

## \* 32. Human-Bird Relationships in Hunting and Gathering Societies

### 16173 - Human-bird relationships in some Aboriginal cultures of inland Australia

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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In many cultures birds indicate things in the environment and they can be harbingers of news through their role in ecology and mythology. In arid parts of inland Australia, Aboriginal people identify birds that signal a range of phenomena. Most prevalent are the availability of water, the whereabouts of food, forthcoming meteorological events, as well as social phenomena such as danger and visitors. The Arandic people of central Australia recognize some 43 birds that indicate a variety of phenomenon in these categories. Why should birds be the most prevalent order of indicators? In addition to their ability to fly large distances, they have distinctive vocalizations that are evocative of language. In many cultures their onomatopoeic calls are 'linguamorphized', such as the often cited English 'did you get drunk' call of the chiming wedgebill. In Aboriginal languages, such calls can even give rise to the bird name itself, such as the singing honey-eater, which is literally 'going, going' (alpeyarte-alpeyarte) in the Arrernte language. In other cases the indicated phenomena may give rise to a bird name, such as the channel bill cuckoo, literally 'yeller of bush bananas' (Ikwarrer-arrpernenhe) in the Kaytetye language. In an effort to clarify a number of anomalous and outstanding issues in localized bird species identification and classification in Kaytetye, authors 1 and 3 undertook fieldwork using audio files of local birdcalls, in addition to carefully selected images. Using birdcalls as a stimulus for discussion confirmed the onomatopoeic basis of a number of bird names, as well as revealed the use of birdcalls as personal names. The role of birds as signifiers of ecological or social phenomenon is in many cases enshrined in local mythology. Ecological associations reveal Aboriginal people's detailed observations of the natural world, such as the presence of a black-breasted buzzard to indicate the presence of emu. Social associations, such as the call of a particular bird species that heralds a visitor or bad news, were explained by Aboriginal people as how people got news 'before telephone'. The great number of bird species that signal danger in the form of a nearby stranger reflects a fear that is still a controlling factor in Aboriginal people's mobility today. This points to the tenacity of worldview (Medicine 1999). In the course of this research, Aboriginal people identified such knowledge as at risk of being lost. As such, a poster of 'birds that signal things' was produced in four Arandic languages. Posters in two further languages have now been produced in collaboration with Aboriginal language speakers. More recently, a poster in the Welsh language has been produced. The posters have also proven to be valuable resource for Indigenous ranger programs.

## **16142 - Cree Goose Hunting and Ecological Calamity at James Bay**

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** *Scott, Colin (Dept of Anthropology, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada / Kanada)*

Hunting the spring and fall coastal migrations of Canada, snow and brant geese has for a long time been an economic, social and ritual phenomenon of immense importance to the James Bay Crees. Many of the most vivid tropes and images in the animistic complex of Cree hunting emanate from this arena, together with the largest scale communal orchestration of harvesting activities, and highly sophisticated modelling of coastal ecological processes. However, this activity is now a shadow of what it was until about twenty years ago. Beginning in the late 1980s, following implementation of the massive James Bay Hydro-electric project, a precipitous decline in eelgrass habitat and associated deterioration of other features in the James Bay and southern Hudson Bay coastal and marine ecosystem occurred. In this paper, I discuss Cree responses to this calamity, in regard to both adjustments in the Cree hunting life, and the politics of Cree and scientific knowledge about causes and effects.

## **16131 - Wildfowl as foodstuff source in the modern Siberia indigenous hunters' life**

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** *Klokov, Konstantin (Saint-Petersburg State University, Saint-Petersburg, Russian Fed. / Rus Föd.)*

Hunting wildfowl for nutrition plays a great role in the life of indigenous hunters in the North. Indigenous population mainly hunt waterfowl (ducks, geese) and grouse (Tetraonidae) – willow grouse, hazel grouse, capercailie, blackcock. Wildfowl is especially significant for the tundra indigenous people nutrition. Thus, each indigenous hunter on Kolguev Island (2008) hunted on an average 67 geese and 28 willow grouses a year, on Kanin Peninsula (2007) – 50 geese and 24 willow grouses a year; in North Yakutiya (2007) – as many as 14 geese in the Indigarka delta; 60 ducks (including eiders) – in the Yana delta; 9 willow grouses – in the Kolyma delta. (K.B. Klokov and E.E. Syroechkovsky, field data, obtained in the course of inquiry interviews and anonymous questionnaires). These numbers can be correlated with the data of the 1926/1927 Polar Census according to which the average kill for an indigenous family a year in the north of Arkhangelsk area was up to 28 geese (sedentary Samoyeds); 34 ducks and 110 willow grouses (nomadic Samoyeds); in the north of Yakutiya – 36 geese (the Kolyma Tunguses), 116 ducks (the Kolyma Yakuts), 99 willow grouses (Bulun Tunguses).

Geese bagging by the North indigenous people has stayed at the same level as in 1920ies but regional difference in the amount of killed birds has increased. Grouse bagging has decreased both in taiga and tundra. The reason is the changes in the number of birds during previous decades: the number of grouses has decreased everywhere, the number of geese in the west of the Arctic has increased, and in the east – decreased.

