Kent Academic Repository

Whittle, Matthew (2026) *Settler Colonial Intrusion, Tasmanian Tiger Extinction, and Animal Privacy in Walton Ford's The Undead.* Privacy Studies Journal . pp. 101-118. ISSN 2794-3941.

Downloaded from
https://kar.kent.ac.uk/112872/ The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from
https://doi.org/10.7146/psj.v.166784

This document version
Publisher pdf

DOI for this version

Licence for this version
UNSPECIFIED

Additional information

Versions of research works

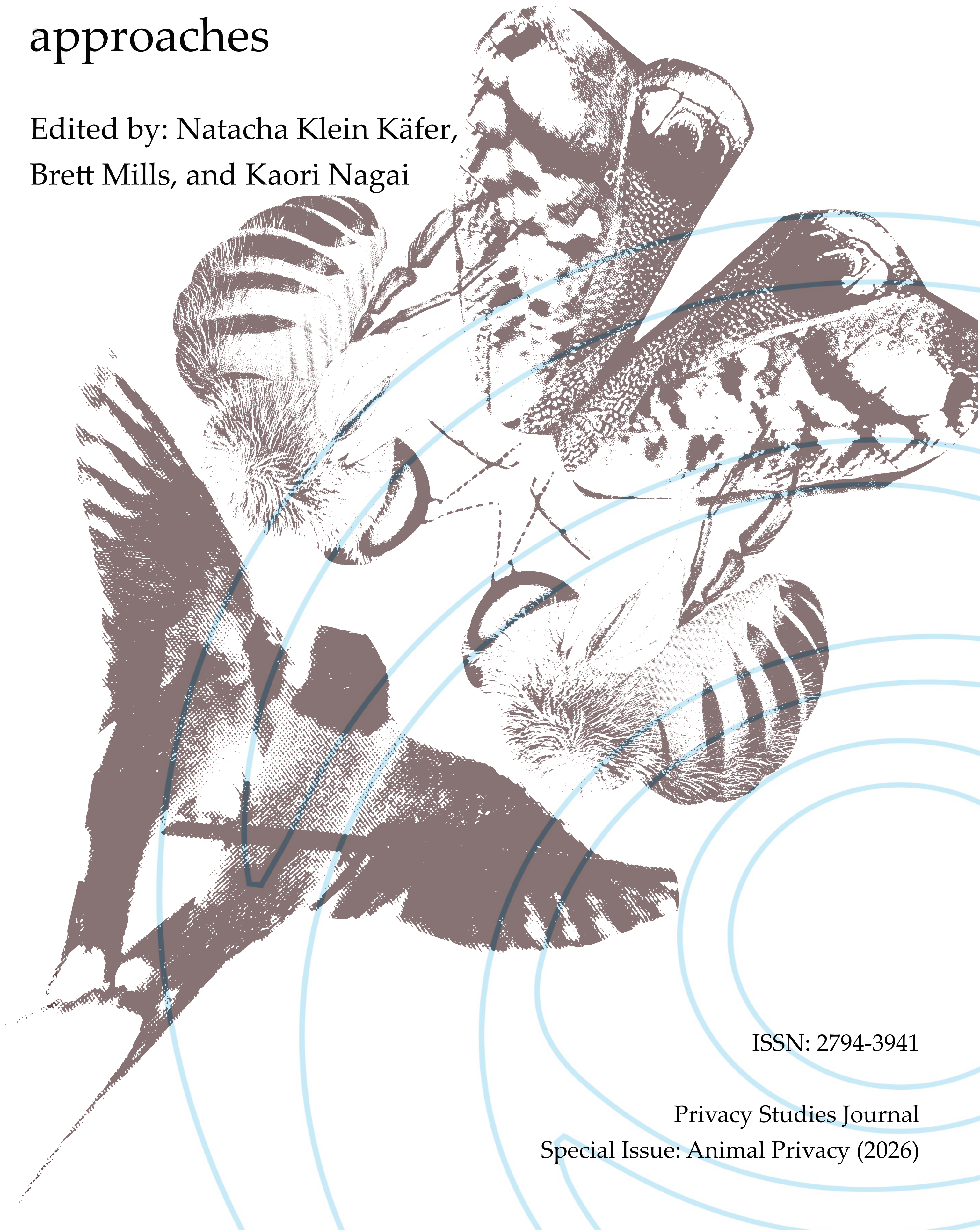
Versions of Record
If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts
If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in ***Title of Journal*** , Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries
If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies).

