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Harriet Ritvo
Symposium

April 29–30, 2022

Samberg Conference Center, MIT



Special Thanks to those who contributed to making this event possible...

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Caterina Scaramelli

Etienne Benson

Mabel Chin Sorett

Janet Browne

Rebecca Woods

Christopher Capozzola

Anya Zilberstein

Deborah K. Fitzgerald

For updated event information, please refer to the History at MIT
website at: history.mit.edu/events/harriet-ritvo-symposium

Schedule of Events

Please note that this is a hybrid event and is subject to changes. Events in red are scheduled as virtual events at the time of printing. Please visit history.mit.edu/events/harriet-ritvo-symposium for updated event information.

Friday, April 29

8:30am	Breakfast
8:50am	Welcome: Anya Zilberstein, Christopher Capozzola, and Agustín Rayo
9:15–10:30am	Session 1: “The Dawn of Green: Modern Ecologies and Environments”
Chair	Peter Perdue
Presenters	Jessica Wang, “Insects and the Infrastructure of U.S. Empire in Early Twentieth-Century Hawaii” Nicole Labruto, “Metabolic Intimacies: Plant Strategies for Bewildering Genetic Modification” Barri Gold, “Thermodynamics, Ecology, and the 19th-Century Novel”
10:40–11:55am	Session 2: “The Animal Estate across the Atlantic”
Chair	Emma Rothschild
Presenters	Whitney Barlow Robles, “Knowing Raccoons from Early America to the Anthropocene” Brad Bolman, “The Nature of the Beagles: Science, Pets, and Empire” Dorothee Brantz, “Multispecies Visions across the Atlantic”
12:00pm	Coffee Break
12:05–1:10pm	Session 3: “Animal Planet: Round Table on Animal Studies”
Chair	Ian Miller
Presenters	Etienne Benson, “The Animal E-state: Digital Sources for Animal History” Lukas Rieppel, “The Chimerical Dinosaur” Rebecca Woods, “The Mammoth and the Sheep, and Other Figments of the Historian’s Imagination.”
1:15pm	Lunch
2:30–3:45pm	Session 4: “Micropolitics”
Chair	Deborah Fitzgerald
Presenters	Jenny Smith, “The Lager of History: Ferment, Foment, and the Industrialization of Beer” Grace Kim-Butler, “The Microbial Lives of Tombstones” William J. Turkel, “Hostile Environments”
3:50–5:05pm	Session 5: “Figments of the Classifying Imagination”
Chair	Jane Pickering
Presenters	Livia Wick, “Cancer, New Objects, and Their Taxonomies in Lebanon” Alison Laurence, “Charismatic Megafauna, or the Passion of the Paleontologist” Michaela Thompson, “Tundra Taxonomies: Classification at the End of the World”
6:00–8:30pm	Friday Evening Reception (RSVP required, please email kalopes@mit.edu) Harvard Museum of Natural History, Romer Hall, 2nd Floor Toastmaster: Philip Khoury

Saturday, April 30

8:30am	Breakfast
9:00am	Welcome: Jeffrey Ravel
9:15–10:30am	Session 6: “The Variation of Animals under Domestication”
Chair	Janet Browne
Presenters	Caterina Scaramelli, “Among Water Buffaloes” Lucas Mueller, “Avalanche Dogs: Training Humans and Animals for the Catastrophe” Luísa Reis-Castro and Jia Hui Lee, “Breaching Boundaries: Domestication across Disciplines”
10:30am	Coffee Break
10:45–11:30am	Session 7: “Understanding Audiences and Misunderstanding Audiences”
Chair	Anne McCants
Presenters	David Singerman, “Is History Funny?” Laurel Braitman, “Writing in Public: Tips for Publishing Outside of Academia”
11:35–12:50pm	Session 8: “Beasts in the Jungle (Or Wherever)”
Chair	Anya Zilberstein
Presenters	Ashawari Chauduri, “Human–Nonhuman Relations in Malay Medicine” Shira Shmueli, “Animal Consciences in Courts” Kit Heintzman, “Cannibalism and the Single Animal”
1:00pm	Final Remarks: Harriet Ritvo

