



## Eating insects – a solution or another step in the wrong direction?

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# EurSafe News

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Dear EurSafe members,



It is my great pleasure to present to you the last EurSafe Newsletter of 2019.

Culturally and philosophically based rankings of animals as 'higher' or 'lower' have taken many forms: More or less like humans, larger or smaller, more or less intelligent etc. Most of these rankings have historically speaking left insects in the realm of least important or, indeed, of no importance. This dogma has for various reasons been challenged recently and the present newsletter includes two contributions on the matter of insects in agricultural and food ethics.

In their paper called '*Eating insects – a solution or another step in the wrong direction?*', Mickey Gjerris, Helena Röcklinsberg and Christian Gamborg address the dilemmas of farming insects for human consumption. Going through both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric concerns, the authors conclude that replacing conventional animal protein with insect protein could solve a number of current ethical problems. However, they caution against a rapid change to insect farming for human food since there are some "ethical questions that need to be examined before even more species are domesticized to serve human needs and preferences with no or little regard for their ethical demands on us."

The second contribution on insect ethics is a report on a four-year project on insects for feed. Bernice Bovenkerk, Marcel Dicke and Marcel Verweij from Wageningen University will be looking at, among other things, the welfare and moral status of insects used for feeding livestock. It is an interdisciplinary project and includes one of the first collaborations between entomologists and philosophers. We are looking forward to hearing more about this exciting new project at future EurSafe conferences.



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The included book review also has interdisciplinarity as a key topic. Samuel Camenzind has read the new anthology *Animal Experimentation: Working Towards a Paradigm Change*, edited by Kathrin Herrmann and Kimberley Jayne. The book includes authors from a number of different fields connected by their critical stance towards animal experimentation. Going through the current debates on animal use in science, the book discusses why and how to shift the current paradigm. Three additional topics are: Politics/legislation, openness and the ethics and philosophy of animal experimentation. Camenzind recommends the book to anyone interested in the current debate on animal experimentation. The book is very readable and, extraordinary for such a book, free of charge as open access online.

Included in the newsletter you will also find an obituary. Bernice Bovenkerk has written on the passing of Professor Victoria Braithwaite.

The vice-president of EurSafe, Franck Meijboom, has also contributed to the newsletter. With a fine conference in Finland behind us, he introduces our newest and rejuvenating members of the board and

thanks the departing members. Next year, 2020, will be without a EurSafe conference. However, Meijboom reveals that both 2021 and 2022 will include the possibility of going to a EurSafe conference. Read on for locations and (most) dates.

Finally, the newsletter includes references to a number of new publications and the dates of upcoming conferences and symposiums.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter and please feel free to contact any of the members of the editorial board if you have questions or contributions such as papers, book reviews, conference information and similar.

Merry Christmas, happy holidays and a good Yuletide and New Year to all of you.

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# paper

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## Eating insects – a solution or another step in the wrong direction?

Mickey Gjerris, Helena Röcklinsberg & Christian Gamborg

There are more than 2,000 edible insect species (Jongema 2015) and the majority of the world population (about 80%) eats insects intentionally as part of their diet (Srivasta et al. 2009). Nevertheless, our guess is that most of the readers of the EURSAFE newsletter would stop their 2-year old from eating a grasshopper that she caught on the lawn. Obviously, there are questions of food allergies and food safety to take into consideration, but our guess is that the reaction would be instinctive – and to some degree based on disgust. This is because insects are not typically seen as human food in Europe and we are rather conservative about what we eat (Consedine, 2019).

Nevertheless, protein from insects is increasingly being suggested as a more sustainable alternative to the traditional animal protein sources (vertebrate animals) in Western diets. Especially since the publication of the FAO-report *Edible insects: future prospects for food and feed security* (van Huis et. al, 2013) and the publication of *Journal for Insects for Food and Feed* in 2015 increased research efforts have been made to look into how insects can help improve the sustainability of Western diets.

