

CONCLUSION: ON BEING MADE OF CARES

Back before I had started this project, I lived in Melbourne for a time. For reasons I don't fully understand, I started a perhaps unusual activity of "snail mending" that is, if I found a snail with a slightly cracked shell (or if I accidentally stepped on a snail and caused the crack myself), I would bring it inside, keeping the snail sufficiently humid and stocked up on calcium until the snail's shell healed. The process was slow—sometimes taking months—but was oddly rewarding and left me very fond of snails.

In my first evening of watching hedgehogs in Dunedin, it had thus been a shock to hear the chomp chomp chomp of a hedgehog eating snail after snail after snail in amongst the geraniums that wove through our backyard. For a moment, I hated hedgehogs and wondered what on earth had made me want to understand people attempting to be kind to them.

But this was exactly "what on earth" I was doing this project for, to not turn away from the realities of living together. In that first night in the field, I had been disabused of my hopes for some kind of ultimate peace. Wolves would not be laying down with lambs, and the "Thou shalt not kill" ethics that I had, somewhat unconsciously, arrived with, would not hold reality. How, then, to keep the cares together? (Taylor 2008). As with environmental stewardship generally, it would seem to require an ability to hold ambiguity (Rose 2011).

As this project continued, however, I would find few examples of the public holding of ambiguity. Indeed, love for the critters hedgehogs eat would be leveraged into attempting to forge a clear-cut "bad guy" image for them

(figure 7.1). I would find myself wincing at the repeated mention of research that had discovered a hedgehog within whose stomach 283 *Hemiandrus* (a genus of wētā) legs were found (Jones, Moss, and Sanders 2005). Like many other kiwis, I have long loved wētā. This love, however, felt almost abused in the repeated framings of hedgehog *versus* wētā, as if aligning oneself with native birds and insects must require (only) deathly opposition to—and dislike of—“introduced predators” such as hedgehogs. An encouragement to hate in the name of love (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 78). The 283 *Hemiandrus* legs were mentioned at numerous “pest” information days, as well as, increasingly, on almost any Aotearoa/New Zealand conservation-focused online explainer. On one level, this research shared useful information. When so many of us have grown up with ideas of hedgehogs eating bread and drinking tea, I suspect that this information may well need to be repeated. However, when shared in simplified frames of hedgehogs as “wildlife baddies” or “deadly pests”, the huge numbers of legs of a fabulous and loved insect in one hedgehog’s stomach start to suggest a monstrously bad animal (figure 7.1).

Such framings of good versus bad species take on a disturbing tone within cultures with histories of deliberate extirpation. Deliberate extirpations of predator species have taken place in the history of the both United Kingdom and British colonies (Coult 2015; Handley 1991; Leslie 1996). This is by no means universal. As Law Professor Asmi Wood has argued, neither in the lore of his nor many other Indigenous nations, nor in global religions such as Islam, is it considered the place of a human to question the right of another species to exist (2019). As annoying or harmful as another kind of being might be, other creatures are assumed to have a right to exist. If other species might be wiped out on the basis of the harms they cause, I wonder at the resistance many of us raised in such worlds might feel at owning, and having any chance of working kindly with, our own ability to cause harm. Contradiction thinking, as Davé argues, in its inability to hold inconsistencies, “puts us at war with the world” (2023, 67).

It’s not to say that hedgehogs aren’t an existential threat to wētā or other kinds. Trapping might be needed in order to save other species. And so little is known about insect life that even more caution might be warranted. In

Aotearoa/New Zealand, with so many incredibly vulnerable species, in some instances, perhaps a case could even be made for extirpation (Palmer and McLauchlan 2023). My concern is, instead, in the way in which such killing is rendered ultimately justifiable rather than needing to be revisited in particular times and places (Haraway 2008, 76).

Not only does vilification stop one being open to other solutions, but such “justified” killing is able to take on a flavor of glee. In the process of getting the various permissions I needed for this book, I flicked to Facebook to connect with one group and was struck by images of people in an apparent state of glee over the bodies of the dead rats. When other-than-human animals are rendered affectively absent, what possibility is there for holding up long enough to make good decisions?

