

English summaries

Éric Baratay, From hero-man to actor-animal, and back again

This special issue was conceived as a major contribution to a topic which, given problems related to sources, continues to be relatively unexplored. It provides an overview of current research, polarized by human gesture, or more precisely by representations, while disregarding other dimensions, such as the “unbridled” economy. It also provides a new opportunity for stressing the importance of interconnecting different themes and approaches, in order to give greater substance, consistency and complexity to the topic. Finally, it helps us bring to light elements requiring further development, in particular animals, which should be considered as actors rather than objects if we want to better understand not only the human-animal relationship, but ultimately also humanity itself.

Florent Pouvreau, The Savage in the alpine imagination in the late Middle Ages (13th–16th century). Myth and reality of a motif of popular iconography

The figure of the savage (hairy, halfway between human and beast) first appeared in alpine pictures in the late Middle Ages, embodying the changing concept of primitive man. No longer depicted as simple-minded shepherd mocked by villagers, or as sexual predator in contemporary folklore, the savage turned into intercessor between men and the forces of nature, indeed a guardian figure. An analysis of some 20 paintings and sculptures produced in the Alpine region over almost four centuries shows the influence of an urban culture in which the savage represented an idealized state of nature. The pictures suggest associations between the process of re-anthropization of mountain landscapes at the time and the way mountain-dwellers viewed their environment.

Étienne Bourdon, Knowledge of alpine fauna in the 16th and 17th centuries

Knowledge of alpine zoology expanded considerably during the 16th and 17th centuries. The Renaissance heralded in a new attitude towards life and science, increasingly based on experience and observation. More detailed and rigorous treatises became available (by scholars like Pierre Belon, Conrad Gesner, Ulisse Aldrovandi, or John Jonston) describing many alpine animals. In addition, however, information could be retrieved from oral tradition, travel accounts, geography textbooks, not to forget dictionaries. In the interlace of different sources a new type of knowledge is woven strand by strand. The transformation stems from a few complex, sometimes contradictory, processes: constantly torn between the need to search our cognitive heritage – especially of Antiquity – and a questioning, sorting, and refutation of the same, which brings about a renaissance of learning.

Alexandre Scheurer, Fears, ghosts, and popular beliefs “inspired” by alpine fauna. The case of francophone Valais (Switzerland), 16th–20th century

The inhabitants of the Alps saw wildlife with a mixture of awe and fascination. In a poor agro-pastoral society, some wild animals could be really harmful. For example, the great predators caused important damage among the herds. In the Valais (Swiss Alps), however, they do not seem to have been threatening to human beings considering the rarity of their attacks. Other species were perceived as frightening only because their biology was misunderstood. Their appearance, their *uselessness* or their traditional associations with Death or Evil were one factor in the fear they inspired. A third group of wild animals was considered *useful* because they could be eaten (a source of food) and did no damage. They were not feared but inspired beliefs bordering on the supernatural. In short, knowledge of wildlife was above all linked with hunting.

Florian Hitz, Ibex and marmot in Graubünden. Representations and customs from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance

In the Middle Ages and early Modern Age, in the valleys of Graubünden, ibexes and marmots were considered mostly as a source of food. The ibex was hunted with such ferocity (in the 17th century firearms were used) that it became extinct. Marmots, too, were hounded. However, a counter-movement emerged at the time, an attitude to these species reminiscent of man's relation to pet animals. For its resemblance to a domestic goat, the ibex was also tamed. Medical science transferred on to man, by analogy, the (imaginary) characteristics of the two species. Ibexes were represented more frequently than marmots, as the species rose to symbolic status in Graubünden's culture. While the literature describes ibexes as aggressive, strong, solitary and free, marmots are represented as industrious, but no less playful, both cautious and shrewd, sociable and well-organised.

