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Habsburg History Beneath the Eagle: The Empire and Its Animals

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The introductory article reflects on the development of animal history and its absence from the otherwise vibrant study of Habsburg history. It highlights the need to integrate nonhuman animals into historical narratives, especially during the long 19th century – a period of profound changes in human-animal relationships driven by capitalism and its impact on the environment. This era saw shifts in animal breeding, scientific discoveries, biodiversity, pet keeping, zoos, and the rise of animal welfare movements, to name some.

▪ **Keywords**: animal history, Habsburg Monarchy, 19th century, breeding, capitalism

Uvodni članek razgrinja razvoj zgodovine živali in njeno odsotnost na sicer živahnem polju habsburške zgodovine. Osvetljuje potrebo po vključevanju nečloveških živali v zgodovinske narative, zlasti v dolgem 19. stoletju, dobi globokih sprememb v odnosih med ljudmi in živalmi spričo kapitalizma in njegovega vpliva na okolje. Gre tudi za čas sprememb na področju reje živali, znanstvenih odkritij, biodiverzitete, hišnih ljubljenčkov, živalskih vrtov in vznika gibanja za pravice živali, če omenimo le nekatere.

▪ **Ključne besede**: zgodovina živali, Habsburška monarhija, 19. stoletje, vzreja, kapitalizem

Just weeks ago, in broad daylight, Renee Nicole Good was shot while supporting her neighbours during a large federal immigration enforcement operation in Minneapolis – an unjust and avoidable act of U.S. state violence. The incident was captured on video and circulated widely on YouTube. Among the most liked comments was not concern for her death or for the family she had left behind, but anxiety about the dog in the backseat of her SUV, with countless viewers asking whether it was okay. This sheds light on how much attention and empathy animals receive in today's society, in some cases, their lives are valued more highly than those of humans.

The nineteenth century constitutes a crucial historical period for understanding the growing prominence of animals and the complex human–animal entanglements that shaped modernity. Within the nineteenth-century Habsburg Empire, animals assumed increasingly significant roles, yet historiography has largely remained anthropocentric. The contributions to this themed issue seek to redress this imbalance by integrating non-human animals into historical narratives, thereby aligning the volume with the burgeoning field of animal history and responding to the growing relevance of more-than-human perspectives in contemporary historical and anthropological research.

At the crossroads of the animal turn and new imperial history

Animals have long appeared in historiography, ethnology and related disciplines. From its earliest formulations, economic history has incorporated animals primarily as productive resources or labouring machines (Lang, 2021: 183). By contrast, cultural history and folklore studies have for decades examined the symbolic meanings and representational roles of animals (Cowie, 2021: 149–159; Babič, 2024). Yet sustained analysis of animals as historical subjects represents a more recent scholarly development, retrospectively labelled the "animal turn". Since the 1970s, increased scholarly interest in animals has permeated numerous disciplines, including anthropology, ethnology, philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, linguistics, comparative literature, archaeology, and all their intersections. The result has been the emergence of numerous transdisciplinary fields – or, at a minimum, an expansion of their nomenclature – including ethnozoology, zooethnography, ethno-primatology, ethnobiology, historical animal geography, zoofolkloristics, ecophilosophy, and critical animal studies. Less than two years ago, this very journal published another special issue, situated at the intersection of critical animal studies and folklore studies, that placed nonhuman animals at the centre of analysis, taking a decidedly radical approach by arguing that anthropocentrism should be replaced with zoocentrism (Golež Kaučič, 2024).

At its core, the "animal turn" is inherently critical, in that it actively challenges established hierarchies between human and nonhuman animals (Golež Kaučič, 2020; Baskar, 2023). In historical research it catalysed the emergence of animal history as a distinct historical subfield, beginning with Keith Thomas's publication of *Man and the Natural World* in 1983 (Cowie, 2025: 2). Researchers in the field of animal history, much like their predecessors in the fields of gender history, postcolonial studies, or global history, have embarked on a path of incorporating previously overlooked voices (Taylor, Twine, 2014). In highlighting nonhuman subjectivities and discussing animals as agents with reflective consciousness, many of them combine their theoretical engagement with activism.[1] As a result, animals figure in a far wider range of historical narratives. Moreover, many historians no longer approach animals as passive objects or as mere reflections of human history; instead, animals have been portrayed as independent and productive entities worthy of study in their own right. Returning to the earlier examples, contemporary economic historians increasingly recognize animals as forms of labour, while cultural historians focus on animal experiences and, in some cases, pursue the cultural history of animals themselves.

