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## Introduction to the Special Issue on Tolkien's Animals

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### Cover Page Footnote

I've been grateful in this process for the support of my mentors, Dr. Dimitra Fimi and Dr. Geraldine Parsons of the University of Glasgow, JTR's editor-in-chief, Brad Eden, the special issue contributors and peer reviewers, and most of all my husband, Milo.

## Introduction to the Special Issue on Tolkien's Animals

The idea for this special issue on “Tolkien’s Animals” grew out of sessions at the 57th International Congress on Medieval Studies held in Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 9-14, 2022. “Tolkien and the Medieval Animal” was a session I organized on behalf of the Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic at the University of Glasgow. I’m very happy to say that all four presenters from that session are represented in this issue. John Rosegrant and Fiammetta Comelli have expanded their original conference papers into peer-reviewed articles, while Marc U. Zender and Camilo G. Peralta appear in this issue’s extensive bibliography of scholarship on Tolkien’s animals. Additionally, I’m delighted to include Ruthann Mowry’s and Caitlin Coker’s conference paper, “The Dragon is Not an Allegory: Reading Tolkien’s Monsters in Medieval Contexts,” also presented at the 2022 Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo.

J.R.R. Tolkien is well-known for his devotion to flora, but his writings also frequently engage with fauna, including sentient animals in possession of language. As Rosegrant writes in his contribution to this issue, “A desire for communion with animals was so fundamental to J.R.R. Tolkien’s sensibility that he retained it throughout his writing career” (1). In *On Fairy-stories*, Tolkien identified “the desire of men to hold *communion* with other living things,” that is, the ability to speak and understand the languages of birds and beasts and trees, as “one of the primal ‘desires’ that lie near the heart of Faërie” (36). Tolkien’s views on animal speech and sentience evolved into a more conservative stance in his later years, however, as Rosegrant argues, Tolkien’s desire for human communion with animals never completely disappeared. Rosegrant’s article, “Of Foxes, Dancing Bears, and Wolves,” is an excellent place to start this special issue as it sets the board for the other papers which follow.

Also in this issue, Deidre Dawson and Jane Beal combine their passion for bird-watching with their passion for Tolkien’s work. Dawson explores the agency and eucatastrophic function of Middle-earth’s great eagles in “Tolkien’s Eagles: *Aves ex machina?*” Beal deftly unpacks the theological symbolism of the gentle finch in “Sam’s Song in the Tower: The Significance of ‘Merry Finches.’” My contribution, “The Deer-Maid Motif in *The Children of Húrin*,” reads Niënor as a “deer-maiden,” analogous to the Irish figure of Sadhbh/Saav who was transformed into a fawn by an evil magician. Finally, I’m extremely pleased to include here the work of two emerging Tolkien scholars, both of whom illustrate Tolkien’s subversive use of his medieval sources. Fiammetta Comelli presents (what I believe is) the first scholarly study exclusively focused on the cultural roots of Tolkien’s bats in her article “From Classical to Medieval: A Reflection on Bats in Tolkien’s Works.” Polina Svadkovskaia examines the Prince of Cats and the flawed nature of his power in her article, “Tolkien’s Tevildo—Of Fables, Rings, and Cats.”

The contributors and I hope you’ll enjoy this special issue as much as we’ve enjoyed creating it. And perhaps it will inspire some of you to explore other animals in Tolkien’s corpus.

—Kris Swank, guest editor

**Source:** Tolkien, J.R.R. *Tolkien On Fairy-stories*, expanded edition, edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson. HarperCollins, 2014.