Join Us in Celebrating Harriet Ritvo, Professor Emeritus

Friday Night, April 29, 2022
Reception: 6:00pm–8:30pm

Harvard Museum of Natural History
Romer Hall, 2nd Floor, 26 Oxford Street, Cambridge, MA 02139

RSVP is required, please email kalopes@mit.edu

Limited parking on street. No onsite parking.
MBTA (Red Line to Harvard Square)



Harriet Ritvo

An Appreciation by William J. Turkel



William J. Turkel is Professor of History at the University of Western Ontario and a member of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada (2018–25). He is the author of *The Archive of Place* (2007), based on his 2004 dissertation directed by Harriet Ritvo at MIT, and *Spark from the Deep* (2013).

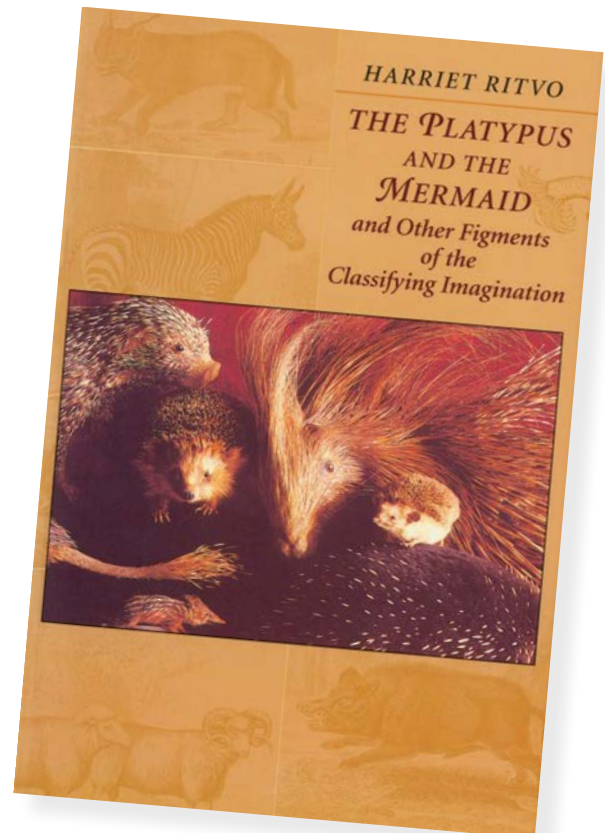
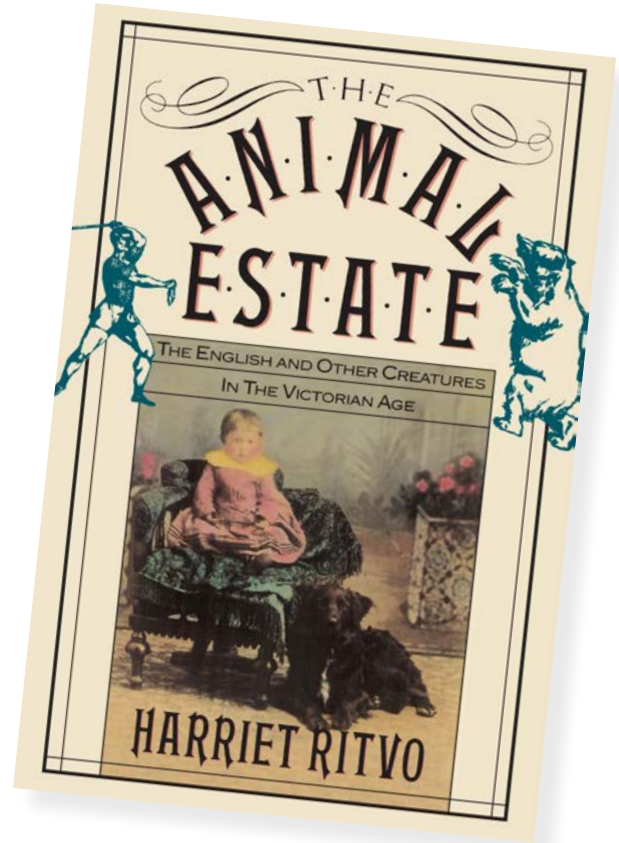
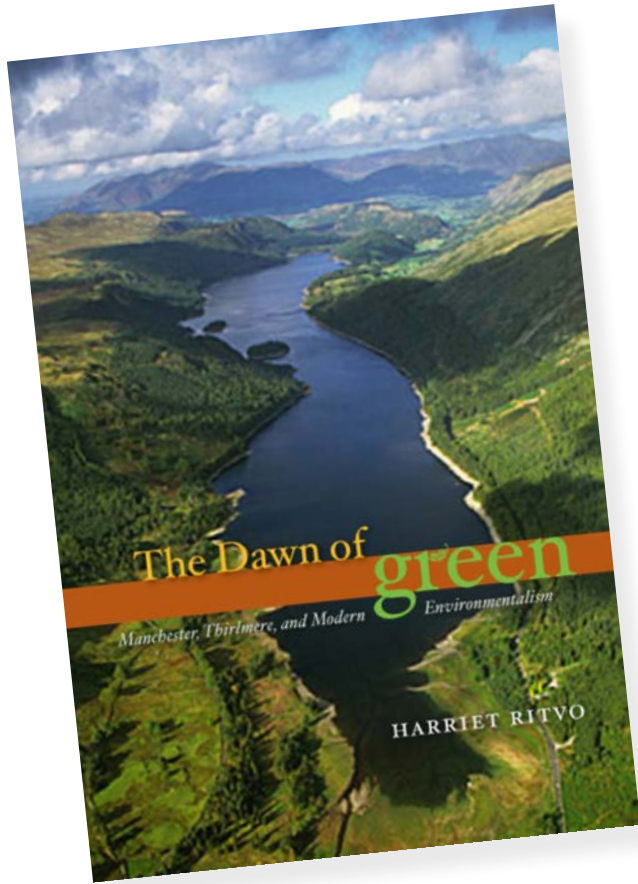
Over the course of a remarkable career, Harriet Ritvo has been a founder of both Animal History and the interdisciplinary field of Animal Studies, and a leading scholar in a number of other fields: Environmental History, the History of Natural History, Science and Empire, and British Cultural History. In 2020 she received the Distinguished Scholar Award of the American Society for Environmental History. She has been, and continues to be, a brilliant and insightful colleague, beloved friend and mentor, inspiring teacher, witty critic, and model of writerly craft.

