

## Global species

*Theme session proposal – “Animals in the Anthropocene: Human-animal relations in a changing semiosphere”*

*Chair:* Morten Tønnessen, Associate professor of philosophy at University of Stavanger (Department of social studies & Department of health studies)

Just how central are animals in the Anthropocene narrative? Some proponents of the so-called early Anthropocene hypothesis have placed animals in central positions in the Anthropocene discourse by focusing e.g. on extinctions in the Pleistocene megafauna in the process of the expansion of the human range from Africa to, ultimately, the whole world. For a critique of this view, see Steffen et al. (2011: 846–847), who write that “[a]lthough these extinctions were likely significant for the ecology of these continents over large areas, there is no evidence that they had any appreciable impact on the functioning of the Earth system as a whole” (ibid, 847).

At any rate, our species might in fact have been the first species to emerge as a *global species* (source here and in the following: Tønnessen 2010). The reason why species do not normally have a global range is that they tend to acclimatise and adapt to local circumstances. A species attaining global reach would diversify – unless, that is, its sustenance were provided, its reproduction were arranged, and its natural foes were constrained, by a global network of human settlements in a somewhat uniform manner. That is exactly what has been the case for a number of further global species that have followed in our wake. We have established a global colonial organism of sorts – an ecological empire, hierarchically organised with *Homo sapiens* on top and with crop species, pets and livestock in privileged positions. Thereby we have further provided global breeding grounds for other species that might not otherwise have been able to spread at a global scale – from rats and doves to bugs and microbes of various sorts.

Livestock represent a particularly central group of global species in both ecological and economic terms (source here and in the following: GLiPHA). Roughly speaking nine out of ten countries report domestic pig populations. Cattle are present practically everywhere except Greenland; sheep wherever there are official data. Goats occur at a density of at least one head per square kilometre in a majority of countries and at least 0.1 head per km<sup>2</sup> in practically any country with a not very sparse human population (Canada and Australia represent exceptions). Horses are to be found at a density of at least 0.1 head per km<sup>2</sup> in 80–90 per cent of all countries. Chickens, the most numerous kind of major livestock groups, occur at less than 0.1 head per km<sup>2</sup> only in Mongolia – in Brazil, China, India and the US there are 100–500 head per km<sup>2</sup>.

This session welcomes contributions that deal with global species, be it an animal species in agriculture, a pet species, or an animal species living in the shadows of human civilization. It also welcomes papers addressing theoretical or methodological aspects of the notion of global species.

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### **References**

GLiPHA (Global Livestock Production and Health Atlas), a Key Indicator Data System (KIDS) provided by FAO – cf. <http://kids.fao.org/glipha/>.

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