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Issue Introduction: Unfair Implicit and Explicit Attitudes Toward Pigeons

Amber E. George

The ferality of animals continues to be an issue within environmental and socio-economic circles that perceive feral animals to be a type of biological pollution. Furthermore, several species of nonhuman animals have been privy to systematic erasure due to nuisance wildlife control programs that aim to keep spaces sanitary from sprawling disease infestations. Several critical animal studies theorists have explored ferality from the lens of defending nonhuman animals targeted for extermination. For instance, one issue of *JCAS* explored alternative non-lethal approaches to interspecies cohabitation with rodents that empower both rats and those involved with keeping human living spaces viable (Jarzebowska, 2018).

This issue written by Callie Boyle, Stella Capoccia, Tedd Darnell, and Julie Hart, explores both the rise and fall of pigeons, the ubiquitous urban birds, who have returned to living in the “wild” spaces of one city, Butte, Montana. Many residents find the presence of pigeons interesting and pleasant, while others are disturbed and disgusted by their existence. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of examples in popular culture that demonstrate widespread disdain for these beautiful creatures. One example is Tom Lehrer’s song *Poisoning Pigeons in the Park* (1959) that describes how he and his lover spend Sunday afternoons killing pigeons with cyanide. The lyric states, that “It’s not against any religion to want to dispose of a pigeon.” The song continues, “We’ll murder them amid laughter and merriment, except for the few we take home to experiment” (Lehrer, 1959). In the film, *Stardust Memories* (1980), Woody Allen refers to feral pigeons as “rats with wings.” Moreover, several other media examples liken feral pigeons to disdain felt for other species such as rats and squirrels.

Understanding that domesticated pigeons were once revered for their usefulness to humans, a question my mind keeps returning to is, why the feral pigeon has become such an outcast despite its important contributions to human civilizations? Not that a species should ever be valued simply for its utility to humans, but how can we honor human war heroes yet completely ignore the service that so many birds provided without so much as giving their consent (Harris, 2019)?

One of the major arguments given for ostracizing urban dwellers such as rats, squirrels, and pigeons is that they transmit communicable zoonotic diseases. When it comes to the notion that pigeons are carriers of disease, several studies have been conducted to suggest this is a widespread misconception. A literature review of epidemiological studies spanning over 60 years of research demonstrates that there are very few documented cases of feral pigeons transmitting disease to humans. The study concluded that “Although feral pigeons pose sporadic health risks to humans, the risk is very low, even for humans involved in occupations that bring them into close contact with nesting sites” (Haag-Wackernagel & Mock, 2004). This suggests that much of the conflict between pigeons and humans stems from attitudinal barriers that include prejudice and speciesism. This issue delves in to these attitudinal barriers to understand what can be done to protect pigeons from extermination. Some suggestions are given for how to honor pigeons as a part of nature that should be respected.

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Flying Icon: The Urban Pigeon and the Human/Animal Relationship in Butte, Montana

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Abstract

This article compares the ways in which two distinct social groups in Butte, Montana conceptualize the feral pigeon (*Columba livia*). The work emerges from a formal complaint by the business community in the Central Business District on the impact that pigeons have on business operations. Yet an in-depth social survey revealed notable differences and unexpected similarities between the vocal business community and the neighboring residential community. This paper canvases the intimate history of pigeons and people, why that led to shared urban spaces, and presents Butte as a unique case study to understand how pigeons are perceived by the local community, even in the face of an out-spoken complainant. Specifically, this work examines whether or not people perceive the pigeon as part of nature and if that perception unfolds in the community's attitude toward the bird. The paper occurs at the intersection of urban ecology and critical animal studies, framing the human-animal relationship against the backdrop of a post-industrial urban habitat.

Keywords: *feral pigeons, urban ecology, animal studies, human-dimensions, human-animal interactions, social construction of nature.*

Introduction

“It shit on my hat; I had to shoot that son-of-a-bitch”

In May of 2012, urban business owners filed a complaint with the Council of Commissioners to address the high-density feral pigeon¹ (*Columba livia*) population in the historic district of Butte, Montana, known as Up Town. Used as a source of food, communication, and sport, the pigeon was domesticated and bred in captivity for centuries. These birds now have a feral counterpart that can be found across the world and is an icon of human-animal relationships – both positive and negative (Allen, 2009). As much reverence as these birds receive, there is an equal amount of disdain (Jerolmack, 2008; 2013; Escobar, 2014). The complaint by Up Town businesses highlights the negative association people have with pigeons and reflects the attitudes some people have towards animals of abundance or commonality (Hamilton, 1999). In addition, there is a documented connection between empathy and attitudes towards animals (Taylor & Signal, 2005; Batt, 2009), that might be eroded when people believe their livelihood is effected by these birds. We wondered if this disdain was their only sentiment and whether other business members held a different perspective. Additionally, we pondered whether people’s conceptualization of pigeons in nature or, as part of nature, was indicative of like or dislike of the birds. For example, did the business community members who exhibited frustration towards the pigeons perceive the birds as unnatural? Conversely, if people liked pigeons, were they more likely to think of them as part of nature? Our goal in this study was to examine the human-pigeon relationship in the context of the Up Town complaint and to understand the ways in which the Up Town business community and residential community differ in their views of the pigeon as specifically a part of nature.