In this, I want to be clear that I am not blaming conservationists or their publicity teams for these framings. Conservation work is difficult and often itself a marginalized practice (Chua 2020 et al., Kiik 2019). Furthermore, the argumentation used arises within a particular cultural context. Without a broader cultural acceptance that one might love and kill, publics who love particular species can make life hard for conservationists, blocking the killing of beloved species that may, in certain times and places, be needed to save other beloved species. To avoid the creation of such conflicts, it makes sense that dominant conservation practice might want to reduce love for those who might be killed, to do careful work on image management of “introduced predators,” lest their charming aspects show, and people become attached.¹

And yet, it is precisely such deliberate use of “arts of dismissal,” the work of reducing attachment and curious noticing of “introduced predators” that concerns me most. Deborah Bird Rose wrote of “double death” as those deaths in which, rather than nurturing life, the mode of death instead destroys “the capacity of life to bend death back into life” (2005, 124). In this, Rose is thinking and feeling with the mass poisoning of dingoes, where the doubling of death is both in the sheer weight of death, as well as in the poisons which mean the dead, rather than nurturing life, poison it. The doubling of death that occurs in the gleeful killings of rats or possums, or the trapping of hedgehogs as monsters, is, to my mind, not only the literal poisoning, but also the

poisoning that lingers from such affective loss, the loss of personhood that has already taken place, even before the killing does.

MADE BUT NOT MADE UP

My experience of a sense of something like dissolution as not just the lives, but the legitimacy of hedgehogs as a creature, came under threat, has given me a *bodily* sense of the importance of attachment to who I am in the world. Such attachments are made, but not “made up” (Haraway 2006, 138). I didn’t want to acknowledge it for a long time—my own speciesist framings of hedgehogs being “just animals” leading me to apologize for being attached in such ways. As Judith Butler argues, we are composed of our attachments to others, it seems that this is so, regardless of their species designation (2014, 22).

I have come to suspect there is additional intensity in attachments to other-than-human beings that also involve having become attuned to them. My body had come to know something of hedgehogs. While I can’t claim to know a hedgehog eye (or nose) view of the world, and while such attunement isn’t some claim of radical empathy, such an experience of becoming-with another in a certain time and place did leave me somehow changed, responsive in new ways. As noted through the stories of hedgehog rehabilitators—including my own experiences—ways of caring are also ways of orienting to the world. From the way one’s body learns to pick up a hedgehog so that it doesn’t scare, to the even more outlandish possibility that one could get a feel for the spaces that might support hedgehog flourishing, becoming entangled with other bodies, attuned and able to respond in ways that one can’t easily undo or ignore (Haraway 2008, 71). Having cared for and lived alongside snails and rats, too, there is some deeper call in me toward them, even on days when I might find them disgusting, or annoying. Coming to care is a subject forming relationship.

And yet, while such attachments to others can become fundamental aspects of one’s sense of self, they are also radically contingent. A vast array of stories and infrastructures, social pressures and personal labors, encounters and histories are at play in our coming to care for others as well as in our learning not to. In contrast to an assumption of an innate biophilia, there is work done

to call others to care. Not that there isn't a place for biological and physical propensities; the tendency for rats to proliferate in ways that hedgehogs don't, for example, does seem to play a part in the level of fear and disgust they tend to elicit in people. However, people can and do still come to love or hate either species. It is *naturecultural*, with the apparent charms of other-than-human beings being bound up in the entangled relations between the agency of other-than-human beings as well the worlds—social and personal—of those witnessing (Lorimer 2009, 324). Throughout my fieldwork, at different times and places, and through books, games, toys, songs, crafts, stories, gentle moments with beloved humans, and compelling social narratives, people were called, charmed, to care for particular other species. In such ways, cares were nurtured for hedgehogs, stoats, and rabbits, and at times beetles and worms, in the UK; for geckos and wētā and native birds in Aotearoa/New Zealand; for cats and dogs in both; and for some, like rats or fleas, rarely in either.

There is a vital politics in recognizing the contingency of coming to care. However much such attachment becomes part of the rhythms and responsiveness of our bodies, however obvious one's cares may come to feel, however strongly we may feel that those to whom we are attached are inherently charming, one could have come to care differently, to have been—and perhaps still become—differently attuned. In this light, not caring shifts from callousness or moral failing to a lack of having been *called into* caring, emphasizing the importance of the greater material-discursive worlds that support the development of our cares. This agency is not that of the individual consumer-actor. Instead, it is partial and diffuse, with core questions of, “With whom do I come into contact? To whom do I open? What sorts of attachments are we forging through our technologies and material worlds?” Through a lens of care, it is possible to recognize an ethics of everyday movements, as one is changed and leads to change in others through everyday contacts, forming connections and telling stories that encourage some connections and not others (Gilligan 1993; Rose 2011, 11). Such attachments matter for who we make space for in this world.

