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Abstract

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Animal Geographies I: Hearing the cry and extending beyond

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Abstract

Research on animal geographies is burgeoning. This report identifies key themes emerging in the sub-discipline over the past two to three years. It begins with an overview of the growing empirical, conceptual and methodological diversity of the field. It then explores two themes, which seek, in turn, to look very closely at the animal and beyond it. The first theme incorporates efforts to attend to the lived experiences of animals and the nonhuman side of human-animal relations: to ‘hear the cry’ of the nonhuman. The second includes attempts to move beyond both the kinds of animals most commonly considered within the field of Animal Geographies, and beyond the animal itself.

Keywords

animal geographies; anthropocentrism; human-animal relations; more-than-human; multi-species

I Introduction

Hearing that ‘cry’—and not merely its cultural representation and anthropomorphized interpretation coming, as it were, from the ‘other side’—has been a major challenge for new animal geographies (Buller, 2014: 312).

Interlocking urban and planetary crises of the Anthropocene compel us to consider what the ‘good city’ might be from a ‘more-than-human’ frame (Houston *et al.*, 2018: 193).

Previous reports by Henry Buller (2016; 2015; 2014) and Alice Hovorka (2018a; 2018b; 2017) have adeptly traced the emergence of the sub-discipline of animal geographies since the mid-1990s. Buller’s examined the fundamental ontological and epistemological challenges posed by the ‘animal turn’ to ‘human’ geography (Buller, 2014); methodological approaches and innovations employed by animal geographers (Buller, 2015); and the ethical questions with which animal geographers grapple (Buller, 2016). Hovorka’s examined the global reach of animal geographies, urging decolonisation of the subfield (Hovorka, 2017), attention to the modes of ‘hybridizing’, or working with other sub-fields within the discipline (Hovorka, 2018a); and awareness of the relations of power between species (Hovorka, 2018b).

Building upon these firm foundations, each of my three reports will examine key themes emerging in animal geographies in the past two to three years. This first begins with a concise overview of the diversity of scholarship of recent years. I then identify two prominent themes, or sets of questions, one looking very closely at the animal, the other extending beyond. The first theme is concerned with how animal geographers attend to the lives and experiences of animals themselves—with how we might move beyond representation and the

anthropocentric gaze. The second seeks to extend beyond the established remit of animal geographies, and beyond the animal. It traces efforts to look beyond the animals most frequently considered in the sub-discipline; to analyse the ‘almost animal’ (Cole, 2016); and to decentre the animal, consistent with the more-than-human, material and relational approaches seen elsewhere in the discipline of geography and cognate fields.

II Diversity

Animal geographies research of recent years is highly diverse. Hovorka (2017: 387) noted that ‘existing global animal geographies offer a wealth of insights and illustrations as to the complex, nuanced and varied relations that humans have with animals, and that animals have with humans around the world’. This trend toward diversity has continued to grow. Following the patterns of diversity described in previous reports, work of recent years shows empirical, methodological and conceptual diversity. Published work examines empirical contexts as diverse as urban stray/feral cats (Van Patter and Hovorka, 2018; Chan, 2016), robotic milk production (Holloway and Bear, 2017; Bear et al., 2017), disease control (Enticott, 2017; Naylor et al., 2017), fisheries bycatch (Magrane and Johnson, 2017), the place of animals in war and the military (Forsyth, 2017; Howell and Kean, 2018), children’s everyday encounters with animals (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017), and spaces of captivity and exploitation (Morin, 2016). It extends methodology, towards visual methods (Bear et al., 2017), ethology (Barua and Sinha, 2017), experiments with digital infrastructure (Kirksey et al., 2018); and notably to collaborative interdisciplinary methods, including arts-science (e.g. Magrane and Johnson, 2017), work with veterinary and laboratory practitioners (e.g. Davies et al., 2018; Greenhough and Roe, 2019; Greenhough and Roe, 2018), and with biological scientists (e.g. Crowley et al., 2017; Crowley et al., 2018; Pooley et al., 2017).