Our work strengthens and expands upon the existing literature that characterizes the range of attitudes towards animals, specifically pigeons. As so many scholars emphasize, relationships change over time and space and new research provides insight into human culture, environmental conditions,

¹ Formally known as rock doves and rock pigeons, the urban/feral/domestic pigeon is now accepted simply as pigeon by the American Ornithological Society. The terms urban and feral are used to distinguish the domesticated free-roaming pigeons from domestic pigeons which are in captivity, and the term wild applies to the founder population that is native to Europe, Asia, and North Africa.

economic transitions, and geographic trends. We elucidate the complexities of the human-animal relationship in a location that presents as a unique study area by comparing two distinct social groups. As stated, our research focused on the role of pigeons as part of the human-animal relationship in Butte, Montana in the face of a public outcry. It is located in an open valley on the west side of the Rocky Mountains in southwest Montana. Compared to most of Montana, Butte was and still is decidedly urban. The area is rich in metals and, during the early part of the 20th century, produced more copper than anywhere else in the world (Calvert, 1988). By 1890, Butte had established itself as a major industrial city and experienced its first industrial boom throughout the Up Town area. Elaborate cast-iron and brick architecture embellished with decorative elements such as cornices and corbels were frequently included on the buildings. Most of these buildings survive today, but many are in serious disrepair (Butte Inventory Staff, 1985), and their ornate design creates an extensive habitat for the urban pigeon. The irony of this lies in the reputation of Montana, a state best known for wildlife and livestock, while Butte is post-industrial with both livestock and wild animals largely absent from the area, save for the pigeons that date back at least a century (see: Image 1). As Delon points out, these urban animals survive on their inherent flexible nature, scavenging on human scraps (in review). The very nature of these birds may be at the epicenter of their complex relationship with humans, not the least of which is in Butte.



Image 1: Child feeding pigeons on Park Street, in Butte, est. date; 1920s. Courtesy of Butte Archives)

As Butte shifts from a mining to market economy, the presence of pigeons may be perceived as more of a threat to business success. Perhaps one of the best-known scholars for his work on pigeons in the arena of society and animals is Jerolmack (2008; 2013), who researched the pigeon from an ethnographic perspective of urban ubiquity. Jerolmack's comprehensive history of pigeons suggests they are an indicator of a changing landscape and a species that marks part of the human identity. Once reliant on pigeons for food and communication, the birds have been supplanted by equipment and have lost their utility. Moving from a necessity to a nuisance, the way people conceptualize pigeons aligns with emergent technologies; a bird once coveted for communication are now rejected because of their lack of value.

The management (reduction) of pigeons can be quite contentious and unfolds in a special context. Haag-Wackernagel and colleagues examined pigeon management protocol concerning their habitat and the human-pigeon relationship. Specifically, their work shows the importance of protecting the connection between people and pigeons by designating feeding areas that change human behavior to limit the number of problematic forage areas (Haag-Wackernagel, 1995; Rose, Nagel, & Haag-Wackernagel, 2006; Haag-Wackernagel & Giegenfiend, 2008). Escobar's work is similar as it relates to space and pigeon management; she describes how the remaking of a cultural space required the removal of pigeons (2014) which represents the separation of people from nature. Complimentary work by Dunn, Gavin, Sanchez, and Solomon highlight the fact that pigeons play a role in people's connection to and protection of nature (2006). Our study expands on the established literature by using Butte, Montana as a case study. We wanted to understand how, during a time of conflict, pigeons were perceived by both business-minded residents and residential. The resulting paper occurs at the intersection of urban nature and critical animal studies, framing the human-animal relationship against the backdrop of the urban habitat.

Pigeon History

Throughout history, there have been few other species that reflect the human and animal relationship in quite the same way as does the urban pigeon. Initially valued for their eggs, meat, and feathers, the connection between pigeons and people began an estimated 5000 years ago, with breeding records that date back over two millennia (Allen, 2009). The domestic pigeon is descendant of the wild Eurasian pigeon (also, *C. livia*). It

is believed that humans began domesticating pigeons by using seeds to cajole pigeons into tower-like structures that served as nest sites. Similar hypotheses on domestication (Price, 1999; Trut, 1999) indicate that the pigeons with the highest tolerance for humans took advantage of free forage and protected nest habitats and became prime candidates for captive breeding programs. Breeders selected pigeons for high, year-round egg production, as opposed to the more common seasonal breeding of wild birds. As a result, the domesticated pigeon population increased rapidly (Caras, 1997; Jerolmack, 2013; Sterba, 2012).