ANIMAL PRIVACY: Historical and Conceptual approaches

Edited by: Natacha Klein Käfer, Brett Mills, and Kaori Nagai



ISSN: 2794-3941

Privacy Studies Journal
Special Issue: Animal Privacy (2026)

Settler Colonial Intrusion, Tasmanian Tiger Extinction, and Animal Privacy in Walton Ford's The Undead

Matthew Whittle

Privacy Studies Journal
ISSN: 2794-3941

Special Issue: Animal Privacy (2026): 101-118

Special Issue - ANIMAL PRIVACY: Historical and Conceptual Approaches

Table of Contents

Introduction to ANIMAL PRIVACY: Historical and Conceptual Approaches by Natacha Klein Käfer, Brett Mills, and Kaori Nagai ...... pp. 1-13

Here's Looking at You, Kid: Nonhuman and Human Privacy Entanglements in the Surveillant Assemblage by Delia Langstone ...... pp. 14-35

The Ethics of Privacy and Consent in Anthrozoological Investigations by Michelle Szydlowski, Jes Hooper, Sarah Oxley Heaney, and Kristine Hill .... pp. 36-59

Baby Watch: Capitalism, Technology, and the History of Maternal Privacy and Livestreamed Surveillance in Captive Animal Spaces by Andrea Ringer ...... pp. 60-81

The Constitutional Monarch and his Mini Zoo: The Case of Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah by Zahid Zamri ...... pp. 82-100

Settler Colonial Intrusion, Tasmanian Tiger Extinction, and Animal Privacy in Walton Ford's The Undead by Matthew Whittle ...... pp. 101-118

Animal Soundscapes and Early Modern Privacy at the Danish Court, Christine Jeanneret ...... pp. 119-145

Abstract

This article examines the role of contemporary visual art in contributing to privacy studies debates about the ethics of looking at animal suffering. Concentrating on Walton Ford's painting The Undead (2008), it expands these debates—which have focused on images of animal captivity in zoos and slaughterhouses—to include the connections between species extinction and settler colonial intrusion. It reveals that the artwork satirizes illustrations that solidified the Tasmanian tiger's status as a threat to livestock for settler colonialists. Placing The Undead in comparison with documentary footage of Tasmanian tigers in zoos and farmed sheep in abattoirs, the article goes on to explore how images of caged and malnourished Tasmanian tigers have secured the animal's place in conservation discourse while the mistreatment of sheep is concealed. Reflecting on the private/public dichotomy, the article adopts a terminology of active non-publicity to name this concealment. It concludes by demonstrating that a commensurate concealment is evident in the lack of attention paid to the genocide of Aboriginal Tasmanians. In exploring the non-human and human costs of settler colonial intrusion, the article argues for creative portrayals of suffering that can signal attention to the histories and legacies of European colonialism without violating animal privacy.

Keywords

Settler colonialism; species extinction; thylacine; Tasmanian tiger; Walton Ford

Introduction

It is emphatically the case that, if the habitat and habits of the Tasmanian tiger (also known by the name thylacine) had remained private from European settler colonial intrusion, the species would still be roaming the earth today.[1] When British settlers established sheep farms on the Australian penal colony of Van Dieman's Land (modern-day Tasmania) in the 1820s, they encountered the marsupial carnivore with stripes on its back (hence the label 'tiger') and incorrectly believed it to be a threat to their livestock of sheep and cattle. This myth saw Tasmanian tigers labelled as pests, leading to a bounty that was paid out to hunters by the Van Dieman's Land Company, farmers' societies, and the government. The colonization of the island also meant that the parts of Tasmania that were "once truly remote and considered thylacine refuges" were "opened up to industrial logging, mining, hydro-power generation and tourism."[2] By 1910, the species was critically endangered; in 1930, the last wild Tasmanian tiger was killed; and, in 1936, the last captive Tasmanian tiger died in Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart. Despite hopes that a Tasmanian tiger population had survived in the island's remotest regions, searches sponsored by the government threw up no further sightings and the Tasmanian tiger was officially declared extinct in 1986.[3]