Demonstrating the maturity of the sub-discipline, research in the field of animal geographies is concerned not only with questions relating to animals and human-animal relations, but also directly engages debates, develops theoretical approaches, and contributes insight to concepts adopted elsewhere in the discipline, including affect and emotion (Collard, 2016; Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017; Wilcox, 2017), bodies (Morin, 2016; Nelson, 2017), mobilities (Flack, 2016; Hodgetts and Lorimer, 2018), agency (Gorman, 2017; Van Patter and Hovorka, 2018), biopolitics (Bluwstein, 2018; Colombino and Giaccaria, 2016), interdisciplinarity (Magrane and Johnson, 2017; Pooley et al., 2017), the Anthropocene (Houston et al., 2018; McGregor and Houston, 2018), and encounter (Collard, 2016; Wilson, 2017). In addition to its Animal Geographies progress reports, this journal has recently published papers that explicitly seek to develop theoretical approaches for animal geographies (Hodgetts and Lorimer, 2018; Lorimer et al., 2019).

As further illustration of the diversity and maturity of the field, scholarship published in the past two to three years features a number of subfields that address distinct public questions, and engage other disciplines and fields of inquiry, but speak little to each other. In this sense, their focus is less development of the field of ‘Animal Geographies’, and more addressing wider political, practical and conceptual concerns. Two such subfields are concerned with first, wildlife conservation, focusing in particular on wildlife management and control (Adams, 2017; Bluwstein, 2018; Crowley et al., 2018; Lloro-Bidart, 2017) and human-wildlife conflict (Bluwstein, 2018; Doubleday, 2018; Lunstrum, 2017; Pooley et al., 2017). Second, animal welfare and rights, care and ethics, examining questions including formal governance of welfare and care (Chan, 2016; Donald, 2018; Duncan et al., 2018; Iveson, 2018) and cultures of care of individual animals (Davies et al., 2018; Forsyth, 2017; Nelson, 2017; Doubleday, 2017). My next report will attend more closely to questions raised by this

important work. The remainder of this report examines two other prominent themes identified in recent animal geographies scholarship: ‘hearing the cry’ of nonhuman animals; and extending beyond the established field and beyond animals themselves.

III Hearing the cry

In this journal’s first animal geographies progress report, Buller (2014: 312) noted: ‘Hearing that “cry” [of the nonhuman]—and not merely its cultural representation and anthropomorphized interpretation coming, as it were, from the “other side”—has been a major challenge for new animal geographies’. This challenge remains, and in recent years animal geographies research has attended to it explicitly. A strong body of work has developed that aims to privilege the animal and the nonhuman side of ‘human-animal relations’. The work pursues empirical, methodological and conceptual approaches that seek to ‘get at’ animals’ experiences.

This move might be read, in part, as a drive to attend to ‘beastly places’. Philo and Wilbert’s (2000) framing of ‘animal spaces’ and ‘beastly places’ retains its currency, as a means of framing categories of animal-human relations, as empirical focus of research, and in directing methodology. Numerous scholars (e.g. Barua and Sinha, 2017; Bear et al., 2017; Lorimer et al., 2019; Morin, 2016; Van Patter and Hovorka, 2018) have noted that a good deal of animal geographies scholarship to date has examined ‘animal spaces’—those ‘proper places stipulated for [animals] by humans’, both material and imaginary (Philo and Wilbert, 2000: 13). Some new work is approaching ‘beastly places’—where animals are ‘getting on with their own lives and worlds without anything to do with us humans, performing their specific forms of agency to one another, creating their own worlds, their own beastly places, without reference to us’ (2000: 19).

This desire to hear the cry of the nonhuman is apparent within a wide range of empirical contexts, discussed by authors as both ‘animal spaces’ and ‘bestly places’. In the animal spaces of laboratories, Greenhough and Roe (2019; 2018) and Davies *et al.* (2018) provide further evidence of Buller’s (2015: 380) assertion that ‘significant advances in understanding what “matters to animals” have come from the sciences of ethology and animal welfare’. Their work follows laboratory animal technologists, as the people ‘responsible for the day-to-day care, welfare and husbandry of laboratory animals’ (Greenhough and Roe, 2019: 368). Doing so helped them learn ‘how to attune to animals’ lived experiences and how to deal with the moral contestations that arise from attuning to laboratory animal lives’ (2019: 371).

