



All Animals Initiative

for Multispecies Community Building

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026 - 2028



NYU

DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Multispecies Community

/,mʌlti'spiːʃiːz kə'mjuːnɪti/ noun

A group of interconnected individuals from different species, united by geographic space and the possibility of sharing common interests, engaging in joint activities, forming social ties, and making concessions when conflicts arise.

Multispecies communities are everywhere and inescapable, but a variety of human activities and worldviews are destabilizing the social bonds (both positive and negative) that bind those communities together. Climate change, habitat destruction, and industrialized animal agriculture weaken multispecies communities by rendering previous habitats unlivable, scrambling species assemblages, and severing interspecies relationships.¹ Mainstream media, politics, culture, education, and economic systems undermine our sense of multispecies community when they ignore or devalue the interests of other animals and promote **anthropocentrism**—the belief that only human beings are inherently worthwhile, which sets us apart from the rest of nature and renders everything (and everyone) else as a mere resource to human ends.²

In addition to driving **mass extinction** and **widespread suffering** in other species, this state of affairs also immiserates countless humans. For example, a growing body of research shows that being estranged from the rest of the natural world leads to poor health and psychological distress.³

What if we were to approach these intertwined problems led by a sense of belonging and responsibility to our multispecies community rather than by anthropocentrism? What new insights and connections would be made possible?

The **All Animals Initiative for Multispecies Community Building (AAI)** was formed to investigate how multispecies communities function, what a multispecies community lens has to say about the wellbeing of humans and other animals, and how we can cultivate thriving multispecies communities around the world.



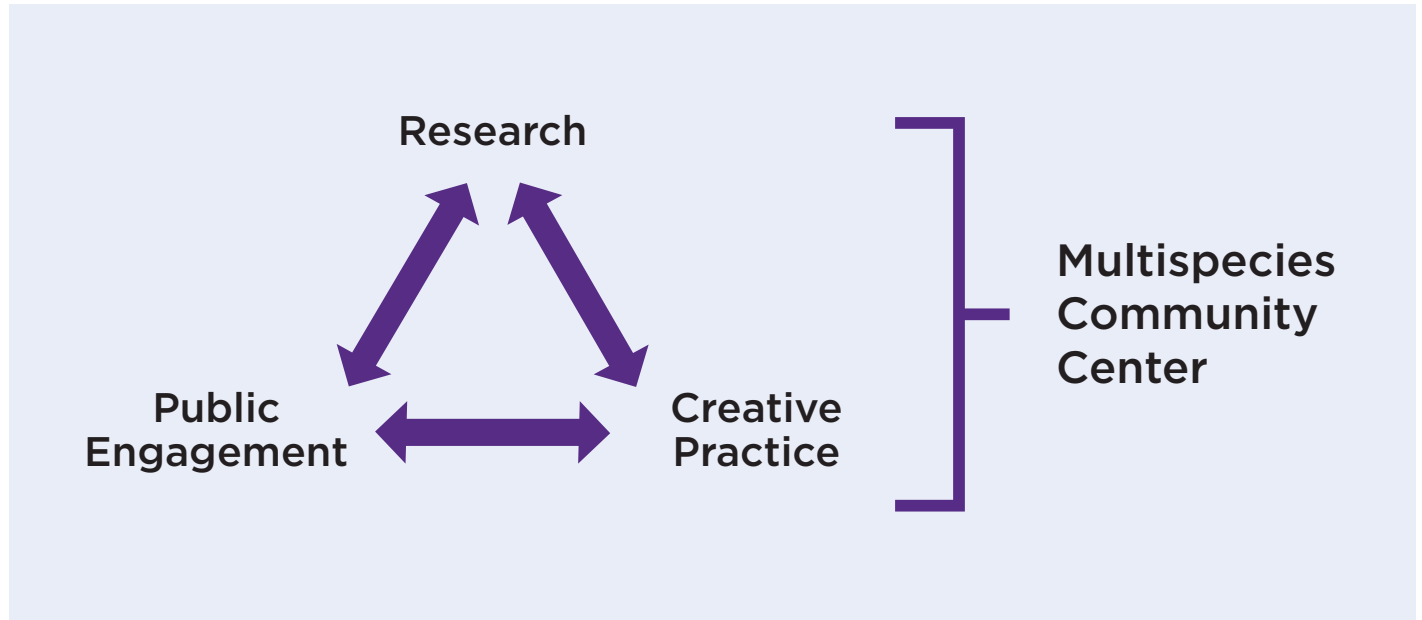
Effy's Reef; See page 13 for references.