The domesticated pigeon's strong homing instinct soon made the bird indispensable for communication (Blechman, 2006; Allen, 2009). Based on their innate drive to return to their original nesting site, domesticated pigeons took on colloquialisms such as homing pigeon or messenger pigeon. Transported distances up to 1800 km, pigeons would be fashioned with a note, released, fly back to their colony, and thus, people could receive word of a successful journey or the need for help (Walcott, 1996). So important was this form of communication that some birds received military honors for facilitating excellent services in times of war, the most famous of which is Cher Ami. The need for fast communication spurred breeding programs of racing pigeons that led to high-spirited competitions. It is not surprising then that domesticated pigeons were brought along to the Americas as a source of food and communication (Blechman, 2006; Allen, 2009).

The long-standing human influence on pigeon's behavior and physical traits, through controlled breeding, set the stage for today's on-going relationship between the two species in urban landscapes. Feral pigeons are still capable of year-round high-production breeding, retain their strong attachment to their nest sites, and appear to favor human food and shelter structures. But in many ways, these birds maintain wild survival skills; they are robust animals that find habitat in extreme spaces (Haag-Wackernagel, 2008). Pigeons nest inside crevices such as windowsills, under eaves, and in empty buildings; they perch on rooftops and power lines, and sheer faces of city buildings and skyscraper. Their presence, complete with droppings, noise, feathers, and nests, often place pigeons as the subject of urban complaints (Capoccia, Boyle & Darnell, 2014; Smith-Miles, 2014; Spielman, 2018), garnering labels such as "rats with wings" (see: Jerolmack, 2008; 2013). Markedly, the presence of pigeons is a contentious topic and one that is intimately woven with human interest. Butte, Montana serves as an

example to showcase this geographic relationship and expand the distribution of complexities.

Few better examples fit all categories of love, hate, wild, domestic, captive, and free-roaming than the pigeon. Scholars like Haraway (2008), Herzog (2010), and Urbanik (2012) open that interrogation further to classify humans' preference of species, from the cute-and-cuddly to the horrific, mystic, and mundane. Urbanik pays special attention to the urban pigeon by suggesting that, while most domestic production animals were not included in the rural-to-urban transition, the pigeon remained present in the human landscape of cities. Herzog looks at the range of animals people have tamed and/or domesticated and explains that many of these animals – from canaries to tigers – are given personhood by their human counterparts for reasons that stretch from loneliness to power seeking. Like many others, Herzog points out that the personal relationship some people have with animals can have positive impacts, including improved physical and mental health. He interrogates how we define “pet,” ranging from animals that have no use to those with high use, and places this against the context of our emotional wellbeing (2010). The urban pigeon is no exception. As Jerolmack (2013) illustrates, both the captive and free-roaming pigeon have been inveigled into meeting people's needs for centuries. Collectively, these scholars have gone through great lengths to demystify the innate love and fear often found in human-animal relationships; the pigeon is central to this discourse.

Pigeons integrate the urban ecology and social landscape in ways that expose the social construction of nature, and maybe even more so, our deconstruction of nature. These birds' physical geography and cultural history create tension between domestic and wild. Robust breeding programs still exist, but the birds that escaped throughout time – either accidentally or intentionally released – now populate the landscape and are classified as wild animals that are feral and exotic, not wildlife. This status appropriates pigeon management to private entities that often utilize biological control with few regulatory limitations (Capoccia, Boyle, & Darnell, 2014).

Paradoxically, pigeons are key for avian biodiversity in urban landscapes. In some North American cities such as Cleveland, Ohio and Manhattan, New York, pigeons are an important prey species for urban-dwelling raptors, not the least of which is the Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*), the vanguard of environmental recovery post DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) (Capoccia, Boyle, & Darnell, 2018).

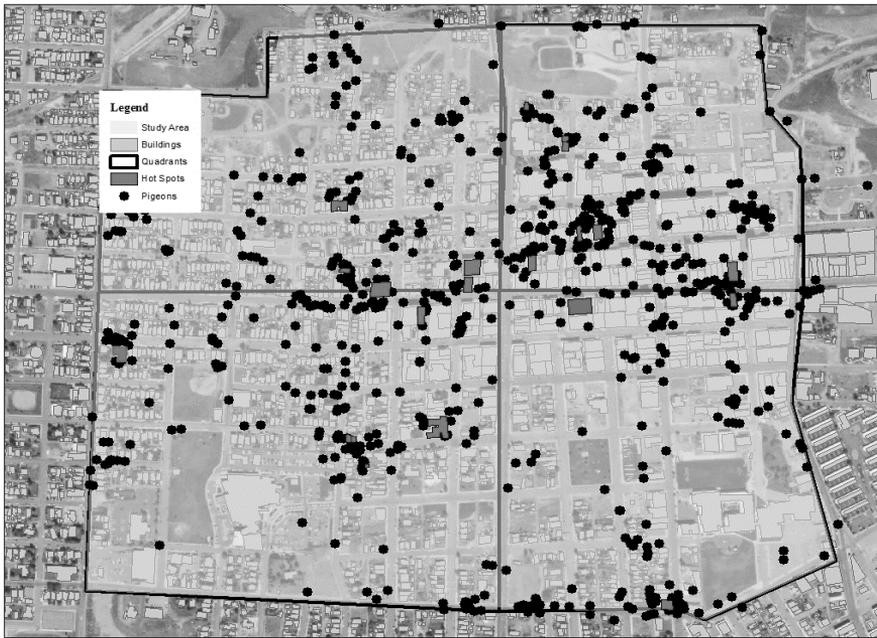
Furthermore, pigeons are considered ambassadors for ecological conservation based on their proximity to and contact with humans (see: Dunn et al., 2006). In city parks and other open spaces, people delight in observing and feeding the pigeon, which also serves to strengthen the human connection between animals and nature. While so many programs are aimed at reducing the pigeon population, it is important to consider what the outcome might be if these programs were successful in ridding the urban landscapes of the pigeon presence. Should the community adopt a liminal position, it could present a challenge to establishing management protocol and generate controversy within the human population. Furthermore, the autonomy of the pigeons, as well as a multi-species space, should be variables when considering the protocol outcome.

