**BASN Conserving Speaker Abstracts**

**Angela Cassidy (University of Exeter)**

 **“They can easily protect themselves, you see...” Conflicting Logics of Care in the UK Badger Culling Debate**

Bovine TB (bTB) is an infectious disease of cattle which can also affect humans and other mammal species. Since government veterinarians connected persistent outbreaks of bTB in cattle with tuberculous badgers in 1971, the UK has seen an ongoing public controversy over this connection. This has centred upon the policy question of whether to cull badgers in order to control the disease, and uncertainties in expert knowledge informing this question. While these debates have increasingly focused on questions of evidence, questions of care have remained in the background, despite their importance in shaping policy decisions via the ‘humaneness’ (or otherwise) of culling techniques. This paper will draw upon Keck’s (2015) elaboration of Mol’s (2002) ‘logics of care’ to explore the contrasting modes of care at play in the badger culling debate. This includes the care of farmers (for livestock and land); policymakers (for citizens); veterinarians (for livestock and farmers); scientists (for knowledge and the natural world); naturalists (for wildlife and landscapes); and animal protection activists. While some of these are conceived of as ‘conservation’, others are not. These logics of care have changed, intersecting and conflicting at different points in time, and changing the politics of badgers and bTB along the way.

**Samantha Hurn (University of Exeter)**

**Street Dog Conservation**

Conservation initiatives tend to be associated with preserving endangered ‘wild’ species and natural habitats. In many contexts around the world, domestic dogs, and especially those who stray beyond the control of their human custodians, represent significant threats to such conservation efforts. Consequently, the suggestion that street or feral dogs might themselves be worthy of conservation may appear counter-intuitive. However, recent research has demonstrated that ‘unowned’ domestic dogs have also carved out their own viable, valuable ecological niches despite being under threat from ‘management’ programmes ultimately aimed at their eradication. Indeed, fuelled by wide ranging concerns including zoonotic disease transmission, pollution, inter-species violence, and symbolism, stray dog population management has become a global priority. As such, the study of contemporary stray dog populations aimed at documenting their locally-specific, vanishing ways of life represents a form of what might be termed ‘urgent anthrozoology’. Telling the stories of these doomed dogs, and exploring the ethics of management practices (e.g. TNR, culling) can also contribute to the burgeoning field of extinction studies. The paper will explore the lives and deaths of street dogs, situating them within the discourses of extinction studies, in order to demonstrate their conservation value in the Anthropocene.

**Beth Savage (Practicing Artist)**

**Sites Of Encounter: The Zoo As Gallery And Other Curated Spaces Of Conservation**

Following residencies at two different sites of conservation, a zoo and a nature reserve, this paper will explore the overlap between conservation and artistic practice. It will examine how the zoo, the reserve and the gallery act as sites of encounter and question the curatorial decisions that are made within these spaces; for example, which animals are represented and how is the ‘conservation message’ conveyed? Drawing on ideas such as Nicholas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics and Shannon Jackson’s notions of the receiver’s role in performativity within art practice, this paper will explore the current visitor experiences of these sites and question the effectiveness of these encounters for the wider aims of conservation. As part of this discussion I will unpack how my own artistic research outcomes, as well as examples of works from the wider contemporary art world, respond to issues of conservation and the freedoms and limitations afforded by this approach. Through these deliberations I will also consider how aesthetic practices might influence future conservation projects, and how adopting creative approaches could potentially lead to a radical shift in conservation practice.

**Cara Clancy (Plymouth University)**

**Life In The Urban Wilds: The Culture And Politics Of ‘Rewilding’ (In) The Anthropocene**

Rewilding, as a specific form of ecological restoration often involving the reintroduction of ‘missing’ keystone species, is a concept and practice gaining increasing momentum within popular media and the UK conservation movement. Rewilding conservation has the potential to respond creatively and flexibly to the future conditions of the Anthropocene. However to do this it must be understood in context, with strong attention given to local histories of place-making –an attention which takes into account the increasing importance of urban locations to conservation/Anthropocene futures. Focusing on the case of rewilding in urban contexts, this research will explore questions of: How do ‘wildness’ and ‘non-human autonomy’ figure and play out in these urban projects? What kinds of cultural/political values inform and underpin conservation decisions in such contexts? How are animal subjects expected to respond, thrive or simply *be* in rewilded landscapes and cityscapes? How do the animal subjects find their place in this process, and make their own worlds? Such questions will be addressed through ‘more-than-human’ field methods inspired by latest thinking in geography and anthropology.

