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This morning, I gave some meloxicam, an anti-inflammatory drug to one of my roosters, a smallish five-year-old cross-bred darling named Kapteeni, or Captain, as he had recently broken his toe. I also changed the bandage on the toe of the roo.

Then I travelled to another town to talk about broiler chickens, whom I have recently discussed and written about a lot. Broiler chickens are the most numerous bird in the world, and as they are bred to grow big and fast, their genetics predispose them to multiple health issues such as weak and malformed bones that break easily. According to the studies of the research organization Welfare Footprint Institute, broiler chickens suffer from different levels of pain approximately all their waking hours. When their bones break, the only treatment available tends to be euthanasia via cervical dislocation. The contrast to backyard chickens – whether pets, homestead poultry or something in between – is sharp. How we humans picture the needs and value of chickens is strongly tied to the cultural

position they inhabit. Besides, the abundance of chickens in the world is tied to the ideas of what is natural to the human species.

The issue at hand digs deep into these two themes: how we as humans conceptualize and interpret nonhuman animals, and what does it mean to be human in relation to other animals. The complexity and ambiguity of these questions run through the issue. As the conference report of Heidi Tähtinen shows, there are challenges in “accessing the voices of, interpreting, and ethically narrating with nonhuman animals”.

Two texts in this issue deal with multispecies art. Heidi Kukkonen’s article reflects on conceptions of chickens: in her ethnographic study, Kukkonen observed human children dancing with chickens in a gallery space. Art is in focus also in Maija Linturi’s essay that analyses performing with urban rats, rodents who are often faced as pests.

Domesticated companion species who share houses with us are discussed in two articles. Jirka Vierimaa’s article about

detection dogs challenges the prevalent view of service dogs as tools to be used, and focuses on the play and communication between dogs and their handlers. Janne Ikäheimo's article on small-animal crematoria focuses on the tensions in conceptualizing pets: family members, yet in the legal and economic category of an animal.

Two articles of this issue focus on equine history. Sese Ma writes about free-roaming horses in Heian Japan and shows how the horses destabilized the state's land system. Juuso Järvenpää explores how Finnish animal welfare activists in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century advanced the use of horse meat, conceptualized horses as meat animals and had a positive attitude to the commercializing animal industries.

Thus, animal welfarism and animal industries have been, and still are, intertwined. As Lisa Gålmark writes in her essay: "When looking at nature and nonhuman animals, it is for us to keep in mind that interpretations are made from within a social and material culture, one that has long been built on the oppression of animals."

Two of the papers in this issue focus more on the humanness that forms in interspecies relations. In their pilot study, Jenni Huhtasalo, Marjaana Raukola-Lindblom and Nina Karttunen observed how spending time with actual horses or simulating these encounters in a virtual envi-

ronment affects people. Lo Bjerregaard's essay about the reactions of the Swedish meat sector organization to new nutritional recommendations sheds light on the views that producing meat industrially is natural to humans.

The book reviews of this issue discuss the sentience of animals (Mustafa Demir), colonial violence on animals (Fariha Rubaiyat Khan) and animals in the Middle Ages (Tua Korhonen).

With the publication of this issue, my first year as an Editor-in-Chief of *Trace* has come to an end. I have learned a lot, and I've had the joy to lean on the expertise of my predecessor Pauliina Rautio and the editorial team of *Trace* – thank you Jouni, Samu, Tuure, Tiina and Eeva! This has, again, been a year of growth in human-animal studies. Another thing that is growing is the use of generative artificial intelligence in research. This is why we created the first short instructions for AI use in *Trace*, and this is the first issue in which every text includes a note about the possible use of generative AI in planning, information seeking, writing or language checking. Before we shall publish the next CfP of *Trace* later this spring we are going to elaborate the AI instructions. A few weeks ago I looked through a bus window at a construction site of a new data center, with these questions on my mind: how and when to use, or choose not to use, artificial intelligence so that it does not escalate the speed at which

we are weakening biodiversity – how can this technology, like the others we use in research, be used to support the essential of life of both nonhuman and human animals as well as resilient multispecies communities.

*No generative AI was used in planning, writing or finalizing of this text.*

## **References**

Welfare Footprint Institute. 2025. Impact of the Better Chicken Commitment and the Adoption of Slower-Growing Breeds on the Welfare of Broiler Chickens. <https://welfarefootprint.org/broilers/>