Simon Roth, Representation on Swiss posters of wild animals in the Alps

As a contemporary prop of tourism development in the Alps, posters represent a communication carrier providing the historian with various readings. A statistical database promoted by the Swiss National Library now makes available a total of 50'000 posters from different collections at one address: <http://ccsa.admin.ch/cgi-bin/gw/chameleon>. The corpus elicits different interpretations of the staging of wild beasts in the alpine regions of Switzerland. Posters could be seen as graphic applications for tourist advertising purposes, but also as testifying to the historical evolution of alpine wildlife. Initially, alpine bestiaries were mainly domestic, but very slowly wild beasts reappeared until, from the 1970s, they finally began to be represented as identity symbols appropriated by competing regions. The precarious return of lynx, bearded vulture, wolf, and bear to the Swiss Alps sparked off passionate debates nationwide, quickly exploited by the advertising industry.

Matija Turk, The flute of Divje babe I. A Neanderthal artefact

In 1995, a perforated femur of a young cave bear was found in layer 8a of the Palaeolithic cave site Divje babe I (Slovenia). The hypothesis that the object could be a flute kindled many polemics within the Palaeolithic profession. The supposed flute was controversial because of its age. According to the radiocarbon dating of layer 8a, it could only be traced back to the Neanderthal. The crucial question concerned the origin of the holes. These may have been made either by a carnivore or by a human being. Experimental testing of both hypotheses showed that such holes could not be the result of carnivore activity. Furthermore, the method of artificial creation of the holes, which left no traces of tools, was defined. The perforated bone is actually an artefact, interpreted as a flute. According to the recent ESR dating (50'000–60'000 years), the object is the oldest flute in the world and a unique artefact of the Neanderthal.

Christian Rohr, “Unexpected wild animals” in the Alps. Invasions of locusts and their impact on Eastern Alpine societies in the Middle Ages and in Early Modern Times

From the 13th to the first half of the 16th century, Alpine communities (Styria, Carinthia, and historical Tyrol) were threatened by plagues of locusts from the great plains of Hungary. In the Eastern Alps, chronicles tell us, swarms of locusts were interpreted as divine retribution and Last Judgement portents, echoing Biblical accounts (Exodus, Joel, Revelation, et cetera). Apparently, actual economic loss was not so overwhelming, as these invasions occurred in August, when crops had already been harvested. Land configuration determined the extent of the damage caused. In narrow valleys, locusts presumably destroyed a higher percentage of fields and meadows, whereas in the plains they only cut a swathe through crops. Defensive measures included: collecting and burning caterpillars, burying dead locusts or preventing the locusts from settling down by making noise. Processions were held to pray for God's mercy and magic rituals performed to avert the plague.

Julien Alleau, Human communities confronted with great predators in Provence (16th–18th century). The unique man-to-wolf relationship in the mountains

There was in the Modern Age no homogeneous policy of pest control enforced across the Kingdom of France. In Provence, since 1632, pest control was organized and supported by a unique system of bounties across the province. All the population was entitled to benefit from it. These bounties, collected in a provisional documentary corpus of 3460 references, enable us to assess the importance and impact of hunting. They also enable us to put the wolf back into a more general framework, which includes other predators actively hunted down, like the bear or the lynx. Such documents are also proof of territorial differences in hunting practices and of a pace of life typical of mountains.

Agnese Visconti, Fish and fishermen on the southern slopes of the Alpine Arc. The case of Lake Como during the period of Habsburg Absolutism

Working on unpublished documents preserved in the National Archive of Milan and National Library Braidense, we illustrate the history of fish and fishermen in Upper Lombardy, more particularly around Lake Como, at the close of the 18th century. Important developments occurred in the fishing sector (at the time of the famous Teresian reforms) changing its legislative and regulatory framework, land use and species conservation. Demographic growth and greater prosperity led to increasing demand for fish, hard to reconcile with species and stocks preservation. Thus, court rulings and official guidelines reveal contradictions, exemplified by the so-called *edifizi da pesca*, installations built in the lake to catch fish, which challenged the very principle of fish, navigation and environmental protection. Conflicts of interests divided the fishing industry and other industries, which public authority was unable to resolve until well into the 19th century, when environment and navigation took priority over supply of fish to towns.

