Animals and Landscape

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EDITORIAL
Animals and Landscape

‘We did not arrive on this planet as aliens. Humanity is part of nature, a species that evolved among other species’.


A quick dip into Klingender’s (1971) astonishing *Animals in art and thought (to the end of the Middle Ages)* shows the global significance and breadth of the relationship between humans and animals as recorded in art. The stories that the representations of these interactions tell from animal art found in the Paleolithic cultures of approximately 25,000 years ago provide us with a glimmer of the importance of animals to humans and the development and perception of the landscape at that time. From such records we can begin to understand the complexity of the ways animals have been and are still embedded within our cultures. This provides the starting point for the emergence of this special issue. The papers have been selected from those sent in response to a call for papers for research that examined topics surrounding the interactions between animals and the landscape. Landscape is generally described or defined by the interaction of the human and non-human, and the human perception of the resulting material features and processes. Although there have been papers over the years which examine aspects of the role of animal-human interactions in creating and maintaining landscapes, this area of landscape studies is generally not well explored or defined. The aim of the call was therefore as a testing ground to provide us with an idea of the research landscape, and thus the call was intentionally broad. We asked for papers on issues from around the world that addressed aspects of this theme. Papers would have to provide a clear discussion of relevant landscape issues and would need to be framed so as to be of interest to our multidisciplinary readership.

The existing literature on animals and landscape is derived from a wide area, much with a strong ecological and cultural geographical focus. Theoretical debates include whether humans should be considered as just another animal in the landscape, or should be seen and treated differently. Animal geographers appear to be stimulating a fresh demand for new conceptualisations of the relationships between humans and non-human species and the need for more sensitive investigations (see Jones this issue). Theoretical issues touch on all kinds of ethical, epistemological, ontological and moral implications and debates that relate to religious and ecological theory amongst others and of course have methodological implications for research. Animals are often seen purely in terms of livestock, or a resource for human use and consumption, although even with this literature there are glimmerings of a recognition of the wider than purely commodity-based role that domesticated animals have within the conception and

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construction of productive landscapes. In 2010 a wide ranging international report sponsored by a number of important organisations including the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) acknowledged that: ‘Policy makers have largely ignored environmental issues related to livestock, often because of the large role that livestock play in sustaining livelihoods and rural life’ (p.xi). The importance of animals as part of a landscape management system is clear from a number of the papers in this special issue. Animals are commonly now used as part of landscape restoration schemes and are recognised as important signifiers of place, often as a result of products gained – such as cheese, meat, etc. – and traditional practices which are linked to landscape character and have local symbolic associations.

The landscape implications of our relationship with animals is not just relevant to rural areas. An example of the economic significance of the relationship we have with animals and the impact of this on the landscape can be seen by the amount spent on domestic animals in the UK. The highly emotional British devotion to its pets is well known; the UK pet food and supplies market is now worth between £2.7bn and £4bn depending on which figures you examine (Youde, 2012). While access to the landscape for dog walking is important for many in urban areas and has been shown to be particularly helpful in relation to human health and obesity, Rishbeth (2001) found that contact in the landscape with such animals can be highly disturbing to some cultures. In multicultural communities this can result in the exclusion of people from using parks because of significant fear of contact with dogs. The impact of the domestic horse population on the landscape is particularly marked in urban fringe areas in a number of European countries where the term ‘horsiculture’ is used to define this particular land use. In the UK in 2006 there was an estimated one million horses under both private and professional ownership (BHS, 2009; BHIC, 2009) supporting an enormous associated industry with considerable relevance to the landscape. In land use terms figures suggest over 500,000 hectares in the UK are dedicated to maintaining and producing horses (BHIC, 2006). In addition there are deep-seated associations and emotions with horses in the UK as evidenced by the debates around the recent scandal concerning horsemeat in the food chain.

Attention is being increasingly drawn to the role of keystone species that may act as ecological indicators of the health of ecosystems, and which may also act as signifiers of cultural health. Animals such as sheep are not just edible grass mowers and wool producers; their use and abuse can and does have significant implications on the whole way of life of communities, cultures and on the health of the environment and change in the landscape. The presence of species may have significant impact on the way landscapes are valued regardless of the ecological condition. For example, bears have been shown to ‘create place’ in that they can signify a sense of wilderness even though the landscape within which they are viewed by tourists is severely degraded, or highly managed by humans (Nevin et al., 2012). This links to the way ‘nature’ is perceived, and thus also the construction of ‘wilderness’ and ‘the wild’. Although there are clearly conflicting and complex perceptions and definitions for all these relevant terms, including animals, biodiversity and nature (e.g. see Beilin et al., 2011), in the call for this special issue we did not make any separation between the terms or particular definition of animals, preferring instead to see what the call produced.

The papers in this special issue provide further food for thought on these and a number of other controversies related to human-animal-landscape production and interaction. This special issue can be seen as complementary to that edited by Marcus
Hall (2003) which examined our relationship with plants as well as animals in human history. Over the years we have had a number of papers exploring relationships in the landscape focusing on animals, but I am particularly pleased that Richard Yarwood has a paper included in this issue. The paper that he wrote with Nick Evans published in this journal in 1995 (Evans and Yarwood, 1995) suggested that much greater attention was needed to the way livestock and landscape are intertwined. In revisiting this subject, he now calls for a new focus on the development of a diversity of theoretical approaches to examine the contested position of farm animals in the landscape. A number of the papers in this issue focus on the pastoral aspect of human-animal relationships, but there are also papers that focus on symbolic and literary connections and on the importance of understanding the change of populations of wild animals in the landscape and the relevance of wild species that are perceived as introduced rather than native.

One of the first papers I dealt with as Editor was Nuttall’s (2004) exploration of Zoo exhibit design and the development of an ‘animal-as-client’ theory. Some papers stick with you, and this is one that always reminds me of the breadth of landscape-focused subjects covered by this journal. I hope this collection will provide similar encouragement for further exploration of the rich area of research that reflects the complexity of human-animal interactions and landscape.

References

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