Materials and Methods²

Our research goal was to understand the human attitudes against pigeons that prompted the complaints to be submitted to the county. Specifically, we focused on people occupying the area from which the complaints originated: the central business district of Up Town, and the surrounding neighborhoods³. The study area is 5 km sq., delineated by major roads and other geographic boundaries, such as the local hospital complex and county high school. The study area was designed by our research team in collaboration with county officials. The aim was to isolate the area most closely associated with the complaints and include the surrounding areas that were realistic to address with our research team. We used black dots to mark the spots that pigeons were commonly seen and marked hotspots in grey: an area that a minimum of 5 pigeons could be seen at any given time (see: Image 2).

² IRB Approval # 65-13 from the University of Montana

³ Our study was part of a larger project commissioned by Butte-Silver Bow County to assess the urban ecology of the pigeon population in the CBD.



(Image 2: Survey area, perimeters and quadrants marked. Black dots represent pigeon sightings, grey squares represent pigeon hotspots, a given area that 5 of more pigeons can be sighted at any given time. Map credit: S. Capoccia)

Our research had two objectives:

- (1) To determine the general attitude people had towards pigeons; specifically, how attitudes of the business community compare with those of the surrounding residential community; and,
- (2) To determine if conceptualizing pigeons as part of nature correlated with peoples' attitudes towards the birds.

We built a twenty-question survey to minimize the influence each question had on subsequent questions. First, we focused on location, distribution, and frequency of pigeon sightings. Next, participants were asked how they felt about pigeons, how the birds impacted their businesses and/or homes. The third section asked about pigeon management. Specifically, we asked the participants: “How would you feel if the pigeons were all killed?” We asked this question for two reasons: 1) to determine how many respondents supported the common recommendation of lethal management and 2) to create a distinction in sentiment. Our word choice was deliberate and frank, using the word “kill” to incite the participants to be realistic about their perceptions, as concepts such as “lethal management” and “euthanize”

sanitize the scenario and scrub the outcome. Finally, the questionnaire asked what, if any, role pigeons had in nature. We placed the question on nature at the end, so as not to influence the previous questions.

Surveys⁴ were distributed into two study groups: business and residential. We used the registry of businesses listed in the Main Street Up Town Butte Association and found that 75 businesses of 115 businesses were located within the study area. We offered the survey to all 75 businesses. For the business surveys, all primary points of contact were conducted in-person, first addressing business owners followed by managers when appropriate. Our primary method was an in-person interview, but several respondents opted to submit written survey answers via email, direct mail, or in person.

For residential surveys, we hand-distributed 300 paper surveys⁵ to individual residences evenly throughout the study area. To align with federal law, surveys were placed in areas other than mailboxes. We skipped multi-unit housing because locked gates and doors made accessing individual residences difficult, we also skipped housing that was not deemed safe (e.g.: *beware of dog, no trespassing*). Surveys were returned via e-mail or direct mail.

We conducted a content analysis to identify the prominent topics in each answer and to identify recurring themes. We categorized emotional responses into “negative,” “neutral,” or “positive.” Responses were classified as negative if the participant expressed dislike or hatred for pigeons, expressed that pigeons were detrimental to the urban environment, or expressed a desire to see the pigeons removed or harmed. Neutral applied to responses if the participant expressed indifference for pigeons, or if the participant stated that he/she had no interest in pigeons or that pigeons were no concern to them. We considered responses positive if the participant expressed like or affection for pigeons or stated that pigeons were an asset to the urban environment or expressed a desire for pigeons to be allowed to live within the study area. We used this same strategy to conduct content analysis for all questions. These sentiments were cross-referenced with other variables such as what the relationship to the birds was, whether or not respondents favored killing the birds, and if they considered pigeons a part of nature. Finally, we compared the responses between the two groups to

⁴ Contact S. Capoccia at scapoccia@mtech.edu for a copy of the survey

⁵ Including self-addressed stamped envelopes

determine what differences occurred between the business and residential communities.

Results

In total, we received 80 responses. Our results were stronger for the business group than the residential, likely because of the in-person interaction. Of the 75 business surveys, 53 (70%) agreed to participate. Of the 300 surveys offered to the residents, we received 27 responses, or 9% which exceeds the 3-5% expected for mail-return surveys (Babbie, 2012; Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). We did not analyze our results based on gender or other demographics. We maintained anonymity for all participants. Our results demonstrate the complex and sometimes contradictory emotions surrounding the issue of urban ecology management, represented in this case by feral pigeon population control strategies.