In this article, I will examine a contemporary artwork that stages and critiques the settler colonial intrusion into the Tasmanian tiger's private habitat: *The Undead* (2008, Fig. 1) by the American painter Walton Ford. This artwork satirizes the illustrations created by nineteenth-century settlers that depicted the Tasmanian tiger as a savage predator. It also frames the story of its extirpation and status as a "flagship example of human-induced extinction" as having been disconnected from the treatment of sheep in Australian farming facilities.[4] In presenting us with a lone Tasmanian tiger and a lamb in a secluded woodland spot, *The Undead* redresses this disconnection and portrays a private, eco-centric kinship between two non-human animals joined together in their suffering due to the violence of settler colonial anthropocentricism.

This focus on contemporary art, settler colonialism, and species extinction draws on scholarship in privacy studies concerning the ethics of viewing images of animal suffering whilst also expanding the purview of such debates. Existing animal privacy scholarship, as Angie Pepper notes, has been of "increasing concern to those working in wildlife filmmaking, conservation, media studies and journalism" and has been informed by "insights from multiple disciplinary fields including psychology, biology, ethology,

---

1 It is common for the Tasmanian tiger to also be referred to as a "thylacine", which derives from its scientific name *Thylacinus cynocephalus*. I have adopted the term Tasmanian tiger throughout this article, but some sources use thylacine.

2 David Maynard, "Tasmanian Tiger: Precious Little Remains," in *Animals, Plants and Afterimages: The Art and Science of Representing Extinction*, ed. Valérie Bienvenue and Nicholas Chare (Berghahn Books, 2022), 318.

3 See Robert Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger: The History and Extinction of the Thylacine* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Owen, *Thylacine: The Tragic Tale of the Tasmanian Tiger* (Allen & Unwin, 2003); David Maynard and Tammy Gordon, *Tasmanian Tiger: Precious Little Remains* (Foot and Playsted, 2014); and Ben Garrod, *Extinct: Thylacine, the Story of Life on Earth* (Zephyr, 2022)

4 Peter B. Banks and Dieter F. Hochuli, "Extinction, De-extinction and Conservation: A Dangerous Mix of Ideas," *Australian Zoologist* 38, no. 3 (2017): 391, https://doi.org/10.7882/AZ.2016.012.

animal welfare and veterinary science."[5] Yet, to date, animal privacy scholarship has not involved theoretical methodologies and analytical practices rooted in postcolonial studies and the visual arts.[6] Furthermore, while research into animal privacy has attended to images of the incarceration of animals in zoos and slaughterhouses,[7] the filming of animal anguish for wildlife documentaries,[8] and the relationship between privacy and species loss,[9] the historical links between settler colonial intrusion, farming, and extinction have gone unexplored. In placing *The Undead* in comparison with footage of one of the last Tasmanian tigers and videos of the abusive handling of sheep at Tasmanian farms, I will show how the artwork explores the colonial contexts of animal suffering in a way that provides an alternative to the invasion of privacy that is so central to images of zoos and abattoirs.

Fig. 1: The Undead (2008) © Walton Ford. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin, New York.

Lastly, comparing these images allows me to test a distinction between the right to privacy of suffering animals and what I term the *active non-publicity* of interlinked forms of human and nonhuman suffering in settler colonial contexts. This will involve an examination of how the state-sanctioned exposure of the suffering experienced by the Tasmanian tiger is too often detached from forms of exploitation that go unrecognized by the state: not only the rearing and killing of sheep but also the genocide of dehumanized Aboriginal Tasmanians that coincided with the extinction of Tasmanian tigers. Ultimately, this examination brings me to the con-

5 Angie Pepper, "Glass Panels and Peepholes: Nonhuman Animals and the Right to Privacy," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2020): 629, 632, https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12329.

6 The Tasmanian tiger has featured in two further works of contemporary art that link its extinction to the history of European colonialism, both of which are sculptures: *Luna 2* (2014) by the Aboriginal Tasmanian artist Vicki West and *The First Supper (Galaxy Black)* (2023) by the Bahamian artist Tavares Strachan.

7 See Elisa Aaltola, "Animal Suffering: Representations and the Act of Looking," *Anthrozoös* 27, no. 1 (2014): 19–31, https://doi.org/10.2752/175303714X13837396326297; Pepper, "Glass," 7–8.