Obviously increasing insect production and consumption in parts of the world where insects are already part of a typical diet also carries many opportunities especially as it can be a way to improve food security. However, we will focus on the envisioned large scale industrial production of insect protein intended for consumption by Western consumers to whom it is seen as a replacement



for already existing animal protein and ask the question: From the point of view of reducing intake of animal protein from livestock, eating insects might seem like a good idea. But, are there perhaps ethical issues related to this practice which upon reflection make the idea seem less appealing?

### Anthropocentric concerns

We have previously suggested that the possible issues can be divided into anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric issues. The first sees insects as a resource and analyzes whether utilizing them in food production raises any ethical issues, whereas the latter encompasses broader concerns about insect welfare, integrity etc. (Gjerris et al., 2016). Here we will put the emphasis on the non-anthropocentric issues and just briefly mention the anthropocentric concerns.

From an anthropocentric perspective the advantages of eating insect protein instead of protein

from vertebrates is primarily related to environmental concerns. Insects are seen as much more 'efficient' animals thus reducing climate impact, land-use, water usage etc. and for being able to use what would otherwise be seen as waste as feed. It should be remembered though, that 'sustainability' is a difficult concept to work with. Different insect species will have different environmental impacts and so far only few large scale studies have been made. Further, it is relevant to ask whether insect protein should be compared with only other animal protein sources or whether it is reasonable to compare with plant based protein sources as well (Gamborg et al., 2018).

It is suggested that the nutritional content of many insect species contributes to a healthy human diet. Rumpold and Schlüter (2013) assessed 249 insect species for nutritional values and found that 83% have a protein content greater than 40% of their body weight and with a much less fat content – outcompeting meat and other

sources of protein such as dairy products and nut. Again, there seem to be advantages, but it is very difficult to generalize from one species of insects to all insects. In addition, several food safety issues have been brought forth in the literature such as allergic, microbial, parasitic, and chemical hazards (Belluco et al. 2013).

Finally, there is the elephant in the room: the social acceptability of insects for human consumption. As mentioned earlier, insects are not seen as part of a daily diet in a Western context, but are – at least as a food source – carrying a kind of yuck-factor with them. Many proponents of including insect protein in a Western context have therefore speculated how the acceptability of insects as food can be raised (see e.g. Looy et al., 2014). Answers typically include calls for education, exposure and availability. Some also include a shift in a perception of insects from (to paraphrase) disgusting bugs to fascinating creatures to be studied and admired through a more appreciative, empathic and curious approach to insects.

As mentioned in the beginning, many of us suffer from what is sometimes called 'food neophobia' and whether insects can be made a part of a typical Western diet through the suggestions listed here is an open question. Carnism seems to be a very strong, albeit often un-recognized ideology, so making the typical Western consumer replace steaks and pork chops with insects might be hard, considering how hard it is to make us replace meat with plant-based alternatives. Further there seems to be a risk that should a shift in the general perception of insects based on a more appreciative, empathic and curious approach to insects take place, this will not necessarily lead more people to eat them. On the contrary, it could lead to a relationship with insects where they are more seen as objects of moral concerns, rather than mere resources.

### Non-anthropocentric concerns

Since the 1970s animal ethics have gained more and more traction in the Western world. Beginning with the now classical discussion between

Peter Singer and Tom Regan concepts like 'animal welfare', 'animal rights' and 'animal integrity' are now widely accepted as relevant ethical concepts. Both Singer and Regan famously took a capacity-oriented approach when finding the animals relevant for ethical consideration and have since been joined by many other philosophers and theologians arguing for ethical limits to human treatment of animals.

The initial non-anthropocentric concern to raise is therefore whether insects are animals that warrant our ethical concern? Are they beings that we should consider in their own right? Asking this from a sentientistic capacity-approach is to beg the question: do insects have the capacity to experience their own lives? Can they have an individual well-being, i.e. welfare? Traditionally, only few have considered this question and the authors of this contribution speak from experience, when we state that it is rare to raise the issue of insect welfare in the public without hearing people laugh discretely.

