses guinea pigs as test subjects at Connaught Laboratories in Toronto. These creatures were a foundational part of the lab’s research process but were largely absent from their record-keeping procedures. Jason Colby investigates the dolphin Tuffy, who was utilized by the US Navy Marine Mammal Program during the Cold War to assist with diving exercises. This essay works in tandem with Nigel Rothfels’s subsequent analysis of the elephant Ned, who was mentioned frequently in the popular press in the early 1900s, but with constant hyperbolic inaccuracy. In both instances, reporters and scientists were keen to describe the animal’s achievements and physical prowess at length, but the actual inner worlds of the animals themselves remain silent.

Part 4 delves into “spatial sources and animal movement,” with Colleen Campbell and Tina Loo’s analysis of bear territory in the Eastern Slopes Grizzly Bear Project investigating the movement of bears from 1994 to 2004 in the Canadian Rockies of Alberta and British Columbia. Through this project, they analyze the tangible ramifications of animal action and ensuing research possibilities. In two subsequent essays, Sean Kheraj and Andrew Robichaud assess movement of animals and animal industries in urban environments using GIS technology, charting how this software can reveal realities about how people related to animals through spatial proximity and development. And Emily Wakild assesses llama diaspora from their ancestral home in South America, analyzing the perceptions of these animals globally.

Finally, part 5 evaluates animals visually, through artwork, museum displays, and taxidermy. J. Keri Cronin uses art history to situate animals in a 1916 painting by Canadian artist Frank Brownell of an Ottawa market and an 1827 schematic drawing of construction of the first Welland Canal in the Niagara Region of Southern Ontario by Oliver Phelps. In both instances, animals are not the focal points of the artwork, but they are key actors nonetheless, revealing attitudes and perceptions about animals through their inclusion. Jay Young details the development of the *ANIMALIA: Animals in the Archives* exhibition at the Archives of Ontario and delves into the challenges of situating

animals through visual media in a manner that is appealing and accessible for visitors. Dolly Jørgensen presents a fascinating analysis of the disparate locations of a taxidermized extinct bluebuck, detailing how tangible and digital displays value animals and perceive extinction.

This collection of essays provides a novel lens on a pressing and important issue within animal studies—how to isolate animal voices in human archives. The evidence and research methods offered within are relatable and easily applied to other modes of scholarly research. However, some of these methods simply state that they are utilizing nonhuman bodies and perspectives in a unique way without deeply demonstrating this within the analysis. While essays like Swart's and Marshall's utilize animal presence and motion as a compelling example of animal visibility in overlooked archives, they could more clearly apply the research methodologies that they reveal in their essays. What would analysis of horsehair actually look like in historical scholarship, and how can these ideas be applied? These are questions that must be interrogated by future scholars. ■

*Published online: October 30, 2024*