The majority of geese and ducks is killed by indigenous inhabitants in spring. The number and correlation of species in hunting bag mainly depends on the location of settlements as related to birds' migration ways. Social factors are not very significant. Spring game hunting real duration is about 1 month, but often it continues in summer. Formerly widespread ducks and geese killing in their molt period is now mainly practiced by nomadic reindeer herders, and in small size. Swans are used as foodstuff only in Yakutia.

Egg gathering exists in two variants. Nomadic reindeer herders gather some eggs per a family a year of mainly ducks, geese and waders (including small ones) in tundra. In some coastal communities near waterfowl, seabirds & gulls breeding colonies there is a tradition of mass eggs taking. Almost forgotten in Soviet years it restarted during the economic crisis period in the end of the 1990ies, when one couldn't buy chicken eggs in the shop. Thus, in Kolguev, in 2008, many indigenous families gathered 100 and more eggs each, mainly geese eggs. There exists a rule in all indigenous communities to leave 1-2 eggs in the nest.

## 16089 - A bird motive in the culture of northern Mansi

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** Fedorova, Elena (*Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) RAS, Saint-Petersburg, Russian Fed. / Rus Föd.*)

Many objects of the surrounding world are mirrored in beliefs, rites, folklore, and art of northern Mansi. Birds also became a part of this process. There are myths about a sky bird – Winged Kars. This is a gigantic bird which looks like an eagle. It builds its nests on a top of a larch, which grows on a lake or a sea. The myths about a diving bird tell about the creation of the Earth: a bird picks it up from the bottom of the sea. The image of a bird can be used for the depiction of spirits-protectors of particular settlements. Their images are well-known from archaeological and ethnographic data. These are metallic figures of birds, guises, which combine both ornitomorphous and anthropomorphous features and which can be represented by wooden figures in sacred sites. Bird images are reproduced in northern Mansi ornaments. Some patterns serve as markers of territorial groups.

The presentation will include more detailed characteristics of these particular and other topics, which are connected with birds in the culture of northern Mansi as well as will pay particular attention to the question how beliefs related to birds function today.

## **16008 - Becoming-bird: ontology of the human-bird encounter**

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** Bonta, Mark (*Pennsylvania State University, Bellefonte PA, USA*)

Where and with what do we begin in thinking about how humans relate to birds, and how humans think that they relate to birds, if we are to strip away the biases inherent in dominant Western representations? Seemingly fundamental to the human experience and beginning in childhood is the I/thou encounter-with-bird-as-sentient-being, which entails some sort of mutual, if ephemeral, bond between bird and person. I examine this 'becoming-bird' entanglement with the aid of French thinkers Deleuze and Guattari (who helped bury Western philosophy and scientism with a turn toward ecstatic philosophy founded in non-linear dynamics). My intent is to pull something universally human out of two parallel discussions in their 'A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia': one on the conceptual shift from being to becoming—which opens the possibility of bird/human symbioses on various registers; the other involving their Olivier Messaien-inspired riffs on birdsong and avian territorialities, particularly the case of the Tooth-billed Bowerbird ('brown stagemaker'). I ground this in my own observations of quotidian interactions at local duck ponds (in Pennsylvania), on the chicken-filled streets of Key West, Florida, and with hunters in eastern Honduras.

## 15920 - Oracle Birds and Spirits of the Forest: Hunters and their Avian Companions on Formosa

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** *Simon, Scott (Université d'Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada / Kanada)*

The island of Formosa (Taiwan), home to some 500,000 indigenous people, is known to Oceanists as the probable foyer of the Austronesian dispersal throughout the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Their traditional territory comprises over half of the island, mostly on the treacherous forested mountains that historically held little interest to rice farmers who came from the Asian Mainland beginning in the 17th century. The indigenous groups, now divided into 16 "tribes," have maintained rich knowledge of the wild fauna and flora, especially "mountain reserves" in the Highlands. Hunting, fishing, horticulture, and gathering are still important aspects of life in rural areas; and highly valued activities even for those who work in the cities for most of the year. Because of these activities, they remain conscious of their relationship with mammals and birds of the forest. This paper focuses on the avian knowledge of the Truku, a people once known for the arts of warfare and for head-hunting in the mountainous forests. Hunters and horticulturalists observe bird behaviour for pleasure, to protect their crops, and for divinatory signs. The sisil bird (Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, *Alcippe morrisonia*), which has become the national symbol of both the Sediq and Truku tribes, predicts success or failure in the hunt. The owl announces the sex of unborn children. Another mysterious bird augurs death. The Truku understand these bird auguries as ways in which the ancestors (*utux*) communicate with the living. Attention to these birds is thus part of a wider ritual context of hunting that involves activities of ancestor offerings, dream interpretation, and the use of hunting charms. Although various churches have attempted to label these practices as superstition and eliminate them, many hunters have adopted syncretic practices rather than abandoning the rituals entirely. In recent years, there has been a gradual revalorisation of these practices, especially since the 2005 Indigenous Peoples Basic Law calls for the government to promote bio-diversity as well as Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices. The goal of this paper, based on field research in Taiwan, is to place knowledge of birds within a wider ritual and cosmological context. Systems of bird divination, according to Lévi-Strauss, seem arbitrary, but become coherent within the larger context of cosmology. This paper explores the avian cosmology of the Truku within its historical complexity and across the social change of contemporary life. Which birds are most salient to the Truku? How do Truku hunters and trappers relate to various birds of the forest? How do they perceive these birds as living beings, and incorporate them into a larger religious system? How do they negotiate between the sacred world of the forest, the demands of their Christian churches, and their relations with the wider society in a postcolonial context?