Harriet completed her PhD at Harvard in 1975. For a few years she worked in administration at Boston University and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences before being hired by MIT, where she became an Assistant Professor in 1980. Over the next three decades she established a regular pattern of publishing a monograph shortly followed by another scholarly book, serving as a kind of accompaniment.

From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Harriet published articles on antivivisection, works of natural history written for children, popular zoology, the emergence of petkeeping, and the discourses and practices of animal fanciers and other breeders, often with well-considered titles (such as “Sex and the Single Animal”). At the time, her essays on the history of human-animal relations looked to some observers like ‘the weirdest’ of the ‘many weird things that have been coming out of the humanities lately’. She was proud enough of this comment to publish and republish it, and why not? With hindsight her word seems fated to have become our own, and we have all taken the animal turn. The study of nonhuman animals provides an inexhaustible source of unsettling questions and imperfect comparisons, by which we perennially try to understand ourselves.

This phase of Harriet’s research culminated in the publication of *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Harvard University Press, 1987). The monograph focused primarily on the rhetorical dimensions of texts produced by breeders, veterinarians, agriculturalists, natural historians, and others who dealt with real animals. As Harriet noted, their discourse “described a wide range of interactions, which might be inspired by primary motives as disparate as sentiment (petkeeping), economics (animal husbandry), and curiosity (natural history).” At the time, *The Animal Estate* was commended for opening new territories for debating nineteenth-century Britain and its empire. Steven Jay Gould praised its brilliance in the *New York Review of Books*, calling it his favorite book of the year. In retrospect it is now usually mentioned, along with the works of Gillian Beer and Keith Thomas, as a founding document of Animal Studies.

In recognition of her formidable talent as an emerging writer, Harriet received the Whiting Award for nonfiction in 1990. The following year she and Jonathan Arac published a co-edited volume on *The Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nationalism, Imperialism, Exoticism*, which explored the relationship between new practices of



Her love of obscure words is of a piece with her collection of mermaids and platypodes and with her deft ability to tend unusual and eccentric students.

nineteenth-century writing and state-level political transformation. Formulated in response to Foucauldian micropolitics and the new historicism, papers in the volume took the perspective of Gramscian hegemony instead, “emphasizing that the resistances within a system of power may change that system.”