**Alan Ross (Humboldt University, Berlin)**

**The Body As A Medium: Conservation Techniques And Visual Culture, 1660-1840**

Advances in conservation techniques from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, especially taxidermy, allowed for animal bodies to be sculpted and positioned in ways that made possible allusions to European iconographical traditions. This paper discusses the impact of the nascent culture of conservation on European visual culture by examining rare surviving eighteenth-century conserved specimen originating in the Leverian Museum/ London and the Linck collection/ Saxony and by tracing their odyssey through several collections as fashions of presenting the animal body changed. In accordance with the anthropology of images, a distinction is drawn between the image, the picture in which it resides, and the medium which provides the material fabric for both. The allegorical way in which eighteenth-century taxidermy had played with species barriers and the hierarchy of creation was deemed unfit for the scientific and educational purpose of the emerging museums of natural history. However, since conserved specimen invoked the appearance of the live animal, they also bore the charge of depictions of the animal body in European visual culture. In the case of the conserved animal body, the image and the medium could, therefore, not be separated from each other.

**Sally McIntyre (Practicing Artist)**

**‘How To Explain Radio To A Dead Huia: Listening Memorials To The Sounds And Silences Of Extinct New Zealand Birds’**

In classical acoustic-ecological conceptions of the soundscape, the technological preservation of a sound mark might be understood to positively relate to the preserving of memory of place. But what of the sounds beyond (recorded) memory, that are already missing? Might there be value in suspending the fantasy of a natural plenitude of sonic fecundity, and its status as a potential recorded totality, to adequately acknowledge this haunting, or gap; to hear the past and present withdrawal of sound from an ecosystem and its soundscape, through ecological destruction? And once we have listened to this silence, how best to memorialise this loss? In a series of works focusing on what Dugal McKinnon has termed “ecological silencing” I explore the possibility for practice based research to investigate the lost birdsongs found within New Zealand colonial narratives, asking what it might mean to re-collect, through interventions into archival records, notation, and other material traces, the songs of bird species lost before the invention of recording technologies, and then to situate these lost songs back into hearing, including placing them back within what might be now listened to, and represented in phonographic or field recording practice, as the 'natural' soundscape.

**Anja Höing (University of Osnabrück)**

**Conserving The Idea Of The Animal: Representations Of Conservation In British Animal Stories**

Literature reflects and discusses the innumerable issues and dilemmas conservation practice is riddled with. This paper will present close readings of two stories that approach conservation from vastly different angles. Gill Lewis’s human-focussed Sky Hawk (2011) contrasts the local, hidden conservation space to the institutionalised maximum security wildlife resort and emphasises the inseparable links between local and global conservation practices. Yet, in the story conserving is aimed at a single iconic species chosen not only for its aesthetic, but primarily for its symbolic value. The protagonists in fact protect neither a species nor a population, but a signifier in an entirely anthropocentric system. Peter Chippindale’s satire Mink! (1995) in contrast approaches conservation from an animal perspective. The story’s animal protagonists purposefully import an iconic species and present it to the humans as a spectacle, as they realise that the real value of their habitat – being an absolutely ordinary English wood – will not be considered worth protecting. Mink! thus satirises the very conservation practices which Sky Hawk takes for granted. Taken together, the stories allow a glimpse at the clash between the biocentric ideals informing the idea of conservation and its accommodation into Western anthropocentric consumerist culture.

**Greg McElwain (The College of Idaho)**

**Conserving Whom Or What? Midgley And The Problem Of The Species And The Individual**

This paper explores the dynamic of how wild and domestic animals and the quandary of species versus individuals are conceived of in environmental ethics through the insights of the prominent British philosopher Mary Midgley. Midgley's work in the early 1980s and beyond presents a shift away from liberal individualist animal ethics toward a sophisticated relational and holistic value system grounded in community, care, empathy, and other components of morality that are often overlooked or marginalized in (hyper)rationalist ethics, though now heavily emphasized in ecofeminist ethics. This is most exemplified in her concept of "the mixed community," which gained special attention with Baird Callicott's usage of it in his effort to create a "unified environmental ethics." This paper argues that Callicott misinterpreted, oversimplified, and misused Midgley's complex concept. Ultimately, Midgley, properly understood, does have much to offer to a unified animal and environmental ethics, including nuanced insights on the topic of conserving. Midgley offers a sensible and community-based approach to conserving that integrates numerous elements of our place in the world and our connection to animals and wider nature. This paper is supplemented with excerpts from personal interviews with Midgley from a forthcoming collaborative book project.