8 See Brett Mills, "Television Wildlife Documentaries and Animals' Right to Privacy," *Continuum* 24, no. 2 (2010): 193–202, https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903362726.

9 See Anat Pick, "Why Not Look at Animals?", *European Journal of Media Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015), 107–25, http://dx.doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/15175.

clusion that, if we are to advocate for the right to privacy of non-human animals, we must do so without divorcing the reasons for that lack of privacy from the brutal histories and ongoing legacies of capitalist-imperialism.

Predator, Pest, Protector: Depicting the Tasmanian Tiger

The growing scholarship on animal privacy seeks to question the anthropocentric belief, succinctly encapsulated by John Berger, that when humans look at non-human animals, "[t]he animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas, are specifically addressed to man."[10] Berger makes it clear that this belief exists only in the human imagination, and that the capacity of non-human animals "to observe us has lost all significance."[11] A privacy studies framework counters the anthropocentric objectification of animals by advocating for animal 'secrets' remaining necessarily secret to humans. This necessity may be, as Pepper notes, because some animal behaviours and rituals are significant for defining social hierarchies, for establishing trust and intimacy, for obtaining food and information, or for founding territories.[12] To this we can add: for their very survival from human intrusion and domination.

In his artwork *The Undead*, Ford depicts the now-extinct Tasmanian tiger as part of his aim to undertake what he calls a "cultural history of the way animals live in the human imagination."[13] Across his oeuvre, which stretches from the early 1990s to today, this project has often involved painting extinct or endangered non-human animals in dramatic scenes where humans are rarely seen but their ecologically damaging intrusions on the natural world is implied.[14] Collectively, these artworks recall Berger's contention that "[w]hat we know about [animals] is an index of our power."[15] In the case of the Tasmanian tiger, its extinction indexes the European settler-colonial power to demonize and destroy entire species under the banner of exporting capitalist modernity across the globe. In *The Undead*, Ford depicts the Tasmanian tiger standing over a prostrate lamb,

10 John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* (Penguin Books, 2009), 14.

11 Berger, *Animals*, 27. For a work that has become a touchstone for scholars advocating for the ability of animals to return the human gaze, see Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. by David Wills (Fordham University Press, 2008).

12 Pepper, "Glass," 628–50.

13 Calvin Tomkins, "Man and Beast: The Narrative Art of Walton Ford," *The New Yorker*, January 18, 2009 https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/01/26/man-and-beast.

14 Ford's preoccupation with species extinction and colonialism is evident across his paintings collected in the Taschen book *Pancha Tantra* (2020). For a close reading of Ford's paintings of extinct great auks in *Funk Island* and *The Witch of St. Kilda* (2005) see Nicole M. Merola, "Assembling the Archive: Close(ly) Reading Great Auk Extinction with Walton Ford," in *Close Reading the Anthropocene*, ed. Helena Feder (Routledge, 2021), 45–59. For a discussion of how Ford's depiction of a golden eagle in his painting *Delirium* (2004) satirizes the North American, settler colonial concept of Manifest Destiny, see Antoine Traisnel, *Capture: American Pursuits and the Making of a New Animal Condition* (University of Minneapolis Press, 2020). I have written elsewhere about how Ford's depictions of hunted and dying animals capture the violence rooted in a markedly male, upper-class, Euro-American desire to name and claim the colonized environment, a violence that is elided in the tradition of naturalist art. For this analysis, see Matthew Whittle, "Lost Trophies: Hunting Animals and the Imperial Souvenir in Walton Ford's *Pancha Tantra*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 51, no. 2 (2016): 196–210, https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989415624957.

15 Berger, *Animals*, 27.

staging how the animal existed in the psyche of British settlers. The painting's composition depicts the way in which Tasmanian tigers were viewed by settler colonial farmers as a vampiric killer of livestock: the Tasmanian tiger's open jaws make it look ready to feast on its prey, while the lamb—its neck bloodied—stares out at the painting's viewer with a blank expression, suggesting that it may already be dead. The composition mimics the imagery of Dracula preparing to drink the blood of an unconscious, white, female virgin, embodying what Ford calls the settler-colonial "myth of a huge, bipedal, nocturnal vampire-beast that sucked the blood of sheep."[16] The colours of the painting also stage a dichotomy between good and evil: the dark green of the moss and tree serves to accentuate the whiteness of the lamb, emphasizing its symbolic associations with innocence (for example, in the phrase "like a lamb to the slaughter") as well as its key role in the settler's vision of Tasmania as a land of pastoral purity. By comparison, the vampiric Tasmanian tiger stands in for a supposedly savage, non-European wilderness that must be tamed and domesticated through the dispossession of Indigenous people and fauna.