According to the historian Harriet Ritvo, the appeal and strength of animal history lie in its marginal position and transdisciplinary character. Precisely because of this peripheral status, animal history can challenge established assumptions and even prompt

[1] An explicitly activist stance is a defining characteristic of the field of critical animal studies.

a rethinking of the relationships between human and nonhuman beings (Ritvo, 2007). In fact, the effects of the animal turn extend beyond history and resonate across many disciplines within the broader field of the humanities. Beyond the foundational contributions of Ritvo and Thomas, the field of animal history has since the 1980s been significantly shaped by Anglophone historians such as Nigel Rothfels, Erica Fudge, and Lorraine Daston. They paved the way for many subfields of animal history researching questions regarding agriculture, breeding, petkeeping, hunting, veterinary science and medicine, even emotional lives of animals in history, to name a few.[2]

Whereas the histories of the French and British Empire have attracted extensive animal-historical scholarship and produced synthetic overviews, the animal history of the Habsburg Empire remains largely peripheral, with even microhistorical cases still underexplored. The animal world was long considered trivial when measured against the supposedly more prominent concerns of political history. In the case of the Habsburg Empire, this tendency was particularly pronounced: until at least the 1990s, historical research centred on national affiliations, both in studies of various national movements and in employing the broader historiographical approach known as methodological nationalism (King, 2001; Wimmer, Glick Schiller, 2002). The latter indicates that, regardless of the research question, the lens remained national. Consequently, broader imperial structures were often overlooked, limiting the scope of historical analysis and reinforcing the dominance of methodological nationalism in Habsburg historiography. As a result, animal-related subjects have attracted limited attention from historians, and existing studies have tended to remain bounded by single national frameworks.

For much of the twentieth century, Central European ethnologists also focused heavily on historical research, particularly on uncovering what was considered the more authentic rural life, often following a similarly nation-centred approach. Nevertheless, at least two notable exceptions explored aspects of the Habsburg animal world without the heavy weight of national framing: Angelos Baš's study of the Ljutomer horse races (1976), and Inja Smerdel's *Sheep Farming in the Pivka Region* (1989).

A break with older national narratives is evident in New Imperial History, a historiographical approach that seeks to reinterpret the Habsburg Monarchy not as a failed entity but as a dynamic and structurally modern imperial formation. As the field matured in the 2000s, a focus on the centripetal aspects of the Habsburg Empire emerged as a key framework for study. Scholars increasingly examined forms of cooperation across ethnic groups, including the practical implementation of imperial policies, imperial culture, administrative networks, and other social and economic systems that transcended crownland and ethnic boundaries.[3] Although at first glance clearly aligned with the approaches of New Imperial History, environmental topics have only very

[2] For an overview of animal history see Kean, Howell, 2018; Roscher et al. 2021; Aiello et al. 2024.

[3] For more on the New Imperial History in the case of the Habsburg Empire, see Judson 2016.

recently entered the field. This is surprising, given that in the nineteenth century few issues were more centripetal than the use of natural resources – whether in water management, the introduction of new species, forestry administration, hunting regulations, or cartography, to name just a few. The observation holds for both the Hungarian and Austrian halves of the empire, which shared largely identical environmental policies (Daheur, Lučić, 2025: 321).

While Jawad Daheur and Iva Lučić, in their recent edited volume *Habsburg Natures: Imperial Governance and Environment in Central Europe, 1850–1918*, expressed scepticism about the expansion of research in Habsburg environmental history, especially in comparison to the research made on other empires, their volume has surely helped to move the field past this impasse (2025). This was further confirmed by the many presentations at the inaugural Central European History Convention in Vienna (2025), underscoring the field's expanding reach and scholarly momentum,[4] and other recent publications addressing Habsburg environmental history (Remec, 2023; Fuerst-Bjeliš et al., 2024; Shields Mevissen, 2025; Zwitter, Rasran, 2026).

Like the environment itself, animals – its crucial components – rank among the most inherently centripetal objects of historical inquiry. Animal history, after all, cannot be meaningfully confined within national frameworks. Did grape phylloxera halt at political borders (Seručnik, 2011)? Can Alpine chamois adjust their migratory ranges to nationally defined pastures (Strle, 2025)? Animals inevitably disregard such human-imposed divisions and must therefore be approached through their own historically situated trajectories. The maturation of New Imperial History, together with the broader animal turn and the growing interest in environmental perspectives, has generated increased attention to the Habsburg animal world. Yet animal-related topics remain fragmented and strikingly understudied. This special issue addresses this neglected dimension of the Habsburg past by integrating nonhuman animals into the historical narrative through a range of conceptual and methodological approaches.

Defining "Habsburg animals"

We must first clarify what is meant by "Habsburg animals": this entails defining what – or who – counts as animals and then addressing the characteristics they shared within the Habsburg context. To begin with a brief disclaimer: while it is today indisputable that us humans belong to the animal kingdom and are therefore animals ourselves, for practical purposes we in this themed issue use the term *animals* exclusively to refer to nonhuman animals, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

[4] The program as well as short blog posts reflecting on the convention are found here: https://ceh-c.univie.ac.at/

Firstly, what are animals, and what role do we ascribe to them in our historical research? As a result of the animal turn, animals are no longer perceived as passive objects. Anthropologists and many other researchers are employing multispecies ethnography and other more experimental approaches, which attempt to research how animals would speak for themselves and give us an opportunity to recognize their subjectivity – even that of microbes (Kirksey, Helmreich, 2010). Although less radically, historians now likewise attempt to consider the animals' inner world to illuminate nonhuman subjectivities and discuss animals as historical actors with reflective consciousness (Baratay, 2012; Wischermann et al., 2018).

