

Day 4

Panel VI: Multispecies Relations

Keynote Speaker: Annu Jalais



Annu Jalais is an Assistant Professor within the faculty of Arts & Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore. Born and educated in Kolkata, a fascination with the Sundarbans, the largest natural habitat of Bengal tigers, led her to anthropology. Annu has a PhD in Anthropology from the London School of Economics.

At the core of Annu's research is the relationship between humans and their environment, specifically in relation to wild animals and climate change, along with issues of development, justice and discrimination. These have been explored in her first [book](#) *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans* (Routledge, 2010) and in [articles](#). The book explores how people living in these impoverished islands interact with the tigers and how their perceptions of tigers and locale articulate contradictory understandings of sociality.

The first of the two publications I have co-written is: *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration* (Routledge, December 2015). This book challenges a predominant assumption of theories of diaspora, namely that migrants settle in the West whereas, in fact, most remain in, or very close to, their own countries and regions of origin in the Global South. Dealing with the experience of Bengali Muslims, the research fills in the major gaps in historical and contemporary empirical knowledge about these communities, interactions with their 'host communities' and their links to those left behind. The second publication, a teaching resource booklet, comprises a comparative inter- and intra-national approach, spanning Bangladesh, India and Britain, and explores key sites within these nation-states. It is linked to a companion [website](#) where through various life-stories, pictorial narratives and a historical timeline, it is possible for British-Bangladeshi children to get a greater sense of the histories of their ancestors, explore different phases of migration and settlement, and understand the shifting formations of 'community'.

Between conflict and conviviality: Human-wildlife encounters and the political animal geography of land development

Sören Köpke, University of Kassel, Germany

How do human-wildlife conflict and land development reinforce each other? And how are the chances of interspecies cohabitation, in the spirit of conviviality, considering intense and often hostile human-wildlife encounters in rural spaces? The submission is an attempt to combine political animal geographies (Margulies & Karanth 2018) with a political ecology of the agri-food system (Köpke 2021). The paper is based on two distinct, salient case studies: Human-elephant encounters in the dry zone of Sri Lanka, and the re-emergence of a wolf population in Northern Germany since the early 2000s. The growing presence of these keystone species – megaherbivores in one case, apex predators in the other – impacts rural cultural landscapes. In Sri Lanka, elephants' foraging behaviour causes economic damage to paddy fields, fruit trees and grain storages. What is more, human-elephant encounters frequently end either in elephant killings or in human deaths. In the case of Northern Germany, wolf packs have been responsible for slaying livestock on numerous occasions, creating a heated debate on wildlife management. Land use changes – growing settlements and encroachment on forests in Sri Lanka, abandonment of the rural sphere in Germany – are seen as drivers of human-wildlife conflicts. Managerial solutions like fencing are of limited effect, while calls for culling programs are not in accordance with the protected status of threatened species under international treaties. At the same time, the increasing presence of charismatic species drives a new and political discourse on interspecies relations, which politicizes spatial and social aspects of conservation and land development.

Sören Köpke is a political scientist and works as a lecturer and postdoctoral researcher at the Section for International Agricultural Policy and Environmental Governance, University of Kassel. He was awarded a PhD from Technische Universität Braunschweig, Germany in 2018 for a dissertation on drought, development and environmental conflicts. He holds a Master's degree in Political Science and English and American Studies from Leibniz University Hannover and studied at National University of Ireland, Galway. He has also worked as a tv journalist. His research focuses on political ecology, rural development, and the international politics of environmental change. In this context, he conducted field research on several occasions, mostly in Sri Lanka. His current research is on biodiversity policy, wildlife management, and environmental governance.



'Meet the Family': Interspecies Relatedness as a Politics of Conviviality and Conservation on Australian Heritage Breed Farms

Catie Gressier, University of Western Australia, Australia

The livestock industry's favouring of a small number of high-yielding commercial breeds has resulted in the extinction of almost 10 per cent of domestic animal breeds globally, with at least 1000 more breeds currently at risk (IPBES 2019). In Australia, a subset of farmers is working hard to conserve the nation's remaining heritage breeds, whose bloodlines and histories are enmeshed with their own. Through analysing the interspecies entanglements of feeding, living together, procreation, and the sharing of substance and emotion over time, I make the case for recognising these relationships as relatedness. On heritage breed farms, interspecies relatedness is evident in the economic interdependence, and mutual benefit and burden, of animals and farmers; it is enacted through daily rituals of nourishment and care; it manifests in shared substance, from blood and milk to gametes; and it endures across generations. How people conceptualise animals has a profound impact on their treatment, and I argue that extending relatedness ideation to farm animals serves as a politics of multispecies conviviality, broadly, and of rare breed conservation, specifically.



Catie Gressier is an Australian Research Council (DECRA) Fellow in the Anthropology and Sociology discipline group at the University of Western Australia. Catie's research examines environmental engagements in Australia and Botswana, with attention to foodways, interspecies relations, tourism, and health and illness. Her first book, *At Home in the Okavango*, explores emplacement and belonging among the white citizens of northwest Botswana, while her second book, *Illness, Identity and Taboo among Australian Paleo Dieters*, examines the body as a site through which neoliberal policies and practices are played out and contested. Catie is currently researching rare and heritage breed livestock farming and agroecology in the climate change era. She is an Editorial Board Member of *Anthropological Forum*, a Director of the Rare Breeds Trust of Australia, and a former University of Melbourne MacArthur Fellow.