## 15901 - Saving Birds Left Behind: An Ethnography of Non-Domesticating Taming in Interior Alaska

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** Kondo, Shiaki (*University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, USA*)

In several Athabascan societies of Interior Alaska, it is known that there are a few individuals from among the migrating summer birds (e.g. White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Rusty Blackbird) that are left behind every year after others have left for warmer places. On occasion, people took pity on them and provided the birds left behind with food and shelter. They let the birds go in spring when they could survive on their own. In this paper, I describe this practice as "non-domesticating taming" and explore the ways in which it can be understood in the context of northern hunting cultures, which have been traditionally known for their reluctance to domesticate wild animals.

The practice can be characterized as "non-domesticating taming" because it does not aim to control the reproduction of the bird species involved. In this sense, it is not domestication, which has the connotation of multi-generation relationships, resulting in significant mutual influence to both parties. On the other hand, it alters the individual birds enough to accustom them to human presence and adapt them to a new environment (e.g. foraging on the dining table and consuming human food such as salami sausage and chocolate milk).

To understand this practice, it is important to note that care for survival and reciprocity are an important values in Northern Athabascan society: they have survived the harsh subarctic environment for thousands of years and helped resource-impaired persons in need of assistance (e.g. American Army explorers and homeless people in Anchorage). This inclination, which I would call "strategies of maximizing the survival of the maximum number of persons," applies not only to human persons but also to non-human persons such as the White-crowned Sparrow.

My analysis was inspired by the recent discussions on human-animal sociality and reciprocity in northern hunting societies by Tim Ingold and Paul Nadasdy. However, I disagree with Nadasdy's assertion that human-human relationships in Athabascan ontologies are governed by "generalized reciprocity," while "balanced reciprocity" informs human-animal counterparts. Rather than recognizing two separate principles in human-human relations on one hand and human-animal ones on the other, I propose a context-dependent view. What matters more is whether the persons involved retain survivability. Animals in self-sufficient conditions (e.g. summer birds in summer) are not supposed to be the target of such care, but the same species of songbird can be so when they lack necessities to be self-sufficient persons including sufficient food, warm clothes and/or long-distance mobility.

## **15887 - Bird divination among the Eastern Penan, Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo: amen juhit**

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** Rothstein, Mikael (University of Southern Denmark (SDU), Odense M, Denmark / Dänemark)

Like most indigenous peoples of central Borneo, the Eastern Penan will observe the movements of birds and listen to avian sounds for divinatory purposes. No questions, however, are presented to the oracle, and no rituals are instigated in order to attract a response. The Penan only use spontaneously occurring divinatory revelations. Many observers, not least Christian missionaries eager to 'civilise' Penan and bring the traditional Penan religion to a halt, have argued that the birds annoy and confuse the primitive foragers, and ethnographic analysis rarely go beyond mere description. By means of ornithological insights, a deeper analysis is, however, possible. In this presentation I shall offer a rather detailed discussion of how, more precisely, the amen juhit-system works by criss-crossing between ornithology, ethnography and comparative religion. My main concern is to show how the behaviour of one species (humans) is, in fact, influenced, or even determined, by another (various species of birds), and that this interconnectedness between very different beings is a prerequisite for the long-time survival of humans in their rainforest environment.

## **15822 - Heard but not seen: humans, birds, and music in a forest dwelling society**

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** *Rudge, Alice (UCL, Mayfield, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)*

In this paper, I present ethnographic data collected during ongoing fieldwork with the Batek of Malaysia. I combine data on human-bird interactions with an analysis of Batek musical behaviour. I consequently illuminate the intertwining roles of human-bird relationships and music in Batek everyday life.

The sounds made by birds are a great source of musical inspiration for the Batek. The two musical instruments they use are each ideally suited to imitating these sounds. Much of their flute repertoire is based on the songs of various birds, and the rhythmic vibrations of the mouth harp evocatively recreate the sensation of large flapping wings. Both the sounds of the birds themselves and the realisation of these sounds in music are often associated with emotional reactions of longing and nostalgia.

The relationship between the Batek and birds is also practical. Birds are useful as a food source, and their calls are manipulated as a tool for hunting. Batek can use birds' calls as signs to predict and read events such as comings and goings, deaths, and sickness. I discuss how this practical understanding of the birds around them manifests itself in Batek musical behaviour.

I consider, with reference to birdsong, how the Batek embed the sounds of their environment in their music. In doing so, I explore further how the sonic qualities of their forest environment are used and understood, and shed light on the role of music-making in Batek everyday life.