While wolves, pigeons, cattle, pigs, and other animals appear throughout the following pages, they do not function as the primary protagonists. The contributions do not seek to narrate the history of animals *per se*, as we remain sceptical of the possibility of pursuing a rigorous animal history entirely detached from the human factor. After all, animals do not write or paint their own histories.[5] A human interpretative lens remains unavoidable, at least in the context of historical research (Fudge, 2000). At the same time, we maintain that the human should remain central, though not paramount, to the field of humanities as such. Accordingly, the present themed issue does not offer a full-fledged animal history; but it does treat animals as sentient beings endowed with agency. Following Helen Cowie, we believe "their actions range from violent rebellions and conscious disobedience through to instinctive reactions or innate biological characteristics that nuance their relationship with humans and other species" (2025: 8). In practical terms, animal agency can be illustrated with malarious mosquitoes that rendered the Brioni Islands entirely uninhabitable until Koch's intervention at the turn of the century – after which Brioni were transformed into one of Europe's most splendid tourist resorts, a place Franz Ferdinand hoped to fashion into his own version of Miramare (Urošević, 2019). A further example is provided by the Viennese Fiaker horses, discussed in Gašper Raušl's article in the present issue, where successful pairing for the renowned carriage rides is possible only when the horses' own preferences are taken into account to ensure compatibility.

In the featured articles, the human element in historical research is treated as central, yet it is also recognized as having always been deeply entangled with the animal world. A recurring question throughout the issue concerns how animals have shaped human history and, more pointedly, how humans have shaped the lives and histories of animals. The experience of sharing this planet is a collective one. The focus is therefore on interactions that blur the conventional boundary of history as purely human, widening the scope to include other, non-human beings around us, because "the history of animals belongs to that of the human species and vice versa" (Freytag, 2016: 12).

[5] More on methodological challenges in animal history found here: Bonnell, Jennifer, and Sean Kheraj, eds. 2022. *Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.

Contrary to the common belief that humans are separate from or disturbing to nature, historical evidence shows that humans have long been entangled with and active within their environments. Human presence in nature cannot be reduced to mere disruptive activity; because human beings had been, to nature and within nature, fundamentally non-harmful (Guille-Escuret, 1992; Baskar, 2025: 166). A substantial body of ethnological and anthropological research, grounded in ethnographic observations of interspecies relationships, further demonstrates forms of cohabitation that are not necessarily detrimental to animals and that often embody distinct historical trajectories (Kozorog, 2015: 127). As the contributions to this issue illustrate, human-animal entanglements transformed in the nineteenth century – a period of profound change – but this was not a time when humans suddenly began leaving their mark on nature or on animals as an integral part of it. In fact, the impact of humans on the environment is long-lasting, "particularly in southern and central Europe, it is likely that already by the late-medieval period there were few natural landscapes that remained untouched by humans" (Freytag, 2016: 11). The Habsburg lands had thus almost no "first nature" or "virgin territories" predating the nineteenth century. Róbert Balogh's recent contribution to environmental history likewise underscores the long-term and systematic character of human interventions in the environment of Habsburg Central Europe (Balogh, 2026: 20–21).

Before turning to the 'Habsburg' section of 'Habsburg Animals', it is worth briefly revisiting the cultural category of animals in the long nineteenth century, especially in terms of its fluidity. Animals were perceived very differently depending on whether they were seen as exotic, livestock, pets, or pests, and their social value reflected these distinctions. This is evident, for example, in the activities of the then-emerging animal welfare societies, whose members displayed far greater affection for pedigree dogs, lions, and robins than for clams, bats, or salamanders (Ličen, 2025: 116). Some animals ranked very low in social and cultural value. In *The Metamorphosis*, Prague-born Franz Kafka tells the story of Gregor Samsa's transformation into "*ein ungeheures Ungeziefer*", a monstrous vermin or gigantic pest who gradually loses his human abilities, autonomy, and ultimately dies. In this metaphor for alienation and dehumanization, Kafka deliberately chose an undefined pest – an animal far removed from humans – to represent someone to be hidden, controlled, and ultimately discarded. Adding another layer of complexity, one's class belonging affected the value assigned to animals (Kozorog, 2023). Cats were particularly favoured among the upper classes. In his far less famous artistic work, the Triestine merchant and mountaineer Julius Kugy dedicated a poem to his recently deceased and dearly beloved cat Muca, who "like a true queen in velvet, snow-white, victorious majesty, gently and kindly, nobly and elegantly placed paw after paw" (Kugy, 1966: 47–50).

In the nineteenth century, the seemingly less problematic category of "human" was also highly malleable. This was the era of Darwin's groundbreaking theory of evolution, which fundamentally shifted perceptions of humanity's place in nature, but his ideas

took time to reach the broader public. Consequently, debates over what constituted a "human" were far from settled. Consider, for example, the case of a "pygmy" girl named Saida brought to Trieste in 1877. In keeping with contemporary practices, she was exhibited as an "exotic example", yet scholarly and public opinions about her were deeply divided: some speculated that she might actually be an ape, while others noted her similarities with European children (Ličen, 2018: 11).

Even after the scientific community eventually reached a consensus on where humans end and animals begin, significant distinctions within both categories persisted, most strikingly in Nazi Germany. The Nazis enacted what were probably the most rigorous animal protection laws of the time – restricting animal labour and vivisection, permitting euthanasia, and imposing strict rules on animal transport (Uekötter, 2007) – but these measures are chilling when considered alongside the simultaneous deportations to concentration camps.[6] By the same token, it is hardly surprising that the notorious Heinrich Himmler gained experience as a chicken breeder before taking charge of the administration of the lager (Sax, 2000). To sum up, the categories of humans and animals have been fluid, shaped by cultural, social, and scientific perspectives, and they have not always been particularly meaningful for understanding the life that surrounds them, as the boundaries imposed by these categories often obscure other significant categories complicating the human/animal divide.