Caring for nonhumans beyond nature-culture dualism: Elephant conservation, mahoutship labour, and multispecies entanglements in Sumatra, Indonesia
Lubabun Ni'am, Wageningen University & Research, Netherlands

Elephant conservation initiatives have been made to perpetuate the domination of Cartesian approaches, which have long been criticized for their assumption on nature-culture dualism. Yet, doing elephant conservation remains heavily dependent on human labour deployed by elephant handlers (mahouts) in looking after the endangered animals. Studying an elephant conservation centre in Tangkahan, in the Sumatra Island of Indonesia, this paper investigates the entanglement of elephant handlers and captive elephants as the performance of multispecies care beyond nature-culture dualism. It is done by looking at three primary features of human-elephant entanglements: ambivalent relationships, embodied companionships, and relational care and knowing. This exploration enables me to relinquish mahoutship custodial labour from the broader context of conservation agenda, within which the encounters between elephant handlers and captive elephants are initially made possible. Combining multispecies care and the dwelling perspective as a complementary framework, I argue that caring for nonhuman animals should be reframed as the practice of dwelling in more-than-human worlds, whereby humans, elephants, forests, and forest spirits are coming together and being interwoven in an entangled world. I conclude this paper by emphasizing the significance of 'dwelt multispecies care' for the future agenda of caring for nonhumans, particularly endangered animals such as captive elephants, as this affective turn is claimed yet still actually undermined by conservationists.

I am an environmental anthropologist who has been doing research on elephant conservation and human-elephant relationships in the Sumatra Island of Indonesia for the last three years. I would like to extend my study by employing multiple approaches of political ecology, posthumanism, and science and technology studies to better understand the future of wildlife conservation by specifically looking at the conservation practice of flagship species in Sumatra, performed by conservationists to fight against the threat of extinction.



Symbiotic futures: Examining changes in the microbe/human relationship in agriculture
Holly Brause, New Mexico State University, U.S.A

In this presentation I examine an evolving multispecies relationship in my southern New Mexico, U.S.A. field site between agriculturalists and microbial life. Small-scale, organic agriculturalists have long been concerned with microbial communities in soils and their relationship with soil and plant health. I demonstrate a growing interest amongst “conventional” farmers at multiple scales to adopt soil health practices and cultivate microbial populations. I link this shift to the growing popular understandings of microbes, particularly in relation to the human digestive system. I explore a growing awareness of the intimate and corporeal connection we share with the world around us; a challenge to the nature/culture divide that acknowledges that our bodies are part of, and vulnerable to the damages of, the ecological systems that surround and constitute us. I show evidence of a growing recognition of shared fates and the need for symbiotic relationships in agricultural production. I engage with theorizations about domestication, care, and the future to examine this shifting multispecies relationship, and examine the potential for multispecies thriving through the creation of symbiotic futures.



Holly Brause holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the University of New Mexico (2021). She works as a Research Scientist at the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute. Her research interests include the politics of future-making, the globalization of food and agriculture, environmental anthropology, multispecies relationships, transboundary water resources, and community/stakeholder engagement.

Wild life and wild death: Conviviality and the necropolitics of rewilding
Edda Starck, University of Goettingen, Germany

As a new conservation paradigm, rewilding is rapidly gaining popularity across Scotland. Against the terrors of the Anthropocene, rewilding projects offer hope by imagining radical visions of “healthier,” convivial futures that promise liveability not just for humans but a large host of species. Their practices are founded in an understanding of liveable environments as constituted by the overlapping worldmaking projects of a multitude of more-than-human actors, thus demanding the possibility for their agencies to unfold freely. Yet, those involved with rewilding often find themselves caught in difficult negotiations of care and control that come into existence around multispecies engagements. These are caused by the complex and paradoxical investment of rewilding projects in both an ethics of liberation from anthropocentric governance of ecosystems, and in narratives of ecological destruction in need of being mitigated, requiring the drawing of strict boundaries that determine who does or does not belong into “healthier” future ecologies. Consequently, ethical ideals of multispecies autonomy and conviviality at times stand in juxtaposition to a dependency on more-than-human labour and death in the pursuit of visions of planetary recovery. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with rewilding initiatives in Scotland, this paper explores this field of tension that complicates the translation of rewilding’s convivial ethics into practice. Presenting two case studies – an urban rewilding project and a rewilded farmland – I discuss the ways in which conviviality in rewilding is oftentimes deeply entangled with a necropolitics of killability, raising questions about the possibilities and limits of living and dying well together.

Edda Starck is a master’s student at Georg-August-University Göttingen, where she studies Anthropology and Cultural Musicology. She holds an MA in Anthropology and Music from the University of Aberdeen. She has conducted fieldwork on environmentalism, food and migration, and performance arts. Her core research interests include environmental temporalities and more-than-human worldmaking projects, as well as social and environmental justice movements. Edda Starck is also part of the HERA project FOOD2GATHER, which researches migrant foodscapes across Europe.