Harriet was promoted to Full Professor in 1995 and became the Arthur J. Conner Professor of History at MIT, a position she has held since. Her research from the early 1990s to the early 2000s was concentrated on the history of natural history and biology. She published articles on scientific nomenclature, zoological taxonomy, genetic capital, gardens and zoos, collections, classification and animal miscegenation. These interests and others were drawn together in her second monograph, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 1997). She showed how the classificatory schemes of experts were “liable to be contradicted from without as well as undermined from within.” It is in this book especially that the reader gets a sense of Harriet’s breathtaking mastery of the entire domain of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British thinking about, and with, animals. She refused to apply the tidy simplifications of hindsight to her material, to exclude the vernacular and focus on the learned, to leave the chimeras, crossbreeds, and embarrassing curiosities hidden in cabinets. Although some reviewers were frustrated that she did not write the simple or whiggish story they wanted to read, all reported being fascinated, charmed, entertained and informed by her book. Charles Darwin’s work on *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* was republished under Harriet’s editorial direction the following year.

Harriet’s research shifted to environmental history over the first decade of the new millennium. She served on the editorial board of the field’s flagship journal *Environmental History* from 2001 to 2013 and was the vice president, then president, of the American Society for Environmental History between 2007 and 2011. While continuing to publish on animals, she also published articles on publics for science, environmental reporting in periodicals, and debates about the reengineering of land and water in Victorian England and its empire. Her monograph, *The Dawn of Green: Manchester, Thirlmere, and Modern Environmentalism* (University of Chicago Press, 2009) focused on the city of Manchester’s damming and development of Thirlmere in the Lake District in the 1870s, one of the first large-scale civil engineering projects to pit conservationists against supporters of industrial development. *Noble Cows and Hybrid*

Zebras, a selection of her essays published between 1984 and 2008, was commissioned by the University of Virginia Press and appeared the following year.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, Harriet has been developing a new project on wildness and domestication. Although we will have to wait for the monograph to comprehend its true scope, there are tantalizing hints in the articles that she has been publishing. A pack of gray wolves in Ipswich, Massachusetts howl through chain-link fence at transport trucks on Route 133. Editors of The Great Ape Project suggest that humans should not remain alone in the ‘sphere of moral equality.’ *The New York Times* celebrates the ‘wonderfully rapid increase’ in English sparrows in the city’s parks in 1868, and then a few months later suggests they be converted into pot-pies. Camels ultimately fail to play an ongoing role in border patrol in the American West. They fare better in Australia until becoming “completely superfluous” with the introduction of cars and trucks, their million-odd feral descendants now “by far the largest herd of free-living camels in the world.” Harriet’s presentations at conferences meanwhile have examined animal migration, acclimatization and assimilation, domestication and environment, invasiveness and endangerment, hybridity and taxonomy, wildness and extinction—assembling interests old and new.

Anyone who has read Harriet has been sent to the dictionary to discover what it means to be ‘struthious’ or why ‘anekeitaxonomy’ really belongs where it appeared. Mark Twain famously compared the difference between the almost right word and the right one with lightning bugs and lightning: notwithstanding Harriet’s fondness for the former, she invariably writes with the latter. Her love of obscure words is of a piece with her collection of mermaids and platypodes and with her deft ability to tend unusual and eccentric students. We, at least, esteem her most for what she provided in our lives—and there’s no English word for this so we’ll just have to borrow a Danish one—hygge.

Presenters



Etienne Benson

Etienne Benson is a historian of environmental sciences, environmental movements, and human-animal relations. He is an associate professor in the Department of History and Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania.



Brad Bolman

Brad Bolman is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Institute on the Formation of Knowledge at the University of Chicago. He is writing a book on the history of dogs in science over the last century and completed a PhD in the History of Science at Harvard University.



Laurel Braitman

Laurel Braitman, PhD is a *New York Times*-bestselling author and the Director of Writing and Storytelling at the Stanford University School of Medicine where she is helping clinicians and other healthcare professionals communicate more meaningfully—for themselves and their patients. Her last book, *Animal Madness*, was a *NYT* bestseller and has been translated into eight languages.



