

CALGARY: City of Animals

Edited by Jim Ellis

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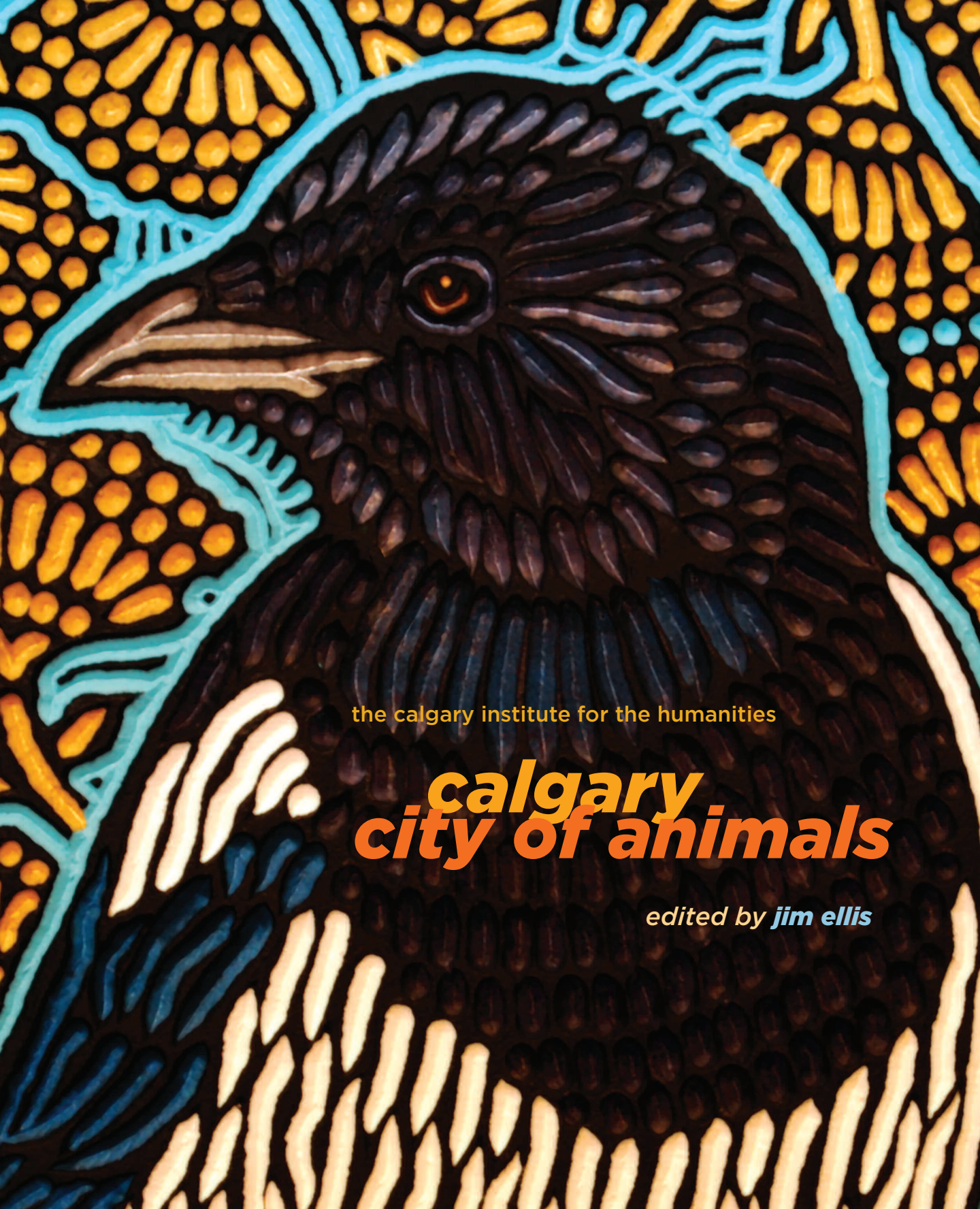
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contents