Attitudes Towards Pigeons

Emotional responses, negative, neutral, and positive, differed between business and residential groups. When asked the general question: “How do you feel about the feral pigeons that live in Butte?” 57% of the business owners or managers reported negative feelings towards the birds, 28% were neutral, and 15% were positive (see: figure 1). The categories were assigned after we conducted a simple content analysis that allowed us to code them as such; for example: “They [pigeons] are gross” was classified as negative, while “I don’t mind them,” neutral, and “I love them” was positive (see: figure 2).

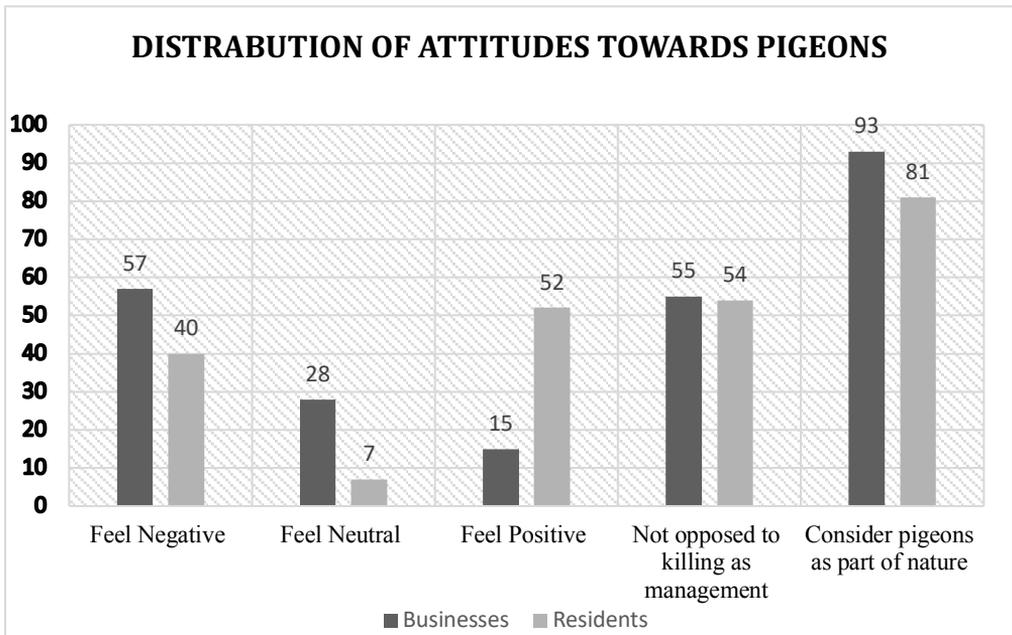


Figure 1: Comparison of attitudes towards pigeons between the Up Town businesses and the surrounding communities. Represented in percentages.

CLASSIFICATION OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS PIGEONS			
	<i>Feeling Negative</i>	<i>Feeling Neutral</i>	<i>Feeling Positive</i>
Business	"They [pigeons] poop everywhere"	"Doesn't bother me"	"It makes Butte feel more like a big city"
Residential	"They are gross"	"They are fine"	"Pigeons come to my garden for hand feeding"
	<i>Not opposed to killing as Management</i>		<i>Opposed to killing as management</i>
Business	"I'd like to bring an air gun and do it myself"		"I don't like them, but killing them is extreme"
Residential	"It may be an option to reduce the population"		"I would feel like some idiot leader made a bad decision"
	<i>Pigeons as part of nature</i>		<i>Pigeons not as part of nature</i>
Business	"Yes, but they are a pest."		"Not when they destroy buildings."
Residential	"Of course!"		"The neighbors feed them, so no, they are more like pets."

Figure 2: Classification of attitudes towards pigeons; examples of the categorical analysis and associated coding of qualitative answers.

When negative, the business responses primarily reflected concern over the property and customers exposed to the feces and sometimes, feathers. Common statements included: “they [pigeons] poop everywhere,” “customers track feathers into the store.” For the positive responses, the business community related to ideas of space and place “I don’t mind them, they are part of nature” and “it makes Butte feel more like a big city.”

By contrast, only 40% of the residents felt negative, seven percent were neutral, while 52% showed positive sentiment with regard to pigeons⁶ (see: figure 1). The residents’ negative sentiment reflected the image of the birds “they’re gross,” “rats of the sky,” and “don’t they eat garbage?” Twenty-two percent, or 6 individuals, showed frustration directly related to pigeons in the neighborhood. In fact, 92% of residents indicated that either they or their neighbors had pigeons in and around their yards, drawing the birds in and providing habitat. Residents’ positive responses showed qualities of personal relationships “Pigeons come to my garden for hand feeding,” “I like to watch them,” and “the neighbor hand feeds them, so I’ve gotten to know them.”