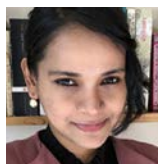
Dorothee Brantz

Dorothee Brantz is a professor of urban history and director of the Center for Metropolitan Studies at the Technische Universität Berlin. Her areas of interest include transatlantic urban environmental history and the history of human-animal relations. Harriet Ritvo was one of Dorothee's dissertation advisors and they have jointly participated in a number of conferences and publications over the past twenty years.



Christopher Capozzola

Christopher Capozzola is History Department Section Head, Professor of History, and a MacVicar Faculty Fellow. In 2002, Harriet Ritvo offered him a job and he has been at MIT ever since, despite the fact that he does not have a cat, does not support the Red Sox, believes *Mollusca* is a delightfully capacious classification, and eschews her strenuous advice against living on the Boston side of the Charles River.



Ashawari Chaudhuri

Ashawari Chaudhuri works as a postdoctoral fellow at the Asia Research Institute in the National University of Singapore. Her PhD that she completed from HASTS was on genetically modified seeds in India.



Barri J. Gold

Barri J. Gold is Professor of Practice in English and Inaugural Senior Fellow in the Environmental Innovations Initiative at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *ThermoPoetics: Energy in Victorian Literature and Science* (The MIT Press, 2010) and *Energy, Ecocriticism, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Novel Ecologies* (Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science & Medicine, 2021).



Grace Kim-Butler

Grace Kim-Butler is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of History and Art History at Utrecht University, where she is part of the ERC-funded project, DURARE: Dynamics of the Durable: A History of Making Things Last in the Visual and Decorative Arts. She examines how scientists develop technologies for the restoration of art and cultural heritage. She currently resides in Amsterdam.



Kit Heintzman

Kit Heintzman is a recovering academic living, thinking, and breathing in Lenapehokink.



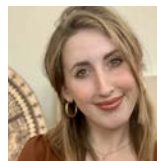
Nicole Labruto

Nicole Labruto is an assistant research professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Director of the Medicine, Science, and the Humanities Program at Johns Hopkins University. Her research explores the intersection of life forms, landscapes, and labor in relation to postcolonial biologies. She is a member of the Curatorial Circle of the Ecological Design Collective.



Philip S. Khoury

Philip S. Khoury is Ford International Professor of History and Associate Provost at MIT. Professor Khoury, as Associate Provost, is responsible for overseeing MIT's non-curricular arts programs and initiatives, including the MIT Museum and the List Visual Arts Center. He is also directly engaged in MIT's strategic planning for international education and research; and much more. Professor Khoury is a political and social historian of the Middle East.



Alison Laurence

Alison Laurence is a lecturer and postdoctoral fellow at Stanford University, where she spends her days teaching undergrads and hunting dinosaurs in the archives. She received her PhD from HASTS in 2019.



Jia Hui Lee

Jia Hui Lee is a Post-Doctoral Fellow in the John B. Hurford '60 Center for the Arts and Humanities, and Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Haverford College. His research explores how more-than-human encounters in East Africa are crucial sites for generating theories and critiques that offer what Sylvia Wynter calls the counterhuman. He has a PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he also developed experimental and sensory modes of doing anthropology.



Lucas Mueller

Lucas Mueller is postdoctoral fellow at the University of Geneva. He received a PhD in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 2021, he was elected speaker of the Swiss Young Academy



Jeffrey Ravel

Jeffrey Ravel is a Professor of History at MIT. He studies the history of French and European political culture from the mid-seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. He is currently working on a history of French playing cards and political regimes from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. He is a Co-Director of MIT's Beaver Press Print Shop, located in Barker Library. Since April 2015, he has been the Faculty Lead for the MIT-Nepal Initiative.



Agustín Rayo

Agustín Rayo is a Professor of Philosophy and the Kenan Sahin Dean of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at MIT. His research is at the intersection of the philosophy of logic and the philosophy of language.