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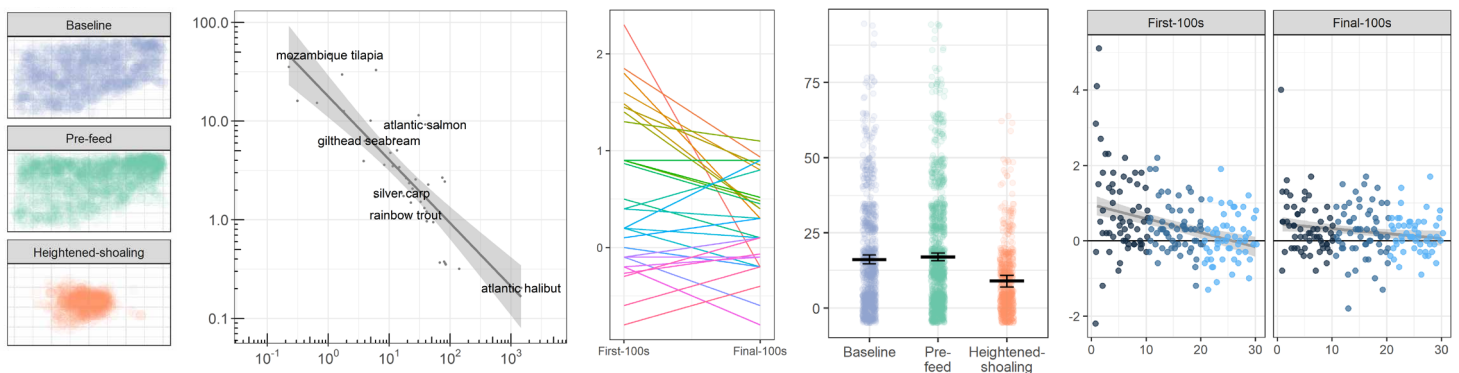
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A LIVING LABORATORY FOR MULTISPECIES COMMUNITY AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY



The **All Animals Initiative for Multispecies Community Building (AAI)** is organized around three interconnected program areas. **Research**, in which we generate knowledge about multispecies communities, is our focal program area and central to all our activities. The discoveries generated through our research feed directly into and are informed by our two other program areas: **Creative Practice**, in which we engage with artistic expression to expand thinking about what is possible for multispecies community living, and **Public Engagement**, in which we put what we learn into practice—exploring and experimenting with building multispecies community right here in NYC. The continuous flow of knowledge generation and inspiration between our three program areas makes AAI a living laboratory for multispecies community building.





RESEARCH: UNDERSTANDING MULTISPECIES COMMUNITY

In the research wing of AAI, we are taking our track record of academic achievement—80+ publications, 2,000+ citations, nearly \$1M raised, and 50+ student mentees across the fields of animal welfare science, psychology, and environmental studies—to the next level.

With our active lab of students and researchers, extensive network of local and international collaborators, and expertise in quantitative methods, animal behavior, and systematic reviews, AAI enhances our understanding of: 1) How multispecies communities function; 2) What a multispecies community framework can contribute to the field of animal welfare; and 3) What practices and policies can strengthen multispecies communities around the world.

1. How Multispecies Communities Function: Foundational Science



The life sciences have investigated how individuals interact with and are affected by other individuals of their own species (e.g., sociobiology and animal welfare), as well as how species relate at ecosystem- and population-levels (e.g., food webs and population dynamics). Alone, this corpus of knowledge, while critical to understanding the world, risks creating the impression that social ties across species boundaries—the building blocks of multispecies communities—don't exist or are unimportant.