**Thomas White (University of Cambridge)**

**Camels, Pastoralists And The State: The Politics Of Conservation In Northern China**

This paper explores the kind of politics that conservation makes possible in Inner Mongolia, northern China. This ecologically-fragile region of grasslands and deserts contains significant numbers of ethnic Mongolian pastoralists, whose way of life is threatened by environmental change, mining, and the strict limits on livestock numbers that the state has imposed to combat desertification. For Mongolians in Alasha, western Inner Mongolia, one of the most significant changes in recent decades has been the plummeting numbers of the culturally-significant domestic Bactrian camel. Drawing on 18 months of anthropological fieldwork, I discuss the formation of an NGO, the ‘Alasha Camel Protection Society’, by a local Mongolian intellectuals. I show how this organisation has used an emerging official discourse of rare breed conservation to argue against the stocking limits and other state policies. In a context where mobilisation around notions indigenous rights is impossible, I argue that conservation affords room for political manoeuvre. I argue that to understand the political valency of camel conservation, we must attend to the particular charismatic quality of this animal. The paper therefore also seeks to provide an anthropological perspective on theories of nonhuman charisma.

**Pippa Marland (University of Worcester)**

**'A great altar-cairn of [...] corpses': A Reading Of The 'Guga Hunt' In Robert Macfarlane's *The Old Ways***

Each year a party of around ten men departs from Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides, bound for Sula Sgeir, to take part in the annual 'guga hunt'. They spend two weeks encamped on the island, during which time they catch and kill two thousand gannet chicks in order to sell them for human consumption. While the RSPB does not formally object to the hunt, the practice has attracted controversy. Fraser MacDonald suggests that the guga hunt reflects both a deeper knowledge of animals and a much closer engagement with the environment than the ‘spectatorial gaze’ of the conservationist. However, at the same time, there have been calls from the SPCA and online pressure groups to ban the practice on grounds of cruelty to animals. Robert Macfarlane's account of the hunt in The Old Ways is prefaced by an allusion to the medieval tradition of navigatio, whereby Celtic scholars would make journeys in order ‘to undergo an apprenticeship to signs of strangeness’ thus becoming ‘more attentive to the meanings of [their] own time and place’. This paper explores the ways in which the guga hunt emerges in The Old Ways as a ‘sign of strangeness’ and teases out the contemporary meanings it reveals, moving beyond the competing discourses of hunting, cruelty and conservation to look at the challenges it poses to our conceptualisation of human/animal relations in, to use Rosi Braidotti’s term, our ‘posthuman planet’.

**Violette Pouillard (University of Oxford)**

**Appropriation As Conservation. Practices Of Wildlife Management In The Belgian Congo, British Kenya And** Uganda (1900-C. 1963)

This paper, to be included in the category “Conserving how ?”, will examine the history of management of the most protected species in British and Belgian colonies in order to unveil the tensions between appropriation and protection of fauna. It will challenge the “MacKenzian orthodoxy” (Van Sittert, 2005) which, concerning the British Empire, regards more broadly the imperial relationships with wildlife, largely defined by the international conservation law. Following this paradigm, the beginning of the twentieth century saw a shift from the utilitarian and economic exploitation of wild animals for ivory, meat, and trophies by “the ordinary man” to “the Hunt”, a symbolic, codified sporting activity, framed by conservation laws and increasingly restricted to the Western colonial elite (MacKenzie, 1988). By paying attention to the materiality of policies and pratices and their effects on animals, beyond the official discourse and propaganda, this paper, however, will show that even the most rationalized practices framed by the conservation law reused former patterns, failed to reduce the effects of appropriation and implemented new forms of exploitation, a process that must be related to the utilitarian grounds of most colonial environmental policies. In conclusion, this paper will briefly examine the postcolonial legacy of these conservation policies.

**Wendy Woodward (University of the Western Cape)**

**Marah And Sekhmet: Two Lionesses, Two Conservation Idols**

In Saving the White Lions: One Woman’s Battle for Africa’s Most Sacred Animal (2013) Linda Tucker foregrounds the story of Marah, a photogenic white lioness. She is born in Bethlehem, South Africa at Christmas—a fulfilment of a sangoma’s prophecy--and is discursively situated within a mythology of “angelic starlions” as imagined by Credo Vusamuzula Mutwa, an eminent lion shaman. Tucker rescues Marah from certain death in the canned lion hunting industry, re-locating her to her “ancestral lands.” In her novel Green Lion (2015), Henrietta Rose-Innes has Sekhmet, a black-maned lioness, as a key attraction at The Lion House, a Cape Town zoo which is attempting to backbreed the extinct black-maned Cape lion. Rose-Innes queers material and discursive conservation practices and putative shamanism through her depiction of the lioness as an elusive, unseen presence, through the response of ‘animal nutters’ to the captive lioness and through the animal’s dangerous disappearance onto the Cape Flats. This paper will consider the figuring of these lionesses in nonfictional and fictional conservation narratives respectively in relation to Una Chaudhuri’s ‘zooesis’: “the discourse and representation of species in contemporary culture and performance.”