Looking into the science, the answer, however, is not so simple as to just snigger it away. First, it should be noted that just asking the question 'can insects have welfare?' seems very arrogant as more than 1 million insect species have been described and some biologists estimate there might be up to 30 million different species of insects (Smithsonian, 2019). The diversity is simply so enormous that a more detailed level of questioning is warranted, treating them as distinct species in the same way as mammals are studied one by one. I.e. the question is rather along the line of 'can this species of insects experience welfare?'. Obviously this complicates matters a bit, but just asking the question in relation to those species considered most useful within large-scale industrial production, would be a welcome beginning.

Further it is worth noting that only little research into insect welfare has taken place so far. There is some evidence in the literature that some species of insects seem to have the capacity to experience welfare (see e.g. Sherwin, 200; Elwood, 2011), but only little is known. However, from a position of

carefulness it seems only right to approach the issue with this in mind: Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, not least the since history shows that “[t]he more different from humans an animal appears to be, the less likely it is to be evaluated as sentient” (Broom 2014: 66).

A further issue within animal ethics is whether only welfare matters. Already in 1999 Rutgers & Heeger elaborated on the concept of inherent worth in relation to animals, referring to valuing the animal’s intactness and fostering an attitude of respect for species-specific behavior and needs. In line with this, respect for animal integrity or animal dignity typically refers to the idea of an animal being worthy of consideration not only in its own right, but also above direct physical or mental harm or welfare impairments.

Parallel to the welfare-approach mentioned above, this begs the question of whether “insects have integrity?”. If so, the argument goes, then we should pay them consideration, if not, we need not. Given that it is imprecise to talk about insects as one entity in the first place, and that a proper scrutiny of both the welfare level and ‘integrity-level’ of each single species is hard to perform, one is tempted to turn from a capacity-based animal ethics theory to one taking its point of departure in the moral agent. Relevant candidates are virtue ethics and care ethics. As elaborated elsewhere (Röcklinsberg et al 2017) taking the shared vulnerability of humans and other animals into account opens for an insight of the needs of the other being. A philosopher like Cora Diamond has already elaborated on this line in relation to mammals (Diamond 2001), and we argue it can be a fruitful approach also in relation to insects. Recognizing shared vulnerability as an existential dimension and empathy as a moral foundation makes species irrelevant, and, interesting enough, to some extent, also the capacity of the individual being.

Since we can’t know, and will have limitations also regarding humans, what suffering, pain or distress is in another being, the mere risk of harming it should be enough to evoke recognition (based on vulnerability) and, in line with the benefit of the above mentioned uncertainty about the capaci-

ty of insects, be seen as a call for empathy with ‘whatever level it may have’. Several authors (e.g. Looy et al. 2014;) have argued for development of an empathetic approach to insects. This is of course a challenge, both on an individual level but also in insect rearing. The latter would most probable not even exist if this was the only ethical consideration to be made. There are however, as showed above, issues of sustainability to be considered, and also of food security. If insects are the most sustainable food source, it might well be justified to consume them to survive. Or it might be another example of using animals in an unethical way.

### A balancing act

Regardless of where one “stops” – in terms of how far reaching responsibilities one assumes and whether these responsibilities are direct or indirect, to or with regard to insects (i.e. whether insects are seen as having moral standing or not) – it is one thing is to determine what has moral standing and quite another to decide what weight differing concerns should be assigned. Deciding which parameters are relevant when seeking (a higher degree of) a “responsible” use of insects (read: sustainability of a product or production method) entails the risk of choosing among different aspects of sustainability that might not always go hand in hand – and essentially entail value-based choices. Moreover, it depends on which alternatives that are considered, as noted above. However, using insects for food, and justifying it by pointing to an increased sustainability, is in itself a value-based argument relying on a certain view on the ethical importance of insects in the greater perspective compared to for example future generations.

The idea of replacing conventional animal protein with insect protein thus carries some advantages, but also ethical questions that need to be examined before even more species are domesticized to serve human needs and preferences with no or little regard for their ethical demands on us.