To account for the accuracy of our analysis for sentiment classification - negative, neutral, and positive - we asked respondents whether they thought killing the birds was an appropriate method of management. We classified our data as *opposed* and *not opposed*, grouping those who were clearly in favor of the option “love it!” with those who were not as passionate or, at least, pragmatic about it “don’t have a problem with it,” “if it needs to be done.”

Our data showed that the overwhelming majority of business owners surveyed who felt negatively towards pigeon also condoned killing the birds, some enthusiastically so. Comments from those in favor of killing pigeons included: “I’d like to bring an air gun and do it myself,” “happy as a lark,” “shoot them, poison them, whatever it takes.” Several business representatives supported the idea, but lamented the situation: “Sometimes it’s necessary, but I wish there was another way” and “I guess there has to be some way to control the population.” Collectively, these responses were classified as *not opposed* to killing pigeons and made up 55% of the total business responses (see: figure 1).

We were surprised to find that 45% of business responses showed

⁶ Fifty-two, 40, and seven percent add to 99 percent; the remaining one percent is divided between the three: 40.7%, 7.4, 51.8.

opposition to lethal management (see: figure 1) and retorted with statements such as “do you have to put it that way? That’s harsh,” “I don’t like them, but killing is extreme,” and “that’s drastic.” The reaction that emerged to our question highlight the reality of this type of protocol: lethal management. Studies on euthanasia show that there is a hierarchy of linguistic choice. People are more likely to accept animal death if they are “put to sleep” or “humanely euthanized,” but these terms suggest an element of suffrage on behalf of the animal which is not the case in a management scenario geared toward mitigating humans’ displeasure (Jepson, 2008). Our use of the term, killing, was matter-of-fact: the decision is to take the animal(s) life/ves. One business owner proclaimed to have no problem with the pigeons and in fact stated that the birds were enjoyable to watch flying overhead. While the oppositional statements to lethal management do not show attachment in the way that the residents’ responses do, they nevertheless, do seem to reflect protective sentiment towards the animals. We did not expect to find this type of opposition from a group of people who were affiliated with the complaints by Up Town businesses.

The residents’ lack of opposition to killing the birds was similar to that of the business people: 54% of residents did not oppose killing the pigeons (see: figure 1). However, the content analysis showed that a different kind of support, with comments that align more with population reduction (killing): “It may be an option to reduce the population,” “If they are shown to be causing problems.” Only three responses showed enthusiasm for killing pigeons: “THRILLED,” “Grateful,” a large, hand-drawn ☺ happy face.

The residents opposed to killing were much more outspoken than those from the businesses: “VERY ANGRY,” “not very happy,” and “I would feel like some idiot leader made a bad decision.” One person who was against killing suggested that we consider the feelings of the people who feed the pigeons, which further highlights the importance of the human-animal relationship. The connection was made even clearer through the interactions: 19% reported providing food stations for the birds, and an additional 25% of residential respondents reported of hand feeding them. With such a high percentage of interactions, it seems that the community respondents felt a strong desire to have their voice heard because of their connection to pigeons, whether it was positive or negative.

Emotion was apparent on both sides of the responses and demonstrates the polarity of the situation. Those who appreciate pigeons do

so fervently and those who do not are equally as ardent. Interestingly, none of the comments directly referenced health concerns, such as disease, other than ‘filthy’ or ‘dirty,’ both of which could align with aesthetics as easily as health. Although some businesses filed a joint complaint to the county against the pigeons, the birds had support in both the business and residential arenas. Thus, bird management must be conducted with consideration for the people as much as the pigeon population.

Pigeons as Part of Nature

We questioned whether people’s attitudes towards the birds correlated with if they felt pigeons were a part of nature. This inquiry speaks directly to the social construction of nature, as urban pigeons in the United States are domesticated and feral which tends to counter the conventional definition of nature as the non-human, non-built environment (on the social construction of nature, see: Hughes, 2005; Latour, 2005). We hypothesized that those individuals who conceptualized pigeons as part of nature would have a higher tolerance for the birds than those who did not. Interestingly, the premise that pigeons are part of nature was far higher than we expected.

In both the business and residential surveys, pigeons were overwhelmingly considered a part of nature, with 93% and 81% respectively (see: figure 1). We omitted two responses from the residential surveys that we felt were indecisive, “somewhat” and “even if they are...”. Business responses tended to frame the reactions conditionally as nature: “yes, but they are a pest” and “not when they destroy buildings,” “not when they are way overpopulated.” Residential answers were more direct; people felt pigeons are part of nature in both positive ways: “they are part of the urban forest environment,” “Of course!” and negative ways: “decidedly not, but neither are we” “The neighbors feed them, so no, they are more like pets.” When we compared the two groups, business and residential, we found nearly equal representation in the categories for those that felt negatively as did positively towards them. The distribution in attitudes demonstrates that the bird’s relationship to and/or as part of nature has minimal bearing on whether people favor pigeons.