Moving on to the second question, what makes the studied animals 'Habsburg'? What common experience did these Habsburg animals share? There is of course something universal about animals' experiences in history. Still, while animals do not necessarily respect political borders, these political spaces nonetheless shape their lives (Kozorog, 2019). The histories of humans, animals, and other nonhuman beings are deeply shaped by political formations, particularly within imperial contexts. Empires are grounded in power relations among their constituent communities, a logic that also extends to the governance of the environment. Imperial history must therefore be understood as environmental history, since ecological transformation, resource extraction, and the management of nature were not peripheral to imperial domination but central to its practices and political rationales (Barnard, 2019; Keating, 2022). Although historical narratives often focus on humans, they are not the only actors of consequence in imperial histories. Empires should, in fact, be understood as multispecies spaces composed of a variety of nonhuman beings. In other words, rather than serving as mere side characters, animals were vital actors in shaping imperial dynamics (Deb Roy, 2015).

Besides the imperial experience shared by many animals, we argue that there is also a distinctly Habsburg one. The Habsburg Empire had large and, due to its geographical heterogeneity ranging from Adriatic islands to Galician planes, also very diverse

[6] Conservation efforts were carried out also under Mussolini's regime in interwar Italy, demonstrating – as in Germany – that nature conservation was not merely an ecological endeavour, but also a political one (Armiero, 2014; Armiero et al., 2021; von Hardenberg, 2021).

animal populations. During the nineteenth century, the imperial administration showed keen interest in many of the animals living within its territorial borders and sought to exert a similar level of administrative control over them as it did over its human subjects. Alongside the introduction of the modern population census, the government conducted a livestock census in the 1820s at the level of cadastral municipalities, recorded in the appraisal protocols of the Franciscan Cadastre (Kolega, 2018). A more extensive agricultural census was introduced in 1850–1851, initially covering horses and cattle, followed by hinnies, mules, and donkeys, then sheep and pigs, and finally beehives. "All these initiatives aimed at a knowledge-driven improvement of nature and thus empire. Together they exemplify how symmetrical the imperial administration understood human and nonhuman animals to be" (Göderle, 2025: 206).

Knowledge production was only one step in enabling the successful exploitation of environmental resources. From its eagle's-eye view, Vienna sought not only to record these resources but also to manage and govern them. In the case of Bosnia, the abundance of forest resources was a key factor motivating the imperial administration to pursue annexation (Dursun, 2025). After all, "the appropriation and utilization of natural resources in the late nineteenth century were important means of exercising power by the Habsburg Empire" (Lučić, 2025: 103). As the nineteenth century progressed, the land management strategies of the Habsburg imperial administration increasingly operated in close interaction with scientific knowledge and bureaucratic intervention, as Kristýna Kaucká has demonstrated in her study of forest health regulation during the bark beetle infestation in the Šumava region (2025).

Beyond the perspective of governance, animals in Habsburg Central Europe were shaped not only by state intervention but also by a range of everyday human practices, such as butchers whose methods of slaughter were increasingly standardized, coachmen operating similar vehicles, children leafing through the same school readers, farmers introducing the same livestock species, or members of animal welfare associations, who sought to reshape attitudes toward animals and to transform animal-related practices across the empire. By the 1860s, there were already twenty-one animal protection associations operating under the umbrella of the Viennese Niederösterreichischer Verein gegen Mißhandlung der Tiere (Lower Austrian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) (Guazzaloca, 2018: 5). Its journal *Tierfreund: Zeitschrift des Wiener Tierschutzvereins* was being printed in 3,000 copies in 1856, making the animal welfare network an influential collective (Ličen, 2025: 118).

Transforming animal worlds in the long nineteenth century

The collected contributions focus on the long nineteenth century, with the exception of the final chapter that addresses a more recent, though decidedly post-Habsburg issue.

This relatively narrow historical focus is deliberate: the period witnessed profound transformations in human–animal cohabitation that not only reshaped contemporary relations but also left enduring, at times devastating legacies that continue to inform human–animal relations today.

To begin with the most prominent force of transformation, one that either precipitated many subsequent changes or was, at the very least, closely intertwined with them; the all-encompassing force of capitalism.[7] In the context of its growth alongside the increasing integration of the world economy and the general acceleration it fostered, the role of states was integral. Empires, in particular, played a decisive role in enforcing and facilitating capitalist development (Osterhammel, 2014). Although the Habsburg Monarchy's relationship to capitalism was far less direct than that of the British Empire, it was nonetheless firmly entangled in processes of global capitalist expansion.