Emerging research suggests, however, that interspecies relationships not only exist, but can be of great consequence: e.g., interspecies hunting in tropical reefs⁴, cross-species preening in birds⁵, human-wildlife mutualism values⁶, and even interspecies play⁷

Upcoming Research:

- The Motivation of Koi to Interact with Human Partners (led by Mariyi Jin)
- What Interspecies Play Says about Animal Minds (led by Mathilde Tahar and with Christine Webb and Barbara Smuts)
- Birds as Community Members? Media Analysis of Public Perception in the US
- Predators in the Multispecies Community: Complicating the Predator-Prey Dynamic (led by Chiawen Chiang)
- Translation through a Multispecies Community Lens: The Role of Artificial Intelligence (with the Animals in Translation Project led by Delphine Grass)

2. A Multispecies Community Lens for Animal Welfare

Historically, the field of animal welfare science sought to improve the lives of animals in terrestrial agricultural systems. With the expansion of the field to include the welfare of animals in aquaculture, laboratories, zoos, sanctuaries, and private homes, as well as free-living animals and more taxa than ever before (e.g., fishes and invertebrates), a new approach is required.

A multispecies community lens, which sees animals as fellow community members with some shared interests and some divergent interests, offers new insights to this rapidly expanding field.

Upcoming Research:

- Systematic Analysis of Culture in Fishes: Implications for Conservation and Welfare (led by Chiawen Chiang and with Kim Carlson)
- Do Fish Have Fun? Evidence for Play in Fishes from Social Media
- Wildness Lost: How Aquaculture Changes Animals (led by Laurie Sellars and with Jennifer Jacquet)
- Octopuses in the Multispecies Community: Implications for Wild Animal Welfare
- Nature Centers, Community Centers, and Wild Animal Welfare in NYC



3. Cultivating Strong Multispecies Communities: Navigating Coexistence and Conflict

The multispecies community frame encourages us to consider animals as members of our extended multispecies community—prompting us to identify shared interests where they exist and legitimize the interests of other species when they diverge from our own. While this approach does not necessitate acquiescence to all non-human concerns, it does direct us to seek compromise and accommodation when possible.

Multispecies community building thus creates the possibility of improving the lives of all animals, including humans.

Upcoming Research:

- Sharks as Stakeholders: Towards Wildlife Inclusive Tourism in the United States (led by Laurie Sellars)
- Extreme Heat, Dying Cows: A Sentinel of Climate-Driven Welfare Risks (with Sonali McDermid)
- Aquaculture Requires New Policy Tools to Protect Animal Welfare (led by Caya van der Sluis and with Mia MacDonald)
- The Forgotten Billion: Hidden Animal Welfare Costs in Aquaculture (led by Chiawen Chiang)
- The Power and Potential of Multispecies Education for Humans and Other Animals (with Natalie Lee)





CREATIVE PRACTICE: IMAGINING MULTISPECIES COMMUNITY POSSIBILITIES

How can we broaden our imagination, expand awareness, and facilitate recognition, interpretation, and response to common intelligences across species divides?

While data-driven, empirical scholarship is a critical component for understanding multispecies communities, becoming better members of the multispecies community also requires cultivating imagination and awe. Creative Practice thus offers a complimentary approach to provoke new perspectives on and new possibilities of being in the multispecies community.

Through expressive and outward-facing engagements—workshops, collaborative art-making, performances, exhibitions, and installations—AAI's Creative Practice wing makes space for interrogating our relationships with other animals and experiments with different ways of living together.

Upcoming Creative Practice:

- Witnessing the Unseen: Caring for a Vulnerable Fish from Across the Globe
- Lateral Lines (an algorithmic radio work produced by Wave Farm and led by Marina Zurkow)
- Redesigning Wild Horse Signage with a Multispecies Community Lens

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION

*How can we put what we learn about multispecies communities into practice?
What insights might we gain and what questions will be raised from facilitating
broad-based, public experiences of multispecies community building?*

Real-world impact requires real-world action. To put our academic work to the test, AAI engages in multispecies community building through our Public Engagement program area. At the Washington Square Campus of NYU, we provide both public and NYU-facing opportunities from multispecies community building meetings, courses, and workshops, to public talks, vigils, and festivals.