This artwork is characteristic of Ford's adoption and adaptation of the aesthetics of nineteenth-century naturalist art that sought to illustrate newly discovered species. Ford's anachronistic aesthetic choices include his use of marginalia (such as writing the painting's title in cursive script) as well as yellowing the edges of the paper and adding small brownish dots (known as "foxing"), giving his contemporary artworks the ersatz markers of age, as though they have been discovered in a long-forgotten archive. Yet, Ford's paintings are never merely recirculating and mimicking the conservative, taxonomic aesthetics of nineteenth-century depictions of wildlife. In his interview with *The New Yorker*, Ford maintains that he seeks "to take the language of the nineteenth-century natural-history illustrators and use it in a way they would never have imagined—to plumb our own collective ways of thinking about the natural world and these beings we share the planet with."[17] Ford's artworks are thus not contemporary attempts to revive the antiquated aesthetics of taxonomic, naturalist painting but rather seek to place that artistic tradition in tension with various manifestations of geopolitical and ecological violence against non-human animals.

In this way, *The Undead* acts as a modern-day parody of and riposte to nineteenth-century illustrations of Tasmanian tigers that played an important role in promoting their supposed savagery and reputation as an unwelcome intruder on settler colonial land. According to Maynard,

> The earliest drawing of the thylacine produced by a European settler, the surveyor George Prideaux Robert Harris in 1808, reflected that generation's love of natural history and species discovery; however, the artist delivered a misshapen and dangerous-looking animal, somewhat like a hyena.[18]

16 Tomkins, "Man".

17 Tomkins, "Man".

18 Maynard, "Tasmanian," 318. For more on the importance of visual portrayals of Tasmanian tigers in contributing to Western misconceptions of the animal's supposed savagery see Carol Freeman, *Paper Tiger: A Visual History of the Thylacine* (Brill, 2010) and Jack Ashby, "Drawn to Extinction: Depic-

In his accompanying description, Harris asserted that the Tasmanian tiger's eyes are "large and full, black, […] which gives the animal a savage and malicious appearance."[19] This imagery and language, as Maynard notes, "influenced attitudes and actions up to, and after, extinction."[20] One of the key ways in which Ford departs from the aesthetic traditions of such nineteenth-century naturalist and taxonomic illustration of animals by figures such as Harris is in his use of ambiguity that allows the painting's composition to be open to a number of interpretations to viewers. Where the nineteenth-century natural history illustrators presented supposedly objective, taxonomic accounts of the non-human world, Ford tells visual stories that are "allegories of colonialism, conservation and human nature."[21] In an interview with *Whitehot Magazine*, Ford commented on his wish to avoid being "dogmatic" or creating works where "there's no alternative narrative."[22] His paintings, instead, invite viewers to find multiple readings, and *The Undead* offers a typical example of this.

Ford's rendering of animal suffering in *The Undead* presents the viewer with at least two opposing images simultaneously: first is that of the settler colonial psyche that acts as a satirical response to Harris's illustration; secondly, however, the subtleties of Ford's composition reveal to viewers an image of the Tasmanian tiger as a nurturing and protective presence, whereby the dichotomy of predator and prey is overlayed with a private moment of eco-centric kinship. Ford has stated that *The Undead* depicts a "fever dream of the Tasmanian settler alone in the bush with these animals."[23] The painting thus invites the viewer to ask whether the Tasmanian tiger depicted is set to feast on the lamb, or if it has been caught looking out over its shoulder with its back to the colonial settler—the killer of lambs and the hunter of wild animals—in anticipation of an attack. The Tasmanian tiger's right paw can be read not as trapping the lamb but as guarding it from the very people who purport to be its protectors but who rear it only to disassemble and commodify its body as mutton. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the lamb's hoof is pictured resting gently on the Tasmanian tiger's leg. And while the lamb's neck is bloodied, on close inspection, there is no corresponding blood evident on the Tasmanian tiger's teeth, a detail that suggests that the supposedly voracious animal pictured may, in fact, have found the lamb already maimed.