Connected to the expansion of capitalism, the nineteenth century was also a period in which humans both conceptually and materially reshaped their understanding of the natural world, setting the stage for many of the global environmental challenges we face today. In his work, Pierre Charbonnier examines the philosophical foundations of capitalism and provides a critical analysis of how the nineteenth-century liberal thought shaped European and later global relationships with nature. He explains that the central political categories of modernity are rooted in specific ideas about humans' relation to land, resources, and the non-human environment. Precisely in the nineteenth century, the notion of political autonomy became closely linked with material affluence through industrial capitalism and liberal economic theory, forming the basis for contemporary understandings of freedom in relation to the natural world. This laid ground for the intensification of the human dominance over the environment, including its non-human entities, producing consequences that are increasingly evident in today's ecological crisis (Charbonnier, 2021). In just seventy years, between 1850 and 1920, humanity destroyed as much forest as in the 150 years from 1700 to 1850, indicating a dramatic acceleration in the rate of primeval forest loss (Osterhammel, 2014: 376). This large-scale environmental transformation had direct consequences for animal populations: most species living alongside humans, particularly in Europe, have experienced a marked decline since the nineteenth century (Cowie, 2025: 169, 181). At the same time, many recognized the need to limit human impact, giving rise to early conservationist ideas. The nineteenth century thus became the period when the protection of natural habitats began to emerge as an organized practice (Jepson, Whittaker, 2002; Wöbse, Kupper, 2022; Cowie, 2025: 175–181).

The relationship between humans and the diverse living and non-living elements of their environment became increasingly mediated by processes of assessment and

[7] While recognizing that capitalism exists in many forms and degrees of intensity – warranting, strictly speaking, discussion of multiple capitalisms – we set this issue aside in the introduction and, for practical reasons, refer simply to capitalism.

commodification, turning these elements into exploitable resources. The demand to overcome nature extended also to the animal world as "nonhuman animals fulfilled the role of serving humans on their destined path towards a supposedly wealthier future" (Syrjämaa, 2024: 25). At the first Central European History Convention (Vienna, 2025), many presenters explored questions of resources and human–nature relations across several panels; these emerged as some of the most prominent topics, signalling the future direction of Habsburg studies. With regard to animals, this shift meant that the previously limited body of research – once focused on subjects such as court dogs and their depiction in royal portraits – expanded significantly to encompass agricultural animals and their role as resources.[8] Two of the contributors to this themed issue used that opportunity to present their research. In his paper on the Habsburg state, Corentin Gruffat highlighted the role of cross-breeding in maximizing agricultural productivity, while Tadej Pavković focused on seventeenth-century horse breeding, demonstrating how husbandry was shaped as much by cultural transformations as by expert breeding techniques. Pavković illustrated the capacity of cultural forces to influence infrastructure in ways that enhanced resource production.

The management and breeding of animals as commodities became a central focus of both cultural and scientific efforts aimed at increasing productivity. Reproductive control over animals, viewed as commodities, was intended to increase their productivity. Consequently, nineteenth-century animal management focused primarily on the development and dissemination of breeding practices.

In truth, ethnographers testify that cultural practices associated with the creation or strengthening of breeds have been found in highly diverse regions of the world. Roy Rappaport described the Tsembaga of the New Guinea Highlands sending their pigs into the forest to be impregnated by wild boars, a practice believed to ensure so-called hybrid vigour (Rappaport, 1968). That said, traditional ecological knowledge is also documented in Habsburg territories, for instance in accounts of seventeenth-century cattle breeding practices (Pavković, 2021: 67–76).

By the mid-nineteenth century, scientific approaches like selective breeding, hybridization, and acclimatization had become central concerns in efforts that brought together agronomists and zootechnicians, zoologists and botanists, with scientific and agricultural societies as well as schools also playing a supportive role. England was at the forefront of these developments and widely renowned for the creation of new animal breeds (Baskar, 2025: 384). Empress Elisabeth was particularly fascinated by English highbred horses and, unsurprisingly, sought to acquire such an animal for herself (Antoličič, 2025: 79). Under the influence of economic as well as scientific interests, also the Habsburg Empire took part in the effort to improve the output of domesticated animals (Gruffat, 2025; Pavković, 2026; Surman, 2027). A notable Central European

[8] More in the author's conference reflections (https://cehc.hypotheses.org/270).

example is the monk Gregor Mendel of Brno, best known for his experiments on pea plants, which laid the groundwork for modern genetics, but who also devoted part of his research to honeybee breeding, exploring the principles of heredity in animals (Baskar, 2025: 383). Techniques for improving species soon became a fully developed commercial enterprise.

Species improving techniques developed alongside numerous scientific discoveries about the animal kingdom, extending well beyond the realm of domestic animals (Coen, 2021; Göderle, 2025). A young Sigmund Freud was among the early researchers of the animal world, focusing on the sexual organs of eels. Despite dissecting and examining some 400 specimens, he was unable to identify mature testes of male eels, as demonstrated in one of his earliest scientific papers from 1877 (Reidel-Schrewe, 1994: 2–4). More broadly, the growth of knowledge and the gradual acceptance of Darwin's tree of life brought with it the recognition of inherent similarities between human and non-human animal bodies, sparking a wave of discoveries about human physiology based on experiments with animals – above all vivisection – which horrified the growing number of animal welfare advocates (Kete, 2002).