AAI thus serves as a Multispecies Community Center, creating a hub of community-based knowledge exchange and action that is then disseminated through press, publications, partnerships, events, and other communication efforts.

Upcoming Public Engagement:

- **I Bird NYU** (a community science and education project, now in its second year)
- Weekly meetings for multispecies community building
- Laying the groundwork for an international network of multispecies community centers through NYU's global campuses



STEERING COMMITTEE



Becca Franks

Director

Becca Franks is an Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies at NYU. Combining quantitative methods and novel conceptual frameworks, her research on interspecies relationships and positive welfare deepens our understanding of animal lives, especially the lives of fishes.



Lauri Torgerson-White

Lauri Torgerson-White is an animal welfare scientist with extensive experience in research and program management. Her research explores the ways humans and other animals relate, with attention to how care informs multispecies communities.



Carol Ourivio

Carol Ourivio is a communications and engagement specialist with extensive experience managing NYU's audiences. She is interested in connecting people, human and non-human, and integrating storytelling and compassion into outreach and research.



Emma Bautista

Emma Bautista is an artist whose research-based practice foregrounds animal dignity and examines how ideology shapes the material reality of human and nonhuman animal relations, transforming materials of harm and neglect into sites of relational possibility.



SUPPORTING OUR WORK

The All Animals Initiative is seeking partners in support of our academic work, outreach activities, and annual operating budget. Because of our placement within the Environmental Studies Department at New York University, the majority of funding goes directly towards multispecies community building.

Our work engages individuals and foundations who seek ways to make a bigger impact with their giving. If you are interested in supporting rigorous scholarship that examines how humans relate to animals, and exploring solutions to our current polycrises with and for other animals, you can donate in two ways:

- Access the **NYU donation portal** and enter “All Animals Initiative” in the designation field to support the AAI fund, or
- Contact **allanimals@nyu.edu** or **beccafunks@nyu.edu** to discuss a gift for any of our funds.

Thank you!

CONTACT US

Website: allanimalsinitiative.org

Email: allanimals@nyu.edu or reach out to Professor Franks directly at beccafranks@nyu.edu

Address: 79 Washington Square East, Floor 6, New York, NY 10003

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² Crist, Eileen. 2018. "Reimagining the Human." *Science* 362 (6420): 1242–44.

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⁷ Brooks, Heather J. B., and Gordon M. Burghardt. 2023. "A Review of Interspecific Social Play among Nonhuman Animals." *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 151 (105232): 105232.

IMAGE CREDITS AND CAPTIONS

Title Page and Page 13: Illustrations by Emma Bautista, reference photography by Echo Chen.

Page 2: Photo of Effy's Reef in Bohol, Philippines, taken by Chiawen Chiang. Effy, a Bluestreak Cleaner Wrasse, is a member of our community who AAI researcher Chiawen met during a study on fish social dynamics. Effy bravely welcomed a human into her world, and her bravery endlessly inspires our work.

Page 3: Illustration of a Common Raccoon, by Emma Bautista.

Page 5: Photo of Becca Franks spending time with Koi fishes at Oko Farms in New York City, where she studied human-animal interactions.

Page 6: Illustration of a Red-Tailed Hawk, by Emma Bautista.

Page 7: Illustration of a Gold Dust Day Gecko, by Emma Bautista.

Page 8: Illustration of a Blacktip Reef Shark, by Emma Bautista.

Page 9: Photo of Being Otherwise, a piece by Emma Bautista. New York City pigeons enjoy sunflower seeds from a hand built of bird-deterrent spikes and other materials previously hostile to them.

Page 10: Photos of the NYU Urban Bird Project (I Bird NYU). Two Research Assistants monitoring for window collisions, and a student contributing to a collaborative art piece showing the migration of the NYU community, both bird and human.

Page 12: Photo of Invisible Neighbors, a piece by Emma Bautista. Larger-than-life fishes built out of textile waste, discarded plastic, and other trash reflect at once the diversity of life and the mindsets of disposability around water.

Page 14: Illustration of Bosco, by Emma Bautista. A beloved community member is shown enjoying a sensory world humans can only imagine.



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