And it matters, too, for belonging. As Sara Ahmed argues, “how we feel about others is what aligns us with a collective which, paradoxically, ‘takes shape’ only as an effect of such alignments” (Ahmed 2004, 27). What other

alignments could be possible? While British people from a diverse range of backgrounds were involved in environmental care—particularly justice-based work—biodiversity conservation in the UK tended to be a very white space. Questions of how to improve diversity were a recurring topic among white ecologists and conservationists, but little work at the time was done on how to develop shared alignments. Beyond “inclusion”, the work of Black and Green Bristol offers the possibility of genuine collaboration and, for conservationists used to operating in dominant conservation contexts, the possibility of coming to care for our living world in new ways (Ketibuah-Foley and McKenzie, 2018).

DISCOMFORT OF BEING MADE

Often when I’ve attempted to type “madeness” in this manuscript, I’ve accidentally written “madness.” I’ve come to appreciate this possibly Freudian typographical error. For those of us brought up with ontologies of self-made individualism, it can be uncomfortable to think about how one’s attachments to the world, to those one loves, are contingent upon particular material-social histories. One’s cares may feel inevitable—indeed, as an attachment becomes part of oneself, it comes to feel like it could not have been otherwise, the beings that one loves are simply lovable. In worlds that imagine and valorize humans as individual, independent, rational-actors (Latour 2012; Rose 1996), it is potentially disturbing to think that, had things been different—had one been told different stories, been born earlier or later, grown up in a different neighborhood or nation—one might care quite differently, despite how obvious and inherent the value of those for whom one cares comes to feel.

One tried-and-true method to get out of such awkward contingency is to see one’s attachments as simply “Natural” (Latour 2004b). However, it also makes it hard to see the ways in which learning and attachment are vital to conservation and rehabilitation work. Through smuggling interspecies attachment into notions of the “rational” and common sense, the attachments at play become invisible. The idea of “Natural” in the UK was at times leveraged to allow hedgehog rehabilitation work to be framed as simply the sensible care

of addressing human-made harms, a move that protects from accusations of sentimentality, but also overlooks the care and attachment involved in such work. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Natural was present in the idea that the extirpation of introduced predators must happen if the country's ecosystem is to avoid collapse, or that some species inherently have greater value than others.

However, the rub in smuggling one's cares into the right and true "Natural," is that attachments of others that don't fit into the same vision become, by implication, "unnatural", less legitimate. And that is difficult place to start conversations. While grand narratives such as "it is Natural," might allow us to be anesthetized to other cares, the cares still exist. Even if we don't see or acknowledge the attachments of the other, with their nervous system on such alert from the erasure of their attachments, relating is likely to be difficult. Without expanding our idea of who someone is to include the beings to whom they are attached, openings seem unlikely and polarization likely. Certainly, in such situations, even surrounded by potentially charming arts of noticing—such as in story books, card games, cute drawings, soft toys, songs, encouraging messages, on television and, at the Pest Fest, pinecone-kiwi-making (figure 7.1), no such openings had been possible for me.

As I learned in the protective shadows of the Zealandia fence line, as well as in private nuanced conversations with conservationists in Aotearoa/New Zealand, in moments when my attachments were no longer under threat, new cares, or at least empathy for the cares of others, were able to grow. In such settings, I was open to notice and be affected in new ways (Honegger 2001; Lorimer 2015, 5). Taking the attachments of others seriously as being part of who someone is can potentially be seen as strategic—a move to put another at their ease and thus help to open them to one's own cause. Certainly, it had done that for me. However, I think opening to another means, or at least can mean, more than that. In anthropology we know opening to another to be risky business: in taking another seriously enough to understand how they are attached to the world, one can find oneself changed, differently entangled in the world (Haraway 1997, 2008). The question then remains of to whom we might wish to open (Candea 2011).