Collectively, our results show interesting findings. For the business community, the majority show negative feelings towards pigeons regardless of their overwhelming perception of pigeons as part of nature. Similarly, there was a slight majority for those who were not opposed to lethal

management versus opposed. The residential responses varied insofar as the majority showed positive feelings about the pigeons. Thus, a direct correlation exists between those who like and do not like the birds and whether or not people support killing them as a management option. The residential attitudes towards the birds had nothing to do with the individual respondent's perception of pigeons as part of nature, but a clear connection can be made between the attitudes and whether the respondents fed or watched them. These results show that the type of relationship and interaction appears more influential for human attitudes towards pigeons than proximity or perception of nature, as espoused by Dunn et al., (2006). People whose business or home aesthetic is compromised by the birds are more likely to demonstrate negative associations while those individuals who take part in feeding or watching the birds, presumably getting to know them as individuals, show positive connections to them and value them as part of their local animal geography.

Discussion

The Sentiment

The emotion humans have toward animals is based on a strong connection to the animal's aesthetic value, particularly in urban settings (Rowan, 1988; Herzog, 2010; Jerolmack, 2013). Species similarity also shows a strong correlation to how humans favor animals (Batt, 2009). This weighted value complicates issues of animal management, particularly in the urban environment where, historically, wildlife managers have focused on removing unwanted pests (Bolen & Robinson, 2003). When emotion enters an animal-related situation, it has the potential to polarize the issue. Human attachment to animals can serve as a powerful force that has the strength to influence the political climate and management protocol (Perry & Perry 2008; Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2003; Capoccia, 2013). Complimentary studies on local invasive species shows that people are less concerned with a categorical assignment of animals as "feral" or "invasive" and more concerned with the well-being of the individuals (Perry & Perry 2008; Seymour, 2013). The range of philosophies and priorities on and for urban animal management can be illustrated with perceptions on feral pigeons and how these have shifted through the years. No longer coveted as a source of nutrition or communication, the birds now represent sport, hobby, nuisance, nature, and are a living remnant of human progress.

Our work strengthens the discourse on the multifaceted emotions humans have for feral pigeons and how important these birds are to people, even in the face of conflict and in the context of nature. While the primary analysis reduced the responses to negative, neutral, and positive values as a means to compare human groups, the individual comments show emotion that ranges from a deep love for the birds to abhorrence. Despite expressing annoyance towards the pigeons and need for management, many business owners mentioned in conversation that they believed the birds were pleasant to watch, that their city presence was acceptable, and that they had their place in nature. That so many of our participants recognized pigeons as part of nature, regardless of their feelings towards them, tell us that ideas about nature are not always nature as entirely free or unmanaged. We anticipated a divide between 1) people who felt positively about pigeons and saw them as nature, and 2) those who felt negatively about pigeons and saw them as feral/not natural. As noted earlier, we were wrong. In an unexpected juxtaposition, nearly all the participants, business and residential, classified the pigeon as natural or part of nature, roughly half from each group felt negatively towards the bird despite this. These results suggest that the concept of nature or natural has little bearing on the expectations community members have for species management. Instead, the aesthetic and emotional condition appears to play a more significant role in people's expectations on pigeon management.

The Frustration

Still popularly and publicly reviled, the strong aversion to pigeons shows how extreme human opinions can be. This aversion may be grounded in people's inability to control the situation or that the birds have lost their status. We fielded a significant amount of frustration from business owners in their capacity to improve the conditions. One person's disdain was hard to contain: "It shit on my hat; I had to shoot that son-of-a-bitch." Several business owners made attempts to pigeon-proof their buildings through the use of particle-board barriers and chicken wire. Others tried to haze pigeons away by throwing objects and shooting at them. Pinwheels, old compact discs (CDs), flagging, and plastic owl epithets decorate some alleys as a means to dissuade pigeon presence. But the birds are hardly phased and the proximity of Butte's buildings – either close together by a few feet or even adjoining – and the deep window sills and abandoned buildings create ideal

habitat for the birds, making efforts to mitigate the situation futile. Many business owners reported feeling helpless and brewed contempt. In fact, there were several references to pigeons as part of the homeless community, pointing to the fact that both people and pigeons seek shelter in alleys and are known to forage on other's half-eaten food. We were left to wonder whether Butte's business community might feel differently about pigeons if they could actively find solutions to the perceived pigeon problems.

Though the resident community expressed frustration, too, it appeared strongly tied to the pigeon's reputation more than an impact on their property: "these birds are disgusting, so I don't want them here" and "city chickens, they're bring the neighborhood down." While we did not ask if any of the residents had connections to the Up Town businesses, none indicated otherwise. The frustration felt across the two groups differed based on their connection to the birds: the business owners felt they were subject to a financial impact, whereas the residents' rejection of the birds appeared more tied to the status.

Simple observations and insight, along with numerous studies, show that humans rank animals along a spectrum. Attitudes towards and classifications for animals are largely generalized; they are not universal and vary across cultures, geographies, and among individuals. Quite often species – like the Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – can fall in to multiple camps based on reputation, behavior, and iconized character. This said, people are reported to favor animals that are useful and tame, marked as intelligent or human-like, or unique and rare. Unfavorable animals have little utility, are the least human-like, and may be considered burdensome and/or dangerous to humans (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Urbanik, 2012; Herzog, 2010). It is in this context that we discussed lethal management.