acknowledgements	ix
introduction	xi
jim ellis, director, cih	
how canadians used to live with livestock in cities	1
sean kheraj	
outlaw horses & the true spirit of calgary	10
<i>in the automobile age</i>	
susan nance	
silence of the song dogs	22
shelley m. alexander	
counting chickadees & reimagining the map of calgary	32
angela waldie	
critical animal studies & the humanities:	42
<i>a critical introduction</i>	
mohammad sadeghi esfahlani	
wild animals in the city	56
jenna mcfarland & andrea hunt, calgary wildlife rehabilitation society	
light pollution in an animal city	62
maureen luchsinger & laura griffin, ann & sandy cross conservation area	

- 66** excerpt from **our biodiversity**
calgary's 10-year biodiversity strategic plan
- 74** **squirrel vs. gopher**
from *calgary i love you, but you're killing me*
one yellow rabbit ensemble
- 76** **becoming insects a new universe**
kimberley cooper, artistic director, decidedly jazz danceworks
- 82** **kaleidoscopic animalia**
an exhibition designed and curated by paul hardy
paul hardy & melanie kjourlien
- 94** **lisa brawn interview & portfolio**
wild bird woodcuts
calgary institute for the humanities
- 104** **her dark materials:**
yvonne mullock's dark horse at stride gallery
jim ellis
- 114** **conclusion**
jim ellis
- 117** **notes**
- 122** **contributors**

acknowledgements

This book grew out of the Calgary Institute for the Humanities' Annual Community Seminar for 2016. The idea for the seminar emerged from the CIH's Advisory Board, which included Bill Dickson, Fran Jamison, JoAnn McCaig, Judy MacLachlan, Murray Laverty, Valerie Seaman, Nancy Tousley, Rod Wade and Lynn Willoughby. Many thanks are due for their guidance and support of the project from beginning to end.

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introduction

jim ellis

director, calgary institute for the humanities

Long before the traders and the North West Mounted Police and the European settlers arrived, and long before the peoples of the First Nations gathered at the place called *Mohkínstsis*, there were the animals. From its beginnings as a human settlement at the confluence of the Elbow and the Bow Rivers, the story of Calgary is not just a history of people but, in many ways, the history of our dealings with our fellow creatures. The fur trade, cattle ranching, and the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth have all left profound marks on the city's culture and geography. How have our interactions with animals shaped the city? What traces can we locate on Calgary's landscape, real or imaginary?

The story of human and animal relations is not just a story of the past. Our cohabitation with animals also, of course, concerns the present, and the future too (we hope). According to the City of Calgary's biodiversity document, there are at present 52 species of mammals in the city, 365 species of birds, 4 of reptiles, 6 of amphibians and 22 species of fish.¹ Where do these animals live in the city? How does the city support animal life? How do we categorize the different animals that live among us (pets, livestock, entertainers, pests?), and how does this affect our relations with them? More radically, what does it mean to think of humans as one animal among many in an urban biosphere? How can we make the city a site that supports the co-flourishing of all of its animal life, human and non-human?

The contributions to this book come at these questions from a wide range of perspectives, including those of historians, geographers, artists, writers, animal welfare workers, wildlife enthusiasts, and ordinary Calgarians, all of whom participated in the Calgary Institute for the Humanities' (CIH) Community Seminar in April 2016. Each year the CIH explores a question of both timely and enduring relevance, and invites three scholars from different fields to join a day-long conversation with the citizens of Calgary. Founded in 1976, the CIH is Canada's oldest humanities institute, and for over thirty years it has been engaging Calgarians in discussions of our common concerns. Of particular interest to the institute lately have been questions concerning our environment, topics drawn from what are called the Environmental Humanities.