Holding Ambiguity: Refusing to Be at War with the World

Kindness is not, as Phillips and Taylor argue about “niceness”; rather, the authors argue that kindness is a way of acting that recognizes our connectedness, our interdependence (2009). If I am able to be closed off to another, I am able to act within what Deborah Bird Rose refers to as the “delusional ‘as if’” of colonialism: acting “as if others don’t matter, as if there are no limits” (Rose 2011, 73). In cutting off recognition of our kinship with those we would kill, ambiguity and tension disappear and are replaced by apparent surety: locked into a hard-and-fast common sense, the ever-political question of what is to be done can seem to disappear, leaving actions to appear dangerously obvious (Mol 2008; Stengers 2005a).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, what would (and what does) it look like to step outside of the grand narrative of the necessity of killing to avoid certain ecological collapse? To allow oneself to be in environments that show the charm and beauty of stoats, possums, hedgehogs and others who may still be targeted for killing? In both countries, might it be possible to learn to resist the sort of framings that render some creatures affectively absent when we make decisions about who will die? To be able to show rats in their full charm and intelligence, to remember that they laugh, *and* still, at times, choose to kill?

However, holding multiple, potentially conflicting attachments can be painful. Being broadly attached makes it hard to overlook the reality that ones cares also create hurts (Mol 2008, 75; Puig de la Bellacasa 2011, 204). Without practice in holding such tensions (and, indeed, within cultural worlds marked by the “tyranny of consistency” (Davé 2017), it can seem easier to simply avoid holding such cares. In the UK, at times this looked like slipping into blame or avoidant optimism in order to not look at the ways in which we are implicated in the harm of those we love. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, to not want to face—particularly as a pākehā, the even greater implication of the very harm of the arrival of one’s ancestors on one’s beloved homeland. Or, to avoid developing attachments to certain species, in order to not feel the necessary sadness of helping one species to live by killing others who do not deserve it.

As Gloria Anzaldúa’s writes—speaking as a queer mestiza woman straddling Mexican and Anglo worlds—there are ideas that cannot be held within

the rigid boundaries that characterize what she identifies as convergent modes of thought, those Western styles of “analytical thinking that [tend] to use rationality to move toward a single goal” (Anzaldúa 1999, 101). In contrast, Anzaldúa argues that, in order to hold reality, one needs to develop a tolerance for contradiction, a pluralistic mode of thinking, one in which, “nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned” (1999, 101). Without being able to hold our own and others’ inconsistencies and harms with some degree of compassion, it seems we are, as Davé (2023) argues, at war with the world, at war with reality in all its generative complexity. And in sustaining contradictions, in refusing to reduce life it is possible, as Anzaldúa notes, to turn “the ambivalence into something else” (1999, 101).

QUIET GENERATIVE EDGES

Despite the pain of our times, I am interested in spaces of promise. Spaces where it becomes possible to hold seemingly impossible tensions and to see what might emerge. Through time spent with hedgehogs, I learned the joys of edges: the shady comforts of a hedge, the insect-richness of dark wood piles and leaf litter. Through living alongside hedgehogs, spaces on the margins emerged as spaces of nurturance and shelter. Perhaps it is from too much time spent with hedgehogs in such zones, but I find promise in the margins of contemporary conservation practices, possible resources for living well with others present in private or quiet ways of being and relating. In British urban spaces, while hedgehogs continue to face challenges, urban declines seem to have slowed and, in some areas, reports show that populations are even growing (Hedgehog Street 2022). In pointing out that hedgehogs are “wild,” champions were also able to remind others of the importance of letting go as a vital part of loving, a discipline that often led to concern for the broader ecologies that support hogs; caring well for a “wild” rambler meant coming to care for where they wander and about the dangers they might meet. It matters, as Haraway notes, what thoughts we think and act with (2014).

Champions’ recognition and protection of the “wildness” of hedgehogs—a very domestic, relational kind of “wild” (Ginn 2016)—offered a gentle yet

fierce challenge to narratives of mastery and entitlement. At times, hedgehog champions found much joy in the surprises of their backyards and delight of cocreation with other species. As Anna Tsing argues in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, living well with others, perhaps particularly in our current times, requires that we develop new skills of knowing and being—recognizing and working with uncertainty and precarity rather than attempting to maintain illusions of mastery (2015, 5). As she writes, “we can’t fix anything, even what we have broken, by ourselves” (2015, 257). Coming to mend the local worlds of our neighborhoods seems to be a matter of learning to work with humility, in never fully knowable concert with never fully allied others (Kirksey 2015, 245). Such arts, I would argue, shape much of hedgehog championing, where the everyday work of making good spaces for others requires facing some degree of the unknown.

