FERAL ANIMALS IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

An Evolutionary History

The relationship between humans and domestic animals has changed in dramatic ways over the ages, and those transitions have had profound consequences for all parties involved. As societies evolve, the selective pressures that shape domestic populations also change. Some animals retain close relationships with humans, but many do not. Those who establish residency in the wild, free from direct human control, are technically neither domestic nor wild: they are feral. If we really want to understand humanity's complex relationship with domestic animals, then we cannot simply ignore the ones who went feral. This is especially true in the American South, where social and cultural norms have facilitated and sustained large populations of feral animals for hundreds of years. *Feral Animals in the American South* retells southern history from this new perspective of feral animals.

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(continued after Index)
Dedicated to my parents,

WILLIAM BENTLEY GIBSON
&
MARTHA SUE WOLFE GIBSON
EPIGRAPH

feral

/ˈfiːrəl/

Adjective; Latin – feralis (funereal; of or relating to the dead)

1 – Having escaped from domestication and returned to the wild

2 – Wild; savage; ferocious
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PREFACE

Historians once considered the “history of animals” such an unlikely subject that they openly ridiculed the idea in peer-reviewed journals, but that is no longer the case. Over the past several decades, historians have published countless academic books and scholarly articles on the topic, and, in the words of Harriet Ritvo, the profession is currently experiencing an “animal turn.” Despite this growing scholarly interest, however, years of research have convinced me that the general public still regards the history of animals as an unfamiliar topic. That being the case, many readers might find the following information helpful before diving in. First, humans are obviously animals, but, in the interest of narrative thrust, all references to “animals” within this text refer to nonhuman animals. Also, plural first-person pronouns like “we” and “our” are reserved for all humans and only all humans. Within the context of this study, these pronouns do not include animals, and they are never used in reference to some people but not others. Finally, the reader will notice many instances in which the narrative references “animals who” rather than “animals that.” This subtle distinction recognizes that animals are not lifeless automata, and that they are instead sentient organisms whose actions have influenced the course of life on Earth.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If this is the only part of the book anyone ever reads, I will not complain. Many different people have helped me on this project over the years, and I hope to err on the side of effusion when expressing my gratitude. I will begin by acknowledging my friend and former graduate advisor at Florida State University, Fritz Davis, who has helped shepherd this project from its very beginning. His contributions to the project are significant. I’d also like to thank Ron Doel, Andrew Frank, Kristine Harper, James Jones, and Jennifer Koslow in the Department of History at Florida State University, as well as Michael Ruse and the History and Philosophy of Science program at FSU. While I am thanking educators who have influenced me, I also want to acknowledge previous teachers at other institutions, including Mark Barrow, Richard Burian, Tom Ewing, Matthew Goodrum, and Amy Nelson at Virginia Tech, Lucy Corin at UC Davis, Darlin’ Neal at the University of Central Florida, William R. Alexander at the University of Mary Washington, R. E. Burnett at the National Defense University, Helen Storey at Penn State University, Edwina Prunty and Bobby Thompson at Ferrum College, and Mark Facknitz, Judy Good, Rose Gray, and Clive Hallman at James Madison University. I also want to thank everyone who has ever been associated in any way with the public school system in Franklin County, Virginia, and I am especially grateful toward my former English teachers, Terri Robertson, Raymond Williams, Jane Warren, Carla Tyree, and Leanne Worley.

I am thrilled that I can also finally thank the various people who have funded this project over the years. I especially want to thank Daniel and Sylvia Walbolt for endowing a five-year fellowship in the Department of History at Florida State University. This fellowship allowed me to study the mysteries of life for a living, and I sincerely thank them for their extraordinary generosity. I am also indebted to the Smithsonian Institution, which provided me with a Predoctoral Fellowship to support research on this project. In particular, I want to thank Pamela Henson...
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I had the privilege of personally meeting with many different people while researching this project. For example, I discussed feral animals with a variety of people at several different academic conferences, and I am grateful to all of them. I would especially like to thank my various co-panelists, including Diana Ahmad, Joanna Dean, Ann Norton Greene, Jason Kauffman, Joshua Kercsmar, Scott Mittenberger, Brett Mizelle, Edmund Russell, Samiparna Samanta, Sandra Swart, and Sam White. In addition, many other people graciously allowed me into their respective homes, offices, or laboratories, and patiently answered all of my questions. I want to express my sincere appreciation to I. Lehr Brisbin at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, Jack Mayer at the Savannah River National Laboratory, Melinda Zeder and Torben Rick at the National Museum of Natural History, Elizabeth Reitz at the University of Georgia, Glen Doran and Rochelle Marrinan at Florida State University, Skip Snow at Everglades National Park, Kate Christen at the National Zoological Park, Phil Sponenberg at Virginia Tech, Brooks Miles Barnes at Eastern Shore Public Library, Xiomar Mordcovich at Miami-Dade Animal Services, Elizabeth DuBose at the Ossabaw Island Foundation, as well as Bernard Unti, John Hadidian, Andrew Rowan, and Wayne Pacelle at the Humane Society of the United States. I also need to thank all of the people whom I never chanced to meet, but who graciously answered my questions on the phone and over email. Many thanks to Denise Bowden at the Chincoteague Fire Department, Peter Savolainen at
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This book began as my dissertation, and I had the good fortune to meet some truly awesome people while living under the Live Oaks and Spanish moss in Tallahassee. First, I want to thank Cindy Ermus. She has listened to me ramble on and on about dogs, horses, and pigs for years, and yet she has somehow never lost her charm, her wit, or her mind. I can never thank her enough. I also want to thank Justin Black, Madisen Rard, Scott Shubitz, Tiffany Hensley, Hendry Miller, Chris Wilhelm, Jonathan Shepard, Weston Nunn, Josh Meeks, Bryan Banks, Thomas Lahr, and Mike Bartholomew for our many fruitful conversations over the years.

And since it took me more than thirty years to write my first book, and I don’t know when I’ll write another, I want to give a shout-out to my brothers and best friends, Bays, Josh, and Jacob, their wives, Ranessa, Christina, and Kim, and their kids, Addison, Ainsley, Lera, Miles, Silas, Fisher, and Lucas. I love them all and they all deserve to see their names in print. Last but not least, I want to thank my parents, William Bentley Gibson and Martha Sue Wolfe Gibson, who gave me life and then taught me that the world is beautiful. They are both poets at heart. I thank them for everything they have ever done for me, and I dedicate this book to them, with love.