The title of the 2016 seminar, "Calgary: City of Animals," reflects our particular interest in exploring our relation to the animals that live among us. Moderator Ken Lima-Coelho guided seminar participants through the morning session, which featured presentations from our three guest scholars. At lunch, each table of eight discussed a question posed by one of our speakers. Sean Kheraj asked whether Canadians should be permitted to practice livestock husbandry in cities. Susan Nance asked what kinds of working animals still lived in the city, and whether animals should be expected to earn their keep in the modern world. Shelley M. Alexander asked participants to consider what strategies are necessary to ensure the co-flourishing of humans, pets, and urban wild animals such as coyotes. The lunchtime discussions were moderated by members of the CIH's Advisory Committee, who summarized the lively discussions for the afternoon session and posed questions back to our speakers.

The seminar as a whole drew on the wide-ranging and interdisciplinary field of Animal Studies. Western philosophy from the ancient Greeks onward has explored the question of the animal, often using the animal to define what it is to be human. Renaissance thinkers, for example, saw the human as suspended between animals and angels, partaking of both natures but striving to escape the former and ascend toward the latter. Other philosophers, starting with Aristotle, posited the existence of three different kinds of souls: vegetable, animal, and human, with the human containing all three. The key difference between animals and humans, argued some philosophers, is the ability to use language and reason, although writers such as Michel de Montaigne believed that animals might well have language that we just failed to understand. René Descartes famously argued that because animals did not have language they could not have souls and should therefore be considered to be essentially machines, a view that justified whatever use humans might choose to make of them. Jeremy Bentham, responding to

Descartes, insisted that the important question was not whether animals could reason but whether they could suffer.

It is a renewed attention to the suffering of animals that fuels much contemporary work in Animal Studies. From the nineteenth century onward, philosophers and activists have argued in different ways for the rights of animals, whether these are as limited as the right to be treated humanely or as far-reaching as granting legal or political rights on a level with humans (this is not entirely unprecedented: animals were occasionally defendants in legal trials in the Middle Ages). Calgarians have been discussing these issues for many years now; as Susan Nance notes in her essay in this volume, the welfare of animals has been a topic in the local press almost since the Calgary Stampede started, back in 1912. But with our increasing concern with global climate change and habitat loss, the question has expanded beyond animal suffering to consider the possibilities for animal survival—including, of course, the human animal.

This book explores our relations with non-human animals in a variety of ways and in a variety of voices. The first group of essays contains the talks given at the seminar, as well as a couple of contributions by scholars who were in attendance. Susan Nance, a historian of animal entertainment, looks at the story of a horse called Greasy Sal who performed in the Calgary Stampede in the late 1920s. Nance follows one horse's career to illuminate what goes on "behind the stage" at animal entertainments but also to avoid the kind of generalizing about animals that often happens in histories of this kind. Here is the story of one particular animal, or at least as much as can be reconstructed from the archives. Shelley M. Alexander, a geographer who specializes in wild animals, particularly carnivores, highlights some of the contradictions inherent in our relations with animals in the city: we want to see them, but we want to see them on our own terms. When coyotes eat our garbage or our pets we get outraged, and often fail to take responsibility for our own actions. How can we rethink our relations to these predators, who are an important part of our urban biosphere? The essay by our third speaker at the seminar, historian Sean Kheraj, looks at a contemporary issue with a long past: the phenomenon of urban husbandry. Whereas now it is mostly urban hipsters who keep chickens or bees in the backyard, in Canadian cities in the nineteenth century, cows, pigs, sheep, and chickens were a common sight, and not just in backyards. Kheraj looks at when and why farm animals left the city.

Two other scholarly contributions come from two of the seminar attendees. Angela Waldie, a practitioner of ecocriticism, follows along with Calgarian naturalist Gus Yaki

xiv calgary city of animals

on his monthly Elbow River Bird Survey, a long-running example of citizen science. Yaki and his wife Aileen Pelzer have been guiding volunteer bird counts for over twenty years now, observing the changes to urban bird life and the urban landscape. Waldie shows how being more attentive to the animals among us can enrich and deepen our understanding of place. Mohammad Sadeghi Esfahlani, the project manager for the CIH's community seminar, discusses a particular outgrowth of animal studies called Critical Animal Studies, and assesses some of its key ideas. In particular, he discusses some ethical issues around eating animals (at the seminar, we had sandwiches for both carnivores and vegans).