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## Insects as sustainable feed for a circular economy

Bernice Bovenkerk, Marcel Dicke and Marcel Verweij

The main challenge of agriculture is to feed an increasing world population in a sustainable manner, whilst taking into account animal welfare. Arguably, the most sustainable and animal friendly sources of protein are plant-based. However, the transition to complete plant-based diets is not likely to happen in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the question is how to feed livestock in a sustainable way, not making use of animal feed that competes with food production for humans (such as cereals and soymeal) or relies on resources that threaten biodiversity (such as overfishing for fishmeal).

The Dutch government aims to stimulate circular agriculture and therefore has awarded an interdisciplinary consortium, headed by entomologist Marcel Dicke, a grant to investigate the potential of using insects as livestock feed. As insects can be reared on organic waste streams, they provide an excellent opportunity to 'close the circle' and contribute to sustainability. The consortium consists of entomologists, biologists, animal scientists, philosophers, and business economists, who will team up to investigate the use of black soldier flies and house flies as chicken feed. Interestingly – although this is not a direct application of our research - feeding chickens flies might function as enrichment for the chickens, causing a potential dilemma between the welfare of chickens and of flies.

Questions that the researchers aim to answer include 'how can we define insect welfare in terms of health and behaviour?', 'what is the moral status of insects?', 'what housing conditions are appropriate for large-scale rearing of flies?', and 'what risks can adversely affect the short- and long-term economic



*Black soldier fly*

viability of rearing insects for livestock?'. The consortium ensures societal involvement and uptake by collaborating with private industry (in particular an insect breeder and an animal production organisation), public organisations (Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, and Food and Safety Authority), and societal organisations (an animal protection organisation and a major farmers' union).

From an ethical point of view, the question of what comprises responsible insect production as feed for livestock is central. We will address questions (a) about the moral status or 'intrinsic value' of insects and its implications; (b) what concept of welfare (hedonistic, objective, other?) is appropriate for insects, (c) whether insects display purposive agency, and (d) whether or not a precautionary approach is appropriate if there is uncertainty about insect's capacity to experience pain or suffering. Moreover, we will address (e) how to weigh protection of insect welfare against

promotion of welfare of livestock to which insects are fed. This project also aims to address more fundamental philosophical and moral questions, such as 'could we attribute moral status to collectives, such as a swarm of insects?', 'are there reasons to attribute moral status to animals who are not sentient?', and 'how should we deal with the demands of animal welfare and rights in a non-ideal situation?'.

This four-year project will start in January 2020 and we will make sure to discuss our findings with the members of EurSafe during the upcoming conferences.