The nineteenth century was also a period of significant population growth, which further intensified efforts to control the environment in order to meet human needs as efficiently as possible. That was visible not only in the countryside, but especially in the rapidly growing cities. Urbanization meant that many people lost, or never developed, personal connections with the animal world, yet paradoxically, the number of utilitarian animals in cities remained high and was even increasing. Still, over the course of the century, animals became increasingly disturbing to city dwellers due to their smell, sound, and sight, and were gradually hidden from urban view (Brantz, 2002; Kete, 2007: 6, 83). In *Taming Manhattan*, Catherine McNeur, for instance, examined how livestock and other animals that once freely roamed New York's streets were deemed dirty and incompatible with emerging notions of hygiene and modernity, and were subsequently removed from the city (2017).

Efforts to dominate the natural world, together with the rise of global interconnectedness, were closely tied to shifts in biodiversity. Many species declined, while others were introduced into new environments – some deliberately, others inadvertently (Cowie, 2025: 168–196). Expanding global trade brought previously unfamiliar species to new regions. Notably, camels were introduced to the European territories of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of agricultural development initiatives, viewed as potentially suitable to supplement or replace horses and oxen (Olenenko, 2023). The Habsburg Empire kept pace. A now well-known example is the introduction of mongooses to the Dalmatian island of Meleda (Mljet), brought from India in an attempt to eradicate the supposedly dangerous local "viper plague", which was perceived as a threat to the development of tourism (Göderle, 2020, 2025). Less prominent, but potentially more economically valuable species were also

imported from Far Eastern Asia. Despite the efforts of state inspectors and agricultural experts to monitor and maintain silkworm health, Gorizian, Styrian, and Carniolan breeders in the latter half of the nineteenth century, seeking to improve their business prospects, readily replaced their ailing silkworms with a new Japanese strain (Žontar, 1957: 106–116; Henig Miščič, 2023).

During the decades of growing global interconnectedness, Habsburg Central Europe also welcomed numerous animals that promised little economic benefit but captivated scientists and, even more so, the upper classes, who found certain exotic species both fascinating and visually appealing. The previously mentioned Julius Kugy was just one of many bourgeois Triestines who kept exotic pets: he had a baboon which he named, dressed up, and even took on walks. It did not take long, however, for Kugy to realize that the unpredictable baboon Benjamin, who frequently attempted to escape and hatched "wild plans, acts of vengeance, [and] marauding expeditions", would be better off at Vienna's Schönbrunn Zoo (Kugy, 1966: 161–168, 191).[9] Unfortunately, the colder climate harmed him, and he died from pneumonia shortly after its arrival (Schönbrunn Zoo, 1893–1906). Perhaps the most surprising story is that of a camel accompanying its sheikh on a German submarine, which arrived in the summer of 1918 at the naval town of Pola. It is unclear exactly how the young camel travelled on the submarine or in what condition it arrived, but this remains the only recorded instance in naval history of a camel being brought aboard a submarine. The camel then was sent to Brioni to recover and gain strength, though its subsequent fate is unknown (Jung, 1988).

In the early twentieth century, both the Schönbrunn Zoo and the Brioni Archipelago were among numerous rapidly growing venues for displaying animals, catering largely to upper-class audiences (Brantz, 2007: 88–93). The first began as a Kaiser's menagerie and evolved into the first public zoological garden originating in the mid-eighteenth century, while the second, founded in 1912 by the prominent German animal trader Carl Hagenbeck and the Brioni investor Paul Kupelwieser, was intended to acclimatize exotic animals for the European market and exhibit them to cosmopolitan visitors.[10]

While animal shelters, emotional support dogs, and dog-dating apps may appear very modern, such love for animals dates back to the nineteenth century, when owners increasingly began treating their pets as members of the family. The nineteenth century is hence marked also by the expansion of pet culture. Pets are animals kept for companionship rather than labour and are recognized as individuals, as reflected in the practice of naming them and incorporating them into various aspects of family life (Brantz, 2007: 76–79). Ritvo, one of the pioneering historians of human–animal relations, examined the foundations of changing human–animal interactions in Victorian England,

[9] One might speculate that Kugy's change of mind was influenced also by the then-popular and widely translated *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Edgar Allan Poe, the first work of detective fiction, in which the culprit is revealed to be an orangutan.

[10] More on the Schönbrunn Zoo in Ash (2008) and Pechlaner et al. (2005).

focusing on the growing prevalence of household pets and contemporary social attitudes toward them (Ritvo, 1987). Extensive research has also been conducted on petkeeping in the United States (Grier, 2006) and France (Kete, 1994). In contrast, the history of petkeeping in Habsburg culture represents another aspect of human–animal relations that remains largely unexplored. Nevertheless, historical sources indicate that the practice of keeping pets was widespread and culturally significant. The growing popularity of pets and their integration into family life is exemplified by 1870s Trieste, where the adventurous British Burtons owned a dog named Nip, treated lavishly with a scented cradle, pillow, sheets, curtain, a sealskin coat, and even painkillers when sick (Burton, 1893: 118). Pets were primarily an upper-class indulgence, and many peasants were amazed at the luxuries they enjoyed. As my grandfather told us about his impoverished childhood, during a visit to Trieste in the 1920s, he saw a dog being "served meals that I myself would not have turned down". His closest animal companions, as with many others, however, were the many silkworms with which he and his brothers co-slept in the attic.[11]

The class dimension is particularly evident in the nineteenth-century animal welfare movement, which gained significant momentum during its latter half (Guazzaloca, 2018). While ostensibly committed to improving animal welfare, not least in the sphere of politics and government, these urban associations largely concentrated on condemning the practices of peasants and working-class people, whom they portrayed as neglectful or deliberately cruel. This perspective went so far as to depict the lower classes as bestial. In addition, many animal protection associations had a particular issue also with Jewish communities whose animal killings were heavily disputed (Kete, 2002: 27). Such associations functioned primarily as mechanisms for reinforcing and sustaining class hierarchies (Ličen, 2025). It is therefore unsurprising that, before the twentieth century, animal welfare advocates were particularly concerned with the use of sticks to control donkeys, while hunting practices were considered far less problematic. For instance, the Carniolan Animal Protection Association counted among its members Ivan Tavčar, who also served as president of the local hunting association (Čeč, 2000: 15).