As Owens and Nuttgens (2021) argue, holding tensions seems to require aligning oneself with higher order things, with a bigness that can hold—and perhaps even transform—apparent contradictions. I see this in the way that champions’ refusal to capture and simultaneous deep concern for wild hogs—requiring that they hold the tensions of wanting autonomy and safety for hogs—led to greater awareness of and tending to broader environmental matters. In rehabilitation work, a binary opposition was at times made between feeling and thinking (2023; Palmer 2020). Yet, it is in holding both the meaningful and the analytic that sustainable rehabilitation thrives. It’s also the realization of one’s own implication in harms that can lead to the realization of the need for “higher order” solutions rather than more action as individuals. And, in all their impurity, just such collective possibilities are emerging, with new political support and new hedgehog-supporting policy being made (BBC 2021), and with Hedgehog Street teaming up with property developers to make sure that new developments create thoroughfares for hogs. Although I share with a number of informants some trepidation about such alliances, I am curious to see what sorts of *agencements* can be made—what sorts of politician-infrastructure-civilian alliances might emerge? An experiment that certainly is not taking place under the sign of purity (Shotwell 2016), British hedgehog conservation over the next few years will be something to watch.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the challenges are different. Rather than needing to hold in mind both the need for autonomy and for safety of a critter like the hedgehog in the UK, living in close contact with humans, the tensions to be held are those of attachment to species who may not be able to, or at least not easily, co-exist. Outside of dominant frames (or, at times, held privately within them), there were a range of approaches to being able to hold the contradictions of caring. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, conservationists privately expressed care and, at times, even fondness for species targeted by culling. Russ, who privately did not hold the anesthetic narrative of doing the absolute environmental right and good in his choice to trap introduced predators, seemed to be motivated to kill as well, and as humanely, as possible. At times, I have experienced the gentle consideration and validation of my own attachments to predators by conservationists working to save species threatened by just those predators. And, in feeling my own cares held even as they contradicted those of my interlocutors, something shifted and I've found myself opening also to the vision of Aotearoa/New Zealand as a land of flourishing native birdlife. For some, like Errol, supplying more native habitat was another way of helping beloved native birds. Yet, unwilling to reduce his own actions to being simply "good," Errol was able to hold the reality that even his tree planting might do harm to the birds he loved by encouraging more rats. Appreciating the work of those humans doing the labor of killing rats, while also regretting it, loving birds and rats, continuing to act for the good while knowing that his work did harm, Errol's work was filled with open acceptance of his inconsistencies (see also McLauchlan 2019). If kindness is to be approached as Philips and Taylor define it, as "identification with the vulnerabilities and attractions of others" (2010, 2), then holding our own and others' inconsistencies, and refusing to render them "ethically nullifying contradictions" (Davé 2017, 37), seems to be a vital aspect of it. What becomes possible, and what might become generously contagious, when we are able to hold our and others' attachments with care—even when they don't (yet) make sense to us, and even when they might appear opposed to our own?

Times remain tough for hedgehogs and others. While there can be no cares that aren't also complex, that don't also cause harms, there are still ways

of being and doing in the margins of dominant practice that may prove to be generative resources for living well in our times. It matters not just that one cares or kills, but *how*. What concepts mediate our actions and to what effect? What anesthetics might block us from opening to the cares of another? Learning to care for other species in such a way, however, does seem to change one, rendering one vulnerable and, potentially, inconsistent. Even for those of us with nonrelational self-concepts, for whom holding tensions generatively may be a little more challenging, I remain hopeful. Or perhaps, more, I remain curious about the practices and relations that might matter, that might help one to hold seemingly impossible tensions, to learn to care in ways that sensitize one to what flourishing looks (and smells) like, to open to it in our bodies. And to refuse to cast out ourselves or each other for our necessary inconsistencies, so that we might be better able to hold with care the full complexity of being in life.

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Hedgehogs, Killing, and Kindness

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