Luísa Reis-Castro

Luísa Reis-Castro is a postdoctoral fellow in the University of Southern California's Society of Fellows in the Humanities, hosted by USC's Anthropology Department and affiliated with the USC Dornsife Center on Science, Technology, and Public Life. Luisa earned her PhD in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS) from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).



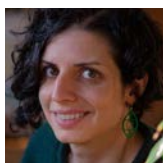
Lukas Rieppel

Lukas Rieppel is a Associate Professor of History at Brown University. Lukas is a historian of the life, earth, and environmental sciences, the history of museums, and the history of capitalism, especially in nineteenth and early twentieth century North America.



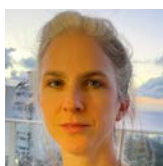
Whitney Barlow Robles

Whitney Barlow Robles is a postdoctoral fellow in Dartmouth College's Society of Fellows and Department of History. She received her PhD from Harvard University in 2019 and stole Harriet from MIT to be on her committee. Her book, *Curious Species: How Enlightenment Animals Made Natural History*, is under advance contract with Yale University Press. She also shares Harriet's unhealthy obsession with cats.



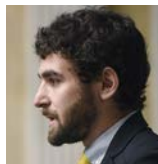
Caterina Scaramelli

Caterina Scaramelli is Research Assistant Professor in the Departments of Anthropology and of Earth and Environment at Boston University. She holds a 2016 PhD from MIT's History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society program, and is a graduate of the London School of Economics in Social Anthropology. Her research interests are rooted in environmental anthropology, the anthropology of science, the environmental humanities and social sciences, and questions of water, climate, animals, plants, and infrastructure.



Shira Shmuely

Shira Shmuely is an Assistant Professor at the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas at Tel Aviv University. Shira is a 2017 HASTS graduate and an enthusiastic advisee of Harriet's. She is interested in the history of human-animal relations, the intersection of law and scientific knowledge, and the history of pain. Her dissertation is forthcoming with Cornell University Press under the title "The Bureaucracy of Empathy: Law, Vivisection, and Animal Pain in Late Nineteenth Century Britain."



David Singerman

David Singerman is an Assistant Professor of History and American Studies at the University of Virginia. He is a historian of capitalism, the environment, and science and technology.



Jenny Leigh Smith

Jenny Leigh Smith (PhD MIT 2006) is an independent scholar who has held tenured faculty positions at the Georgia Institute of Technology and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. She is a historian of science, technology, and the environment. Her current research focuses on the causes of modern famines and the environmental impacts of refugee camps.



Michaela Thompson

Michaela Thompson is an Environmental Science & Public Policy Concentration Preceptor at Harvard University. She works with and supports students writing senior theses and capstone projects and their faculty advisors. She holds a PhD from MIT's History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society program. Her research centers on the history and anthropology of marine sciences, including fisheries management. Her work is at the intersection of environmental history, STS, and sustainability, focusing strongly on human interactions with the ocean.



William J. Turkel

William J. Turkel is Professor of History at the University of Western Ontario and a member of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada (2018–25). He is the author of *The Archive of Place* (2007), based on his 2004 dissertation directed by Harriet Ritvo at MIT, and *Spark from the Deep* (2013).



Rebecca Woods

Rebecca Woods is an Assistant Professor and historian of science, animals, and environment at the University of Toronto. She received her PhD from MIT. Her first book explored the history of breeds of sheep and cattle in the British empire, and her current project examines the history of frozen mammoths since 1800.



Jessica Wang

Jessica Wang is a Professor of U.S. History at the University of British Columbia. She earned her PhD from MIT-STS in 1995. She came to animal history late in life as an already tenured professor, and she is grateful for Harriet Ritvo's generous tutelage, which came long after Jessica's days in the communal graduate student space of E51. Jessica's current work focuses on the history of tropical agriculture and the U.S. insular empire in the early twentieth century.



Anya Zilberstein

Anya Zilberstein is an Associate Professor in the History Department at Concordia University in Montreal. She is a historian of science, environment, and empire in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. Harriet's influence is everywhere in her work, from her first book to more recent publications and research on the intersections of animal history and the history of food, as well as the history of ornithology.



Livia Wick

Livia Wick is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the American University of Beirut. Livia has a PhD from MIT. Her research and teaching interests are the anthropology of medicine, science, birth, gender, war, oral history, and infrastructure.