These scholarly voices are complemented by contributions from some of the people who work with animals in the city. At the seminar, we had representatives from the Calgary Zoo, Calgary Parks, the Calgary Stampede, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and Calgary River Valleys, among others. Jenna McFarland and Andrea Hunt, representatives of the Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society, responded to our invitation to contribute a discussion of the work of their organization, and the kinds of animals they rescue and treat. A second essay by Maureen Luchsinger and Laura Griffin from the Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation Area addresses the importance of dark refuges for non-human animals. A sustainable habitat means more than just land; it also means preserving spaces of nocturnal darkness or, as Angela Waldie observes in her piece, enough quiet for birds to hear each other. To round out this section we include an excerpt from the City of Calgary's biodiversity strategy document, which illustrates what is guiding the city's thinking and planning over the next ten years, in order to sustain the various species that live in the urban biosphere.

The third major group of contributions to this book takes yet another approach, showing how artists in the city of Calgary have represented and responded to the animals that live among us. The anthropomorphic song from the One Yellow Rabbit ensemble's show *Calgary I Love You, But You're Killing Me* features three of Calgary's most familiar urban dwellers: gophers, squirrels, and magpies. Kimberley Cooper, the choreographer and artistic director of Decidedly Jazz Danceworks, talks about finding inspiration in insects and insect movement for her latest work, *A New Universe*. Cooper is known for her innovative approach to jazz dance, which involves "creaturizing" human movement; the strange hybrids of humans and bugs in her work challenge us to explore our communalities with other creaturely worlds. Internationally known fashion designer and Californian Paul Hardy was invited by the Glenbow Museum to put together a show based on their vast collection of artifacts. The result, *Kaleidoscopic Animalia*, was a series of fantasy window displays that explored the rich (and occasionally disturbing) history of

our use of animals as both material and inspiration for fashion and design. Like Angela Waldie, Calgary artist Lisa Brawn finds inspiration in the humble chickadee. She has been carefully observing the birds of Calgary for years, using them as inspiration for her art. We include an interview and a series of woodcuts from Brawn, whose strikingly graphic images of wild birds have been seen around the world. In the final essay, I discuss Yvonne Mullock's installation and video *Dark Horse*, which was being presented by Stride Gallery during Stampede Week. Mullock's work, which uses a horse-powered press to make prints by crushing cowboy hats, responds in interesting ways to the issues raised by Susan Nance's more historical account of the horse named Greasy Sal. Whereas some of the other artists find inspiration in animals, Mullock often includes animals in the art-making process, challenging our ideas of who or what can produce art, and even what art is.

As this last example shows, although we have separated the essays into distinct groups, there is a dense web of parallels and exchanges between them. Seeing the similarities and the differences in the way that scholars, artists, and animal welfare advocates think about our relation to non-human animals opens up these conversation in multiple, productive ways. While Sean Kheraj charts the disappearance of domestic livestock from the city, it is notable that the City of Calgary's Biodiversity Strategy proposes the experimental use of goats to control weeds in city parks. (At the Community Seminar, one group suggested using community-owned goats that could be sold for meat at the end of the summer, an idea that was met with some resistance.) Lisa Brawn portrays the same birds that Gus Yaki sights along the Bow River, although she documents their presence in different ways, for different reasons. Shelley M. Alexander raises issues that prompt us to rethink our interactions with animals in the city; the people at the Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre deal with the consequences of these failed interactions every day. On a lighter note, while Kimberley Cooper talks about imitating insects, Mohammad Sadeghi Esfahlani talks about eating them. What all of the essays have in common is a desire to understand better the role that animals play in our urban life, and in our imaginations. If they collectively demonstrate the truth of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's observation that "animals are good to think [with],"² they share in the belief that animals are good to live with as well.