The frustration that people feel related to pigeons indicates our changing nature and even an elite-style perception. No longer useful, pigeons take on monikers of other undesirable animals: rats and chickens. Does the rejection of pigeons by both residents and business owners represent attitudes about our social status? Would more people appreciate them if free-roaming pigeons retained their market value in some fashion or were less abundant?

Pigeons: A Flying Icon of the Human Landscape

The feral pigeon is a bird that is neither wild nor tame. Pigeons display many characteristics that humans find endearing, such as parental

care, pair bonding, and a perceived dependence on humans for food (see: Jerolmack, 2008; 2013; Delon, in review). So vital were they for food and communication that pigeons were once even sacrificed to the gods (Flannery, 2009). Furthermore, pigeons are members of the Columbidae family that include the mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*) and the turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), revered by many as symbols of peace and hope (Humphries, 2008; Allen, 2009), and white pigeons, masquerading as doves, are often released at weddings as a symbolic gesture of goodwill and purity (Jerolmack, 2008).

But the values we place upon the pigeon evolves. Research on attitudes towards pigeons is a prime example of how the pendulum can swing: the very behaviors that were enjoyed and selected for by humans – preference for human environments, adaptability to forage on human food scraps, year-round breeding potential – are now the exact traits that make pigeons problematic and unappealing to the public. The data from this study suggests, particularly when comparing the two survey groups, is that management is often rife with social conflict that can lead to a divided social response. The differences between the groups signal a changing social climate in Butte about perceptions of animals and political opinion toward pigeons. Despite Montana's, and even Butte's, strong utilitarian approach toward animals, the region is not immune to political support for pigeons.

The challenge for those charged with the task of animal management in urban settings is to negotiate between values and solutions that are socially acceptable (Hinchcliffe & Whatmore, 2006). Lethal methods like hunting – a traditional tool of wildlife managers – are generally unpopular with urbanites (Patterson, Montag, & Williams, 2003; Perry & Perry, 2008). It is predicted that as urbanization expands, values will continue to shift to focus on the emotional and aesthetic value of animals away from utilitarian values. This brings scientific credibility to the wide-ranging impact that emotional and moral positions have on environmental policies, species management, and the way we understand the natural world.

For centuries the wild pigeon of Europe, Asia, and North Africa and the bird's domesticated descendants have decorated the landscape, enhanced our livelihoods, carried our communication, nested in eaves of our buildings, and defecated on our doorstep. But whether or not people conceptualize pigeons as nature appears to have little bearing on how they feel about the birds. Pigeons animate cityscapes as free-roaming animals in an otherwise

constructed, compartmentalized, and controlled condition. As a result, these birds provide meaningful interactions with people, both positive and negative (Jerolmack, 2013). Biologist E.O Wilson – among others – has stated that humans need contact and interaction with nature (1993) and Dunn et al., describe how the urban pigeon fills that role (2006). Urban residents enjoy having wildlife in their midst, but only before the animals become problematic (Patterson, Montag, & Williams, 2003; Bolen & Robinson, 2003). High population numbers and the bird's increased waste is reflected in negative attitudes and efforts towards control that reflect nature as something that is balanced. As a result, continued research will be critical as a means to follow these geographic transitions and appropriately engage with the ever-evolving human-animal relationship. The mighty pigeon: a flying icon of human desire.

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Author Biographies

Callie Boyle received her Master's degree from Montana Tech. Her thesis was on the urban ecology and social dynamics of the pigeon population in Butte, Montana. Callie's main theoretical approach was the social construction of nature and the human relationship to animals.

Stella Capoccia, Ph.D., is an expert on the human dimensions of wildlife and animal geography. Her Ph.D. investigated the ways in which animal rights and human attachment to animals unfolds in wildlife conservation and management. She was the P.I. on this project and Callie Boyle's research advisor.

Tedd Darnell was an undergraduate at Montana Tech before transferring to North Dakota. While at Tech, Tedd received funding to investigate community perceptions of wildlife in response to several mountain lion sightings and public outcry. Tedd also worked on the pigeon project and developed considerable insight from both research experiences.

Julie Hart's, Ph.D., primary focus is on human health and safety. Dr. Hart is an expert on particulate matter and human exposure to it. She served as a member of Callie's graduate committee and as the expert on exposure issues as they related to pigeon droppings.

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JCAS Editorial Objectives

The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established to foster academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies is increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker takes a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount a more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy. JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. The journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal to facilitate communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal liberation movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed in any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Since a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytical thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminism, activism and academia, Continental philosophy, or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention.

Review Process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication; suitable submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

Manuscript Requirements

The manuscript should be in MS Word format and follow APA guidelines. All submissions should be double-spaced and in 12 point Times New Roman. Good quality electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should conform to American English grammar spelling.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words and have no endnotes. In exceptional circumstances, JCAS will consider publishing extended essays. Authors should supply a brief abstract of the paper

(of no more than 250 words). A brief autobiographical note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation email address, and full contact details.

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