The so-called "hunting cult", in which hunting was pursued not for sustenance but as a leisure activity and a display of power, was another distinctly upper-class phenomenon, exemplified by Emperor Franz Joseph, who was reportedly responsible for the deaths of some 55,000 game animals (Schmöckel, 2026). In contrast to animal welfare, which drew mostly women (Donald, 2019; Ličen, 2022), hunting was predominantly a male endeavour (Kete, 2007: 12–14; Carmichael, 2026). Although animal welfare associations rarely criticized hunters' activities, as the empire approached its dissolution a growing number of voices began to question hunting practices. The famous example

[11] More on sericulture in the wider Gorizian area in the ethnological-historical study conducted by Vesna Mia Ipavec (2008).

is the story of *Bambi*, which actually predates Disney's adaptation and was written by Felix Salten, born in Budapest in 1869 and raised in Vienna. His 1923 book, *Bambi: Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde*, was not intended for children and depicts the forest as a landscape shaped by hunting, where deer and other animals face constant danger. By immersing the reader in the animals' anxiety, Salten subtly critiqued hunting as a threat not only to individual creatures but to the forest ecosystem as a whole.

The final animal-related topic that we consider to have gained significant attention in the long nineteenth century is the instrumentalization of environmental features for national purposes. The national movements were in the Habsburg Central Europe largely emerging and spreading in the second half of the century (Judson, 2016). One of the imaginary elements that national fantasies came to incorporate is nature or some of its segments, as exemplified by Gábor Egry's recent research on Transylvanian forests, which he identifies as both symbols and instruments of national mobilization and resistance (2025), and by Iva Lučić's work on Bosnian forests, which mobilized Bosnian national sentiments as a response to Habsburg efforts to take advantage of the region's forests (2025). In terms of links between emerging national movements across the Habsburg Empire and particular animal species, no research appears to have been conducted so far. Nevertheless, it would be impossible to overlook the eagle as the enduring symbol of the Habsburg dynasty as well as imperial authority. The eagle, however, cannot be compared to the role of wolves in German nationalism. The wolves were said to embody the virtues of the Germanic people – so much so that, by the time of the Third Reich, they existed only in fairy tales yet were nevertheless placed under legal protection (Sax, 2000: 75). Its imagined descendant, the *Germanische Urhunde*, or German Shepherd, became celebrated for embodying the strength, loyalty, and discipline associated with the idealized Germanic virtues (Sax, 2000: 83). A somewhat far-fetched comparison can be drawn with the Lipizzaner horses of the Habsburg imperial stud, which symbolized the prestige, elegance, and discipline of the Habsburg elite rather than representing the empire as a whole. Gašper Raušl's article in the present issue, among other topics, explores the Lipizzaners and their enduring role as symbols of the Habsburg Monarchy, while Tadej Pavković examines selected animal breeds that the Slovenian national movement has come to regard as inherently Slovenian.

Habsburg animals in the present issue

The roots of the present issue lie in a conference held under the same purposefully unconventional title, Habsburg Animals, in late 2024 at the ZRC SAZU (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts) in Ljubljana. The decision to organize the event – and subsequently to develop this special issue – emerged from repeated but ultimately unsuccessful efforts to identify animal-related scholarly works framed

within a Central European context. This absence was particularly striking in light of the breadth and diversity of research on animals within other imperial frameworks, the growing prominence of environmental history, and the continued vitality of Habsburg studies. The time was ripe to bring animals more fully into Habsburg history. Contributors addressed a wide range of topics, including meat consumption, breed selection, animal welfare, animal specimens in museum collections, zoos and pets, art historical perspectives, animals in wartime, hunting practices, and animals as living technologies, to name some. The presentations, primarily focused on the long nineteenth century, covered different parts of the empire: from donkeys on the Dalmatian coast to dogs in Prague, and from exotic animals in Lombardy to animal markets in Transylvania.

The present issue brings together some of the most developed and insightful research on what we broadly term *Habsburg Animals*. Contributors, coming from diverse academic backgrounds, career stages, and disciplines, illuminate important stories about pigeons, wolves, horses, to name a few, and, of course, humans. Their work seeks to portray a Habsburg history that is not limited to humans alone, but one that entangles the more-than-human in ways that acknowledge the agency of animal beings.