Nicolas Lescureux, John D. C. Linnell, Are mountains the last resort for great predators?

In western Europe, extreme persecution, urbanization and the development of intensive agriculture drove large carnivores to find refuge in the mountains. Wolves have thus been associated with mountains and wilderness in western popular imagination, fed by wildlife documentaries filmed in North America. However, following their protection, wolves demonstrated their capacity to adapt by colonising intensive farming areas and town outskirts, while “clashes” between humans and wolves built up in mountainous areas. The traditional spatial categories are thus blurred by wolves, which end up causing management problems. Relational categories based on the existence of reciprocity appear to be more suited to explain the essentially dynamic nature of the relationship between humans and large carnivores in an ever changing landscape.

Émilie-Anne Pépy, Monastic spaces: nature reserves? Carthusians in the Alps and wild animals, 16th–19th century

By the second half of the 18th century, the deserts of Carthusian monks were besieged by the early naturalists. Those scientists knew they could find in those remote monasteries food and shelter, as well as guides to “escort” them in their explorations. During the 19th century, as scientific tourism became more popular, those deserts began to be considered as nature reserves, where wildlife and rare flora could be preserved. Nonetheless, a systematic study of monastic sources appears to suggest that, before the French Revolution, Carthusian communities had very little concern for wild life. All they did was to adopt some safety measures against predators, such as bears. Although many poets and travellers described Carthusian deserts suggesting the overwhelming presence of animal figures, these external sources were clearly influenced by religious representations, where the staging of wild animals was a way to emphasize the heroism of the anchorites.

Patrick Kupper, Crossing borders. Towards a history of Men and Animals in the Swiss National Park

The Swiss National Park was the first national park in the Alps. The park was established in the Lower Engadine before World War I as a complete reserve, in which the entire community of animals and plants should be allowed to develop undisturbed by human interference. At the time the park was created game was scarce in the region. Increasing game populations as well as changing patterns of land use triggered conflicts. How these conflicts evolved during the 20th century and what roles may be attributed to human and non-human actors is at the core of the analysis. The categorical separation into park land and park surroundings proves to be very significant as it resulted in the national park becoming a special zone, a Foucauldian heterotopy. The maintenance of park boundaries remained a precarious affair and border crossings by humans and animals were at the source of most conflicts.

Luigi Piccioni, Paying back Nature, teaching how to preserve. Symbolical aspects of ibex culling in the Gran Paradiso National Park, 1948–1969

The essay aims to analyze the technical and ethical dilemma facing the management of the Gran Paradiso National Park between the post-war years and the end of the Sixties with regard to the hunting of ibexes and chamois on the reserve's land. Guidelines issued by international boards like UICN and a protectionist culture absolutely proscribed hunting in national parks. In the Gran Paradiso, on the other hand, a well-regulated and limited selective hunting had to be allowed to supplement the meagre public funding. Unable to ban hunting altogether, the director of the Park, Renzo Videsott, tried to reconcile the principles of conservation ethics and hunting by introducing a symbolic compensation, also intended to educate the hunters.

Farid Benhammou, A geopolitics of the wolf in “Alpes-Maritimes”. From conflict to coexistence

The wolf is a symbol of safeguarded biodiversity and it is also a constraint in the activity of sheep farming in the mountains. However, it can also be assimilated to a *political animal*. In other words, when they arrive in a territory wolves encourage a mobilization and conflicts of favourable or unfavourable actors. When they show up socio-environmental systems have to be reorganised. Examining the case study of Alpes-Maritimes, an area with the highest density of wolves and conflicts in history, we will pick up on the original debate linked to the animal's reappearance. From the 1990s, geopolitical representations used to dispute or support the settlement of species. Secondly, we will study the reasons behind the increased tensions with farmers in Alpes-Maritimes. Will the wolf turn from “troublemaker” to “organizer”? Indeed, after some intense incidents, several farmers and environmentalists launched initiatives and new partnerships in an effort to manage more effectively the complex issue involving strong national and social interests.