It is in the co-existence of these two interpretations that we can discern the painting's staging of a paradox at the heart of the anthropocentric, settler colonial intrusion into the lives of nonhuman animals. This paradox hinges on the fact that the extinction of the

ting the Thylacine," Linnean Society, May 15, 2024, 55 min., 38 sec., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8qtzQkPfUE.

19 George Prideaux Robert Harris, "Description of Two New Species of *Didelphis* From Van Dieman's Land," quoted in "The Early European Thylacine Literature," REPAD: The Recently Extinct Plants and Animals Database, last modified September 2025, https://recentlyextinctspecies.com/thylacine-archive/early-thylacine-literature-1642-1850.

20 Maynard, "Tasmanian," 318.

21 Claire Howarth, "Artist Walton Ford on his Wildlife Paintings," *Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2014, www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304572204579501810948837306.

22 Walton Ford, "From the Vaults: July 2008, Interview with Walton Ford," interview by Ajay Kurian, *Whitehot Magazine*, July 2008, https://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/2008-interview-with-walton-ford/1490.

23 Tomkins, "Man".

Tasmanian tiger was justified on the grounds of protecting docile and innocent lambs from a supposedly wild and vampiric beast; and yet what was, in fact, being protected was the economic interests of settler farmers operating in a global system of commodity production wherein the lamb's value lies in the eventuality that it will be killed and eaten. For this economic system to prevail, the private lives, habits, and habitats of both animals—regarded by the settler farmer as existing at opposite ends of the predator/prey dichotomy—must be violently intruded upon. In the following section, I will go on to explore how, since its extinction, an absence of privacy regarding the suffering of Tasmanian tigers held captive in zoos has also been integral to its cultural status in Australia becoming central to animal conservation. While this marks an important shift in the species' reputation from pest to pedestal, the publicity of such imagery reveals a contradiction that must be attended to: namely, that while the extinction of the Tasmanian tiger has been actively rewritten into the history of Australia, the centrality of animal suffering in abattoirs—along with the concurrent genocide of Aboriginal peoples who were stewards of Tasmanian tigers—is actively hidden from view.

Privacy versus Active Non-Publicity

The story of the Tasmanian tiger's extinction has become foundational to conservation efforts in Australia to the point where, in 1996, the country's annual National Threatened Species Day was established on September 7, the date that the last known Tasmanian tiger died in captivity. This was made possible by the availability of film footage and photography of caged Tasmanian tigers in zoos. While such imagery worked to transform the animal in Australia's collective consciousness from a savage beast to an icon of animal welfare, the tight focus on the Tasmanian tiger in conservation discourse has an adverse effect of detaching its history of suffering from interconnected stories of both human and non-human suffering that go actively *un*publicized. In the case of Tasmanian history, two such stories of suffering at the hands of precisely the same settler colonial forces that extinguished the Tasmanian tiger involve Aboriginal Tasmanians and farmed sheep. These stories do not fit neatly into a private/public dichotomy, but rather into a category that can be called *active non-publicity*.

In conceptualizing this term, I am drawing on Paul Gilroy's notion of "active forgetting" in post-imperial nations. In *After Empire: Multiculturalism or Convivial Culture?* (2005), Gilroy writes that "[o]nce the history of the empire became a source of discomfort, shame, and perplexity" for formerly imperial nations such as Britain, "its complexities and ambiguities were readily set aside. Rather than work through those feelings, that unsettling history was diminished, denied, and then, if possible, *actively forgotten*."[24] What Gilroy foregrounds here is that certain stories and lived experiences are not merely forgotten; rather, those histories that prove to be disruptive to the nation's narrative about itself are actively written out. This involves the selective acknowledgement of certain strands of a nation's history and the reduction of the significance of others. In the context of this article, Australia has sought to 'work through' its 'unsettling history' of species extinction by publicizing images of what was, until very recently, thought to be the last Tasmanian

24 Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Multiculturalism or Convivial Culture?* (Routledge, 2005), 98, emphasis added.

tiger, and by commemorating its death with an annual day of reflection on human-induced species endangerment. Receiving no such publicity are the histories of Australia's treatment of its Aboriginal populations and the animal that is farmed for its wool and meat, despite the fact they are commensurate with the story of the Tasmanian tiger. As I will go on to explore, the case of the Tasmanian tiger situates the topic of species extinction within existing debates in privacy studies concerning the ethics of viewing film and photography of animal suffering. At the same time, it raises questions about whether the categories of public/private are sufficient when the publicity of the Tasmanian tiger coincides with the active non-publicity of related stories of settler colonial genocide and the mistreatment of animals in agricultural farming.