In their study of ‘legacy dolphins’—those ‘in human care’ who ‘cannot in good conscience be returned to the wild without near-certain deadly consequences’—Taylor and Carter (2018: 2) found that captivity is experienced differently by different animals, thus recognising the unique experiences of spaces and places for animals as individuals. Bear *et al.* (2017) and Holloway and Bear (2017) seek to understand how dairy cows experience dairy farming and new milking technologies. And in the bestly places of cities, Barua and Sinha (2017)—in their study of urban macaques in India—consider ‘what urbanisation might mean for the animals themselves’. Amidst this diversity, it is perhaps surprising that there is little recent research on animals in the home—Howell & Kean (2018) offer one case.

A key point in this work is the methodological challenge of ‘getting at’ nonhuman experiences of human-animal relations (Greenhough and Roe, 2019). A rich body of recent scholarship seeks explicitly to address this methodological challenge. Bear *et al.* (2017) note that research on animals, as constituents of social relations, continues to grow, but

methodological developments have lagged behind, and Fletcher and Platt (2018) call in particular for innovative methods for understanding the 'beastly' nature of animals. In a range of animal spaces and beastly places, scholars are seeking to adopt and develop diverse methodologies—notably in recent years, through visual methods, story-telling, and ethology.

According to Bear et al. (2017: 227-228) 'Many studies have continued to favor text- or voice-based methodologies', thus privileging 'the articulate'. Some work uses observation, and there is a small body of video-based research; but even some video work, they argue, is inherently anthropocentric. In their research on new robotic milking systems, they examine the 'potential of still photography and digital video for producing less anthropocentric studies of human-nonhuman relationships' (2017: 226). They argue that: 'Studying the more-than-human geographies of robotic milking—understanding how places are co-constituted by heterogeneous actants—raises specific methodological problems. ... Visual methods provide one potential route to decenter the human in such research, reducing reliance on spoken human interpretations of animal and technological actions, and giving the animals and technologies greater “voice”' (2017: 227). In this context new technologies form both empirical focus, or point for investigation and critique, and methodology.

In the context of laboratory animal testing, Greenhough and Roe (2019: 369), adopt storytelling as ethnographic method, arguing that 'understanding the ways in which those who work with animals use storytelling to negotiate the paradoxes and contested moralities which characterise their day-to-day practice is a useful method for animal geographers.' Doing so reconfigures relations, multiplies perspectives, and captures forms and moments of encounter that are resistant to conventional modes of academic writing. Consistent with cognate and broader fields such as the environmental humanities, Barua & Sinha (2017) (re)turn to

ethology, referencing Yi-Fu Tuan's assertion of its importance. They adopt an 'etho-geographical' approach to their study urban macaques to learn what urbanisation means for animals, and to animate urban political ecology.

Conceptual developments, too, seek to reveal something of the experiences of animals. In a pair of theoretical papers, Hodgetts and Lorimer (2018) and Lorimer *et al.* (2019) propose *animals' geographies*; 'The apostrophe', they state, 'is important. We use it to foreground a distinction between considerations of how animals have been spaced by humans, and animals' own lived geographies and experiences' (Hodgetts and Lorimer, 2018: 1). They propose *animals' mobilities* as an approach that 'prioritizes the lived patterns and embodied experiences of animals' (2018: 2). Other work extends concepts generally attributed to humans alone, to animals. In the context of war-time Britain, Howell & Kean (2018) examine emotion as not only human, insisting that it is 'transpecies as well as transpersonal'. Tang *et al.* (2018), in their research into humans and livestock in rural China, investigate whether the concept of human-livestock dwelling can 'surpass' anthropocentrism, by attending to animals' bodies, feelings, behaviours and welfare.

As is true across multiple sub-fields of the discipline, animal geographers are turning to agency in an effort to de-centre that which is traditionally privileged; in this case the human experience of human-animal relations. For animal geographers, agency offers a means to 'hear that cry'. Van Patter and Hovorka (2018) examine discursive constructs of feral cat colonies and the nonhuman agency and material lived experiences of cats, in order to analyse 'what it might mean to think of feral cat colonies as homes'. Gorman (2017: 316) argues that much research on therapeutic landscapes is anthropocentric, 'ignoring and silencing the agency and experiences of non-humans'. Agency and assemblage enable critique of 'the

heterogeneity of elements that come together to produce therapeutic space’ (2017: 318).

