



Editorial

# Editors' Introduction to the Special Issue "Communication in Defense of Nonhuman Animals during an Extinction and Climate Crisis"

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When honored with the opportunity to edit our first Special Issue in a media journal, we knew that we would concentrate on the subdiscipline of "critical animal and media studies" (CAMS). This is a term we coined with Matthew Cole (Almiron et al. [2015] 2016) in order to express the convergence of perspectives between critical media studies and critical animal studies, in the name of promoting interspecies justice and anti-speciesist discourse through transformative media. Additionally, in thinking of what type of communication topic might be most valuable and urgent for the focus of this Special Issue, we quickly honed in on the need for communication to protect fellow animals in nature ("wildlife") who are struggling to live with us in the Anthropocene, where the collective action of our species has created a crisis for all living beings, particularly with anthropogenic climate change and the sixth mass extinction of species. In putting out the call for papers, it was akin to a plea for help in raising the alarm for communicators and media professionals, in order to propose a pathway for transforming our discourse on nonhuman animals and facing our urgent obligations to protect them as inherently valuable individuals.

The scholars who responded to our call (from our home countries of Spain and the USA) propose solutions for media-makers and animal advocates to inspire protection of free-living species such as sharks, coyotes, parakeets, fishes, and octopuses, while showing concern for the human animal species as well. To begin, Iri Cermak directs entertainment and documentary film producers in how to defend one of the most maligned animal species, great white sharks, by ceasing the exploitation of people's fears of them as "maneaters" via "pseudoscientific narratives" and instead inspiring respect for sharks, protecting them from human attacks and the fishing industry (ab)use (Cermak 2021). Claudia Alonso-Recarte explores the popularity of the *Tiger King* docuseries during pandemic lockdowns and how its focus on anthropocentric drama does a disservice to conservation efforts to protect big cats, while critiquing the injustices they face in captivity (Alonso-Recarte 2022). Sean Quartz expands the notion of critical animal and media studies with creative cultural studies to rhetorically explore how the main octopus featured in the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* helps us become more-than-human and embrace coexistence and animal flourishing (Quartz 2022). Foregrounding a decolonial ethic within critical animal studies, David Rooney, critiques the documentary *Racing Extinction* to suggest more equitable representation of both Western and Eastern killing of marine life in commercial fishing practices, to demonstrate our ethical obligations toward all sea animals (such as fishes), not just charismatic mammalian species (Rooney 2022). Switching from media discourse to political discourse, Debra Merskin seeks to understand and transcend the urban-rural divide present in arguments for and against banning coyote-killing contests in Oregon, in order to help animal advocates to provide more persuasive and understanding rationales for offering alternatives to killing contests that will resonate with rural participants who have historically celebrated these mass hunting events (Merskin 2022). Finally, Laura



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Fernández, Jose A. Moreno, and Alejandro Suárez-Domínguez examine the press representation of monk parakeets in Madrid in six Spanish newspapers and find a dominant frame of extermination as a management tactic to eradicate the monk parakeet populations in Madrid, while non-lethal population management tactics are much less represented (Fernández et al. 2022).

Overall, all the articles in this Special Issue show how fruitful a CAMS analysis is to unveil the power relations and psychological rationalizations behind free-living animal (ab)use, and to do so in a way that inspires media and communication practitioners to be more effective in disentangling and dismantling the root causes of violence against nonhuman animals. Included are the very relevant impacts on humans as well, since reducing violence towards other animals involves reducing violence in general. In this regard, we are very glad to confirm that from the reading of these papers, we can obtain direct and indirect recommendations for transforming media and optimizing animal defense.

Ultimately, this Special Issue of *Journalism and Media* asks us to use media narratives strategically in order to transcend the standard anthropocentric narratives that have facilitated these ecological crises, and to avoid the instrumental lens through which we typically showcase free-living animals. The studies presented herein instead show us who those free-living animals really are, what they really want and need, and defend their right to exist freely, hopefully inspiring us to move toward coexistence.

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