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Minding **A**nimals – the Human Re-engagement with Animals

We are honored to be joint Guest Editors of this edition of *Humanimalia* which showcases three of over 400 papers presented at the first Minding Animals Conference. It is pleasing to see that this and many other journals are publishing papers from the conference.

In July, 2009, the first *International Conference on Society and Animals: Minding Animals* was held in Newcastle, Australia, and styled heavily on the title and contents of the book by Marc Bekoff (*Minding Animals: awareness, emotions, and heart*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002). The conference sought to further develop the burgeoning transdiscipline of Animal Studies through an engagement of academics with animal advocates and activists, scientists, bureaucrats, and other animal practitioners. Included in this edition of *Humanimalia* are three papers given at Newcastle which are excellent exemplars of the depth and scope of what was presented and experienced at Minding Animals.

Many of the delegates and artists traveled from distant parts of the globe to be at this exceptional event. They all shared the one common concern, a desire to learn more and be part of the experience of human nonhuman animal interrelationships. The disciplines represented included veterinary science, sociology and geography, biology and ecology, anthropology and literature, art and music, to name just a few.

The aim of this special edition is to provide a snapshot of what was presented from three distinct disciplines represented in Newcastle. Matthew Chrulew presents an analysis of the concepts of wilderness and place; Marc Fellenz considers the place of nonhuman animals in environmental aesthetics; whilst Kay Peggs ponders the predicament of humans and other animals in biomedical research. Nevertheless, they all have a common theme, a new re-engagement by human animals with nonhuman animals (hereafter referred to as animals).

In considering all three papers, one is reminded of the overall objective of Minding Animals, of what the conference sought to achieve. Humans are but caretakers of and participants in life on Earth and it is essential to remain focused on the interconnectedness of that life. Minding Animals is not just about the need to ‘mind animals’, but to take stock of our human actions and what those actions mean to animals and the planet more broadly. When people from various backgrounds and

interests get together, then that shared knowledge can be utilized to improve planetary life and in the case here, of human animal interrelationships. To that extent, this is why *Minding Animals 1* was so hugely successful, and probably why the momentum for holding a *Minding Animals 2* has not waned (more of this later).

The three papers presented show that the answers to the many problems that we face are complicated, as they are uncertain and often contradictory. Specifically, human relationships with animals are, almost always, particularly complex.

Matthew Chrulew considers the disturbing possibility of the disappearance of animals and ecologies across the planet, including the loss of all wildernesses, at least as fashioned by preservationists, and moves by some to restore or rebuild lost ecologies. Re-wilding and the place of animals in that consideration becomes the focus of Chrulew's analysis. As humans seek to restore and protect larger swathes of land as national parks and engage in more minimalist conservation measures, or if we as a species more controversially seek to re-wild nature, then re-wilding and restoration projects have direct and major implications for large numbers of animals.

Chrulew's skilful overview of the paradoxical nature of the arguments in support and against the conservationist paradigm is intriguing as much as it is complex. We are left to ponder whether we should be conserving "the dwindling remains of a supposedly pure wildness," whether by reintroducing species in degraded areas is even sound, and whether the endeavor of re-establishing mammoths is no more than science fiction.

Marc Fellenz's view of environmental aesthetics and the place of animals in his worldview has been influenced strongly by his own aesthetic appreciation of nature, by his philosophical worldview which questions more traditional ethical models, and the aesthetic theory that was developed of Plotinus. Fellenz believes that aesthetic encounters with nature and animals may be an integral factor in re-engaging with animals. He develops the view that kinship is paramount in that re-engagement.

The kinship model developed by Fellenz provides for a positive re-engagement with animals based on the senses what one experiences when one encounters nature directly; similar to that experienced when appreciating artwork or a vista. The paper grapples with the many layers that are experienced in creating this sense of kinship and of reflecting on and relating to nature.

Kay Peggs tackles the controversial exploitation of those many millions of animals used in biomedical research for supposed improvements in human health. Peggs questions, in light of complex procedures and animal abuses more generally, the actual goal of such research. Disturbingly, Peggs introduces us to transgenic marmosets who are, because of their close genetic similarity to humans, central to such research. These human relations are transformed to advance the human condition. The ethical justification for such experimentation is lost in an hierarchical layering of animals as tools of research.

Peggs unequivocally reminds us that biomedical research is part of rationalist science that exposes animals to risks that would be unacceptable for humans to endure. The questions that need immediate resolution revolve around what should be done to cease invasive and exclusionary procedures on animals, whilst at the same time maximizing human health. In short, we need to be more mindful of animals.

Minding Animals has offered much in our understanding and appraisal of human animal interrelationships. But, as these three papers show, we must do more. We need to develop greater levels of compassion and respect so as to rebuild our connections to nature and with animals. Minding Animals 1 and the presentations and connections made there have gone a long way to facilitate these connections within the academy and beyond. It is the intention to continue to do just that. The inaugural Minding Animals Conference was incredibly successful, as have been all the Pre-conference Events. More of these events are planned before the next and follow-on conferences. Minding Animals 2 will take place in July 2012 in Utrecht, The Netherlands. We invite you to join us for another memorable and earth changing event. For more information on Minding Animals 2, see: <http://www.mindinganimals.com>

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