Crowley *et al.* (2017) examine how people respond to, and negotiate about, beavers and their re-introduction to waterways of Devon, England, while concurrently recognising the role beavers themselves play in shaping their own story. The relationships between human and animal agency examined in these cases provides a segue to the second key theme of this review: extending beyond the animal.

IV Extending beyond

Recent animal geographies scholarship pushes beyond the established scope of the field in three key ways. First, while animal geographies scholarship is diverse, it continues to be dominated by an empirical focus on terrestrial mammals. Some recent work extends beyond this traditional remit towards non-terrestrial, non-mammalian species (notable earlier examples include Bear, 2011; Beisel *et al.*, 2013; Phillips, 2013). Recent research on aquatic animals examines the lives of captive marine mammals (Taylor and Carter, 2018); experiences of killing fish deemed ‘invasive’ species (Atchison *et al.*, 2017); ecological effects and affects of fisheries bycatch (Magrane and Johnson, 2017); and the legality (Braverman, 2018) and economies (Bear, 2017) of marine life.

Geographical attention to animals of the air is more scant, with research analysing the role of sulphur-crested cockatoos in the relational constitution of space (Kirksey *et al.*, 2018); and what is involved in transforming animals—in this case chickens—to food (Wilbur and Gibbs, 2018). It is perhaps surprising that attention to groups as diverse and visible in human-animal relations as aquatic animals and birds is still unusual. Beyond these groups there is very little indeed of the tremendous diversity of animal lifeforms; crustaceans are the focus of one paper, in a ‘geopoetic approach’ to bycatch in the shrimp-trawling industry (Magrane and

Johnson, 2017). Though slim, this work builds on and extends from the traditional home of animal geographies. More is needed. Extending beyond the animals most often considered is important in terms of understanding the diversity of animal life, of human-animal relations, and of the ways in which animals shape worlds.

Second, fascinating new work is emerging on the ‘edges’ of the animal. Research into the historical practice of egg collection, or ‘oology’, asks how the ambiguous ‘almost animal’ state of birds’ eggs is important in contestation over practice and ethics (Cole, 2016). In doing so, it ‘raises wider questions about the “almost-animal” that should extend the reach of animal geographies’ (2016: 18). Two other notable studies also relate to animals’ reproductive processes. Farming edible birds’ nests in George Town, Malaysia, attests to the agency of swiftlets *and their nests* in shaping urban policy and therefore urban form (Connolly, 2016). Research on Piedmontese bull semen offers insights into the ways that death, as a spatial and relational process, is ‘put to work’ under a biocapitalist mode of production (Colombino and Giaccaria, 2016).

Other ‘almost animals’ take the form of microorganisms. For example, a study of the human microbiome examines the ways ‘ecological ontologies’ unite projects at a variety of scales, including deliberate reintroduction of species into landscapes and human bodies (Lorimer, 2017). Research into badger vaccination as method for addressing bovine Tuberculosis, looks not only to cattle and badger, but to bacteria and vaccine, to determine roles played by animals and other entities in public controversies such as disease control (Naylor et al., 2017). This work at the edges of the animal presents questions and insights into environmental and ethical controversies; logics of urban, environmental and health policy; and biocapitalist modes of production. Further, it tends to explore relationships between animals and other

entities, materials, phenomena and governance, pushing the boundaries of animal geographies towards more than the animal.

Third, in recent years some research about animals has come to focus more clearly on the more-than-human as well as more than the animal; on the nonhuman, lively and inert materials, elements, forces and institutions that shape animals' lives and human–nonhuman–animal relations. As animal geographies and more-than-human scholarship come together, researchers adopt a more-than-human—that is, material and relational—conceptual frame. This approach privileges both nonhuman entities and phenomena, and the relations between them. Efforts to decentre the human and the animal lead to research that focuses less on the animal *per se*, and more on the animal as part of a network, assemblage or other relational form that has agency and/or elicits affect or emotion. This move is part of the broader material and relational turns within the discipline of geography and cognate fields. Such work considers the animal through a conceptual frame that examines both its inherent qualities and factors that extend beyond it.