## Animal Experimentation: Working Towards a Paradigm Change

Edited by Kathrin Herrmann and Kimberley Jayne

Book review by Samuel Camenzind

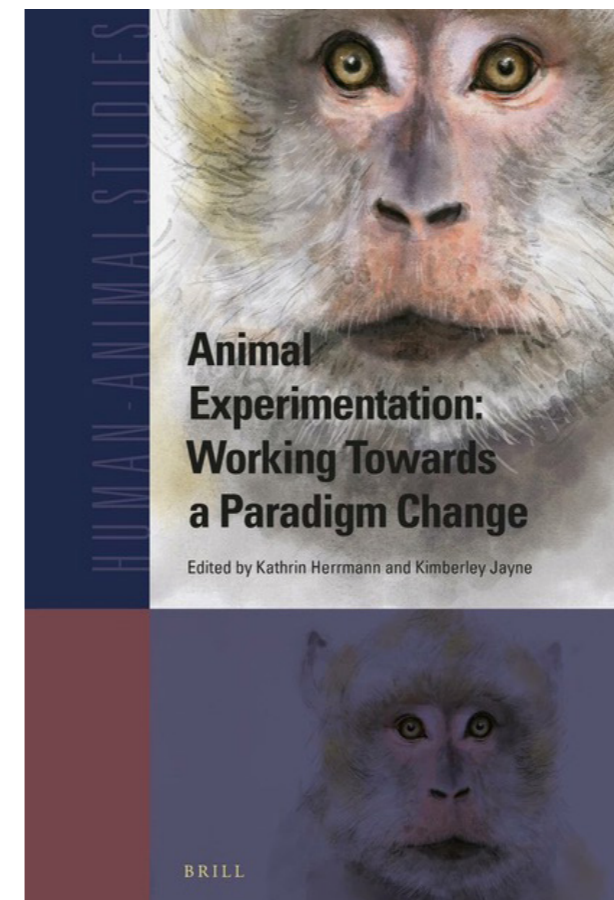


Systematic reviews over the past decades indicate that scientific validity and reproducibility are worryingly poor throughout biomedical research, including animal experimentation. According to a survey by the journal *Nature*, about 50 per cent of scientists agree that there is a significant reproducibility crisis. This is not only a problem for science itself but also for the trustworthiness of science in society. In combination with an increased moral standing of animals within ethics and law, but also with the advent of new methods to change the genome like CRISPR, which opens new possibilities for animal research, we should pause for a moment and reconsider in which direction science should head.

Against this background, the anthology *Animal Experimentation: Working Towards a Paradigm Change* edited by Kathrin Herrmann and Kimberley Jayne Brill falls on fertile ground. As the title clearly states, their final aim is to paradigmatically shift away from the old (animal) model to a new science that surpasses animal experimentation regarding resources (economy), reproducibility (science) and, foremost, ethical standards. The 711 page-book includes invited contributions by a range of multidisciplinary scholars, across many fields (e.g. biochemistry, biology, veterinary medicine, law, philosophy, psychology, microbiology, immunology and pharmacology). Although the authors

share the same vision, they differ in how the end of animal research can be accelerated. While some demand an immediate abolition of animal use, others recommend interim steps to reach the goal.

Containing 28 contributions by 51 experts, a preface by Peter Singer and an afterword by John P. Gluck, the editors – who both worked within the field of animal experimentation for about a decade – aim to reach a wide readership, which is underlined through the open access policy.



The first half of the book (chapters 1-13) is divided into four parts and focuses on current debates surrounding the issue of animal use in science. It discusses why and how to shift the current paradigm (part 1), politics and legislation of animal experimentation (part 2), openness in animal experimentation (part 3) and the ethics and philosophy of animal experimentation (part 4). The second half of the book (chapters 14-28) is divided into three parts. It analyzes the current practice of using animal models and informs about already

available alternatives. Subjects are the effectiveness of the animal model (part 5), animal-free education and training (part 6) as well as advanced animal-free approaches (part 7).

Although written for a wide readership, the occasionally frequent citation of articles, laws or organizations (e.g. 74f.; 168) underlines the academic focus of the book. The book impresses with the discussion of a wide range of topics regarding animal research. Starting from the analysis and evaluation of arguments for and against animal research on a very general, theoretical level, it also covers recent developments regarding alternatives to toxicity testing. Even if readers do not share the editors' and contributors' intention to completely abolish animal research, for many it will be just eye-opening how animal research is challenged by scientists themselves, justifying their arguments with empirical studies before even mentioning and debating ethical questions. Because of its interdisciplinary contributions and its actuality regarding the state of the art, *Animal Experimentation: Working Towards a Paradigm Change* is definitely an enrichment for everyone interested in animal research.

**Animal Experimentation: Working Towards a Paradigm Change**  
 Edited by Kathrin Herrmann and Kimberley Jayne

Brill, Leiden/Boston  
 Human-Animal-Studies, vol. 22  
 ISBN 978-90-04-35618-4 (hardback)  
 ISBN 978-90-04-39119-2 (e-book)  
 Hardcover: ca. 180€  
 E-Book: Open access: <https://brill.com/view/title/35072>

## Victoria Braithwaite

Obituary by Bernice Bovenkerk



We regret to inform you that on 30 September renowned fish biologist Victoria Braithwaite passed away, aged 52. Braithwaite was professor of Animal Behaviour and Cognition at Penn State University, where she did research on fish cognition. To the public, professor Braithwaite was best known from her book *Do Fish Feel Pain?* in which she de-

