

People, Products, Pests and Pets: the discursive representation of animals

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The different ways in which people talk and write about animals is to be the topic of a major new research collaboration between **Professor Guy Cook** (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/people/academic/cookguy.aspx>), from the **Department of Education & Professional Studies** (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/index.aspx>), King's College London and **Dr Alison Sealey** (</staff/profiles/elal/sealey-alison.aspx>) at the University of Birmingham. Funded by **the Leverhulme Trust** (<http://www.leverhulme.ac.uk>), the project will run for three years, starting in September 2013.

The project uses a distinctive methodology to create an overview of the many ways in which animals feature in discourse, and how the views of those communicating professionally about animals relate to the language they use. First, a large digital database of texts about animals will be compiled from sources such as newspapers, wildlife broadcasts, campaigning literature, and food product labels, to be analysed using specialised linguistic software to reveal frequent patterns of language use. Second, interviews will be conducted with people whose jobs involve communicating about animals, such as broadcasters, scientists, environmentalists, and animal welfare campaigners, to elicit their views on the best language to achieve their purposes. Third, focus groups will be conducted with various interest groups and members of the general public, to ascertain their responses to different ways of speaking and writing about animals.



Both new scientific research and changes to the environment have brought a new urgency to understanding human perceptions of animals. Findings from the project will inform public debates about the ways animals feature in human experience: as companions, commodities, and quarry in hunting; in domains such as medical experiments, food production and consumption; and in respect of the practice and ethics of decision making about these issues, such as the balance between economic and conservationist criteria. Findings will also provide evidence about whether current ways of speaking and writing contribute to, or detract from, positive action in sustaining the co-existence of humans and animals.

- **[People, Products, Pests and Pets: the discursive representation of animals \(/schools/edacs/departments/englishlanguage/research/projects/people-products-pets.aspx\)](/schools/edacs/departments/englishlanguage/research/projects/people-products-pets.aspx)**