Corentin Gruffat's article examines programs of breed selection aimed at promoting particular groups of cattle to develop the Habsburg Monarchy into an "agricultural state". Tadej Pavković also focuses on livestock but emphasizes its classification and the emergence of the concept of breeds. Drawing on examples from Carniola and Styria, he shows how agricultural experts imagined national breeds while highlighting the ways in which animals could be mobilized in the nation-building process. These are followed by two articles on Bosnia which actively integrate its territories into analyses of late Habsburg economic, educational, and leisure life. Cathie Carmichael explores the growing interest in the supposedly unspoiled and inviting Bosnian landscape as a hunting destination. In her article, she highlights the ambivalence of certain Habsburg intellectuals, who both hunted animals and emphasized the rising fragility of natural environments. Mitsutoshi Inaba similarly examines wildlife killings, but from the unexpected perspective of Bosnian children. He investigates the attitudes toward animals that children were expected to internalize through their schooling. Unlike other contributors, Róbert Balogh tells his story through a single species, the pigeon, highlighting its many – and often contradictory – entanglements with humans in both Habsburg and post-Habsburg Hungary. Were these birds symbols of peace or instruments of war? Objects to be hunted or cherished as pets? The final ethnography-based article examines the long legacy of the Habsburg Empire, which in many ways continued to endure even after its dissolution, particularly in relation to animals. Focusing on the Viennese Fiaker industry, Gašper Raušl presents the horses as working partners with significant agency.

All in all, by examining the history of human–animal entanglements in the Habsburg Empire, we contribute to an underrepresented area of Habsburg historiography while also engaging with broader debates on Empire. This perspective allows us not only to

identify what was distinctive about the Habsburg context but also to develop a lens through which to critically situate the Habsburg Empire in a global framework, while simultaneously contributing to the field of animal history.

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Habsburška zgodovina pod orlom: imperij in njegove živali

Pričujoča posebna številka se umešča na živahno področje habsburške zgodovine, ki kljub močnemu odmevu živalskega obrata v zadnjih desetletjih ni ugledalo razmaha raziskav zgodovine živali. Nasprotno, stanje raziskav je daleč od tega. Nečloveške živali vendar zaslužijo svoje mesto v zgodovinskih pripovedih, četudi ne nujno kot glavne protagonistke. Raziskovanje zgodovine živali, ki bi bila popolnoma ločena od človeškega dejavnika, je vsled nujnosti človeške prizme pri interpretaciji virov nedosegljiva. Človek tako ostaja v ospredju, a kot akter, ki je z živalskimi akterji tesno prepleten. Ključno vprašanje, ki zaznamuje uvodnik in celotno številko, se dotika načinov, na katere živali oblikujejo človeško zgodovino in zlasti načinov, na katere ljudje oblikujejo živalsko. V tej številki torej raziskujemo habsburško zgodovino, ki ni omejena na ljudi, temveč s prepoznavanjem njihove tvornosti vključuje tudi nečloveške živali.

Prispevki posebne številke pod drobnogled jemljejo t. i. habsburške živali, živali, ki si delijo izkušnjo življenja v habsburškem imperiju. Njihova skupna zgodovina ima posebno težo, zlasti če govorimo o dolgem 19. stoletju. Gre za dobo, ko je dunajska imperialna administracija povečala nadzor nad živalskim svetom in uvedla poseben način upravljanja živali, kar je nedvomno krojilo skupno izkušnjo živali, ki so naseljevale prostor Habsburške monarhije. Obenem so si habsburške živali delile tudi bolj vsakdanje izkušnje, na primer tiste, povezane z novimi prevozniškimi uredbami, vse bolj standardiziranimi metodami zakola, inovativnimi vzrejnimi praksami ali spreminjajočimi se splošnimi idejami o tem, kakšno ravnanje z živalmi velja za primerno.

Odnos med živalskim in človeškim so v 19. stoletju zaznamovale številne globoke preobrazbe. Prav v 19. stoletju so ljudje kot rezultat razraščajoče se kapitalistične ideologije tako konceptualno kot materialno preoblikovali svoje razumevanje naravnega sveta, s čimer so postavili temelje globalnim okoljskim izzivom. Odnos med ljudmi in raznolikimi živimi ter neživimi elementi njihovega okolja je tedaj vse bolj zaznamovalo poblagovljenje, s čimer so se tudi živali pretvorile v resurse oziroma vire dobrin. Tudi vse bolj prisotne tehnike izboljševanja živalskih vrst so bile namenjene večanju produktivnost, a velja poudariti, da so se razvijale vzporedno s številnimi znanstvenimi odkritji o živalskem svetu. Prizadevanja za obvladovanje naravnega sveta so bila v 19. stoletju, skupaj z naraščajočo globalno povezanostjo, tesno povezana tudi s spremembami v biotski raznovrstnosti. Obravnavano obdobje ravno tako označujejo druge pomembne spremembe v odnosu med človeškom in živalskim svetom: urbanizacija, nesluten porast hišnih ljubljenčkov in med višjimi sloji še vedno priljubljen lov. Zadnja z živalmi povezana tema, ki ji namenjamo pozornost, je instrumentalizacija živali v nacionalne namene.

Tematska številka z raziskovanjem zgodovine človeško-živalskih povezav v Habsburški monarhiji dopolnjuje področje habsburške zgodovine in se hkrati vključuje v širše razprave na področju zgodovine imperijev. Ta perspektiva ne omogoča le prepoznavanja specifik habsburškega konteksta, ampak tudi kritično umeščanje habsburških zgodb v globalni okvir.