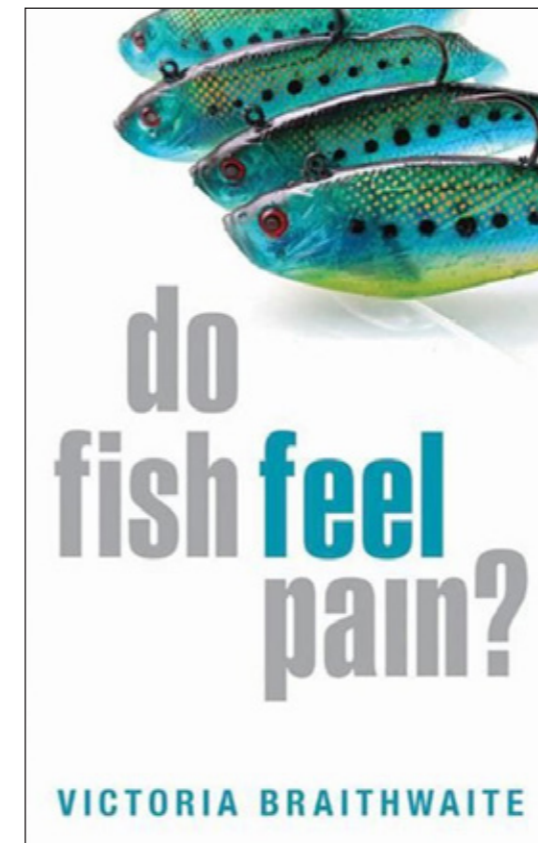
scribes experiments that she carried out with rainbow trout. Not only did she show that rainbow trout have nociceptors, and therefore the basic structures necessary for feeling pain, but she also argued that it is plausible that they consciously experience pain.

In an experiment, carried out together with her colleague Lynne Sneddon, she confronted rainbow trout with a novel object (a Lego castle) right after they had been injected with bee venom or vinegar. While they usually avoid novel objects, the trout could not concentrate due to the pain of the injections and they swam against the lego castle. However, after they had received analgesia, they would avoid the lego castle again, suggesting that they did not experience pain anymore. This experiment, as well as her other work on fish cognition, shook the world of animal welfare research and led to changes to Home Office regulations. Her research was also the first to show that animals' cognition is shaped by the worlds in which they live. For her contributions to the understanding of animal navigation, she was elected to the Royal Institute of Navigation in 2005.

After an undergraduate degree at the University of Oxford, Braithwaite spent the early 1990s studying how animals use visual or other sensory information to learn – starting with pigeons during graduate research at Oxford and later focussing on

fish for postdoc work at the University of Glasgow. In 1995, she took up a lectureship at the University of Edinburgh. Braithwaite joined Pennsylvania State University in 2007. A diagnosis of pancreatic cancer came as she was preparing to move to Berlin to become the director of the IGB Leibniz-Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries.

Professor Braithwaite also showed an interest in the moral implications of the recognition of fish sentience. She co-authored a chapter on the ethics of killing fish in the book *The end of animal life: a start for ethical debate* (edited by Franck Meijboom and Elsbeth Stassen). She will be greatly missed by the scientific and animal welfare and cognition communities. Our sympathy goes out to her family, friends and colleagues.





## EurSafe executive committee

After the good Conference in Tampere, we now are already heading towards the end of the year. Let's first look back! During the General Assembly we said good bye to Thomas Potthast and Helena Röcklinsberg as members of the EurSafe Board. They both served the board for many years and contributed to the EurSafe community in numerous ways. We thank them wholeheartedly and trust that they remain active members so we can enjoy their ideas, experience and nice company. We are also extremely glad to announce that Simon Meisch and Tea Kortetmäki have been elected as new board members. With these new board members, we are glad that we managed to find new and young members and again can look forward to a fruitful collaboration.