This review has identified two subsets of inquiry within the more-than-human frame. One analyses the role of technology in animal worlds. In a critique of multispecies ethnography, Gorman (2017: 330) argues that 'whilst the method aids in creating a reconceptualized social constituted of more than just human actants', it omits a wider range of artefacts, technologies and elemental forces. In their research on robotic milking technologies—in which they adopt innovative visual methodology—Bear *et al.* (2017: 227) seek to give 'the animals and technologies greater "voice"'. By doing so, elsewhere Holloway and Bear (2017: 234) demonstrate that 'As milking practices have changed from hand to different kinds of machine milking, what it is to be human and bovine have changed, human–cow relationships have

changed, and understandings of bovine health and welfare have changed’. In these ways, animal geographers are extending beyond the animal empirically and conceptually, and expanding more-than-human research methodologies. Such efforts are consistent with Dowling and colleagues’ argument that research in a more-than-human frame demands ‘alterations in thinking and methods’ (2017: 824), as we come to ‘grapple with the conceptual, methodological and political challenges of conducting research in, with and as more-than-human worlds’ (2017: 829).

The second subset of inquiry addresses environmental research questions occupying scholars across multiple disciplines. Such questions include wildlife conservation, approached through multi-species accounts of conservation actions and governance (e.g. Hodgetts, 2017), and insights into human-wildlife conflict and rural economies (e.g. Margulies and Karanth, 2018). Other scholars engage questions of global ocean crises, through attention to more-than-human legality in and of the ocean (Braverman, 2018), and a call for attention to the role of liveliness in Blue Economy research (Bear, 2017). Finally, the challenges of the Anthropocene are considered by McGregor and Houston (2018), who analyse four propositions for the cattle industry, and by Houston *et al.* (2018), who explore how the concept of ‘multi-species entanglements’ might shape the usually-anthropocentric field of urban planning theory. They assert: ‘Interlocking urban and planetary crises of the Anthropocene compel us to consider what the ‘good city’ might be from a ‘more-than-human’ frame’ (Houston *et al.*, 2018: 193). This provocation invites us to interrogate political-environmental questions of the Anthropocene; multi-species, socio-environmental challenges for cities; and the potential of a more-than-human conceptual frame to extend beyond humans and beyond animals.

V Conclusion

The diversity of animal geographies continues to grow, empirically, methodologically and conceptually. This review has identified two key themes amidst this diversity emerging over the past two to three years. First, how geographers might ‘hear the cry’, or get at the lived experiences, of animals themselves; how we might shift the anthropocentric gaze; how we might attempt to understand the animals’ ‘side’ of animal-human relations. Second, how and where we might extend beyond both the animals most commonly considered, and beyond animals themselves, to the edges of the animal and to the more-than-human. Such work demands a shift in thinking and methods (as argued by Dowling *et al.*, 2017); a challenge being embraced by animal geographers and colleagues working at the edges of the field. Researchers approach both themes from a range of empirical foci, methodologies, and conceptual frames, illustrating the richness and maturity of the sub-discipline.

Notwithstanding the diversity of the field, two limitations are apparent from this review. First, animal geographies research maintains its empirical focus on terrestrial mammals. Exceptions exist, but they are just that. In their influential edited collection, Philo and Wilbert (2000) urged geographers to take seriously fish, insects, and other nonhumans. That need remains. It is important in terms of understanding the diversity of animal life and animals’ lives, of human-animal relations, of broader animal-other relations, and of the ways in which animals shape worlds, and of course, are shaped by them. Finally, several authors reviewed here have noted the importance of politically engaged work (e.g. Dowling *et al.*, 2017; Duncan *et al.*, 2018; Greenhough and Roe, 2019; Margulies and Karanth, 2018). Indeed, for some it is the motivation for developing methodologies for getting at and beyond the animal. Explicit political analyses exist in some areas, including wildlife conservation and conflict, biocapitalist modes of production, and questions of the Anthropocene. But the call for further

political research in animal geographies—research that considers animals not as ‘things’ but as ‘vulnerable beings whose vulnerability is often tied to their place(s) in human society’ (Srinivasan, 2016: 76)—remains strong. In my next report I pick up this thread by attending more closely to the public and political questions concerning animal geographers, through a thematic focus on caring and killing.

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