Furthermore, we are glad that we could announce the hosts for the next two conferences. Donald and Ann Bruce indicated that they are willing to host the conference in Edinburgh 2022. However, we first are looking at the 16th conference in 2021 organised by Ivo Wallimann at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. Dates and first information are already available at <https://events.unifr.ch/eursafe2021/en/>.

Next to these topics, the agenda of the board meeting in spring 2020 will also include the financial planning, communication and the results from the membership survey.

If you have any questions or ideas, please do not hesitate to contact the board!

Franck Meijboom  
On behalf of the Executive Board, December 2019

## Cognitive Kin, Moral Strangers?

*Cognition, Animal Ethics & Animal Welfare*

Judith Benz-Schwarzburg



In her new book, EurSafe-member Judith Benz-Schwarzburg reveals the scope and relevance of cognitive kinship between humans and non-human animals. She presents a wide range of empirical studies on culture, language and theory of mind in animals and then leads us to ask why such complex socio-cognitive abilities in animals matter. Her focus is on ethical theory as well as on the practical ways in which we use animals. Are great apes maybe better described as non-human persons? Should we really use dolphins as entertainers

or therapists? Benz-Schwarzburg demonstrates how much we know already about animals' capabilities and needs and how this knowledge should inform the ways in which we treat animals in captivity and in the wild.

### Other publications

- Dhont, K., & Hodson, G. (eds.). (2019). *Why we love and exploit animals: Bridging insights from academia and advocacy*. Routledge.
- Giraud, E. H. (2019). *What Comes after Entanglement?: Activism, Anthropocentrism, and an Ethics of Exclusion*. Duke University Press.
- Nguyen, H. (2019). *Tongue-Tied: Breaking the Language Barrier to Animal Liberation*. Lantern Books.
- Trzak, A., Ed. (2019). *Teaching Liberation: Essays on Social Justice, Animals, Veganism, and Education*. Lantern Books.
- Shapshay, S. (2019). *Reconstructing Schopenhauer's Ethics: Hope, Compassion, and Animal Welfare*. Oxford University Press.
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**JANUARY 17**

## Feminist Canine Ethnography Workshop

Amsterdam, Netherlands

[website](#)

**JANUARY 29-31**

## 16th Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability

Santiago, Chile

[website](#)

**MARCH 27-28**

## CFA: Graduate and Undergraduate Conference: Critical Reflections on the Environment and Nature

Submission deadline: February 14, 2020

University of Windsor, Canada

[website](#)

**APRIL 2-3**

## Elusive Conversations International Association for Environmental Philosophy

This symposium seeks to envision a richer and more inclusive environmental governance, proposing specific steps for how environmental philosophy can better engage current governance practices.

Michigan State University, USA

[Call for papers](#)

**APRIL 16-17**

## Vegetarian Epiphanies I: From Realization to Changing Eating Habits

Rennes, France

[website](#)

**APRIL 24TH-25TH**

## Animaterialities: The Material Culture of Animals (including Humans)

Sixteenth Material Culture Symposium for Emerging Scholars

Delaware, USA

[Call for papers](#)

**MAY 15-16**

## Animal Rights: Advocacy and Academia

National University of Ireland Galway, Ireland

[website](#)

Contact: [frances.mccormack@nuigalway.ie](mailto:frances.mccormack@nuigalway.ie)

**MAY 28-29**

## Vegetarian Epiphanies II: From Realization to Changing Eating Habits

Santa Barbara, USA

[website](#)

**JULY 14-20**

## Animal Welfare, Veterinary Ethics, Law and Communication skills

VetNEST Summer School Skopje, North Macedonia

Co-organised by The Messerli Research Institute this summer school contributes to the teaching on animal welfare, veterinary ethics and law with a focus on small-scale farms and traditional (extensive) production systems that are of particular importance in the Balkan states and Eastern Europe.

[website](#)

**AUGUST 16-19**

## Animals and Public Policy

Embodying, Implementing, and Institutionalising Animal Ethics

Oxford, UK

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**SEPTEMBER 28 - OCTOBER 1**

## Utopia Animalia

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