The fact that species endangerment is brought to Australia's attention on the date that the last Tasmanian tiger died highlights how the animal has been rewritten into the nation's history at a time when Australia has seen the highest rate of mammal extinction across the globe.[25] This rate of species loss has meant that the country is at the forefront of reports that Earth is entering its sixth mass extinction event (the fifth being the extinction of the dinosaurs 66 million years ago).[26] To date, over ten percent of Australia's land mammals have been declared extinct since European settlement in the late eighteenth century and "[a]ll of these extinctions," write Peter B. Banks and Dieter F. Hochuli, "are in some way linked to human involvement, whether by introducing alien species, removing habitat, changing land use or burning regimes."[27] This has meant that "Australia has an acute sense of extinction guilt."[28] Contemporary calls to reckon with the conditions underpinning the Tasmanian tiger's extinction have led to it becoming central to efforts to use this guilt as fuel for empathy towards non-human animal species.

To mark National Threatened Species Day in 2021, the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) released newly colourized archival footage from 1933 of what was thought to be the last known Tasmanian tiger, a male called Benjamin, who was locked in a cage at Beaumaris Zoo.[29] The footage shows a lone, skinny and lethargic-looking animal pacing around the edges of its enclosure, lying down, and opening its iconic jaws. The film has often been coupled with a photograph taken in May 1936 of the same Tasmanian tiger looking malnourished and mistreated in its zoo enclosure.[30] The story of the Tasmanian tiger endling has been given added emotive depth with the details that Benjamin was "consistently neglected" by the zoo's management and was either "unfed" or "left

25 Adam Morton, "Australia Confirms Extinction of 13 More Species, Including First Reptile Since Colonisation," *The Guardian*, March 3, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/mar/03/australia-confirms-extinction-of-13-more-species-including-first-reptile-since-colonisation.

26 For a detailed overview of the 'sixth extinction' see Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (Bloomsbury, 2014).

27 Banks and Hochuli, "Extinction," 391.

28 Banks and Hochuli, "Extinction," 391.

29 See Simon Drake, "1933 Thylacine Footage Colourised," NFSA, n.d., 1 min., 17 sec., https://www.nfsa.gov.au/latest/colourised-footage-last-tasmanian-tiger. The film is not the only example of footage of captive Tasmanian tigers. According to Maynard, there exists other instances of "historical film footage of captive thylacines in the London and Hobart zoos" that show "dog-like creatures held in poor conditions, some being taunted to 'perform' for the audience" (Maynard, "Tasmanian," 324).

30 See "Extinction of thylacine," National Museum Australia, n.d., https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/extinction-of-thylacine.

with the remains of the previous day's food."[31] This neglect ultimately led to Benjamin's premature death in 1936 when he was accidentally locked out of his enclosure and exposed to freezing temperatures. Adding to the tragic overtones of this historic loss is the fact that it occurred just nine days after the Tasmanian tiger became protected as part of Australia's Animals and Birds Protection Act.

The story of Benjamin persisted as a cautionary tale of avoidable human negligence until 2023 when research by Robert Paddle and Kathryn Medlock revealed that the enclosed animal captured in this well-known film footage and photography is not, in fact, the Tasmanian tiger endling. Noting that Benjamin's remains have never been found by researchers, Paddle and Medlock discovered that he was in fact the penultimate of his species, and that one day after the now famous photograph of Benjamin was taken in May 1936 he died of neglect. When his body was found by the zoo, it was treated as refuse and dumped in the daily waste collection.[32] Days later, a new Tasmanian tiger specimen was bought by Beaumaris Zoo—an unnamed elderly female—but documentation was not recorded due to the species being recently protected by law. Paddle and Medlock's research confirms that it was this unnamed female, and not Benjamin, who died on September 7, 1936, and who was the last of the Tasmanian tigers.

At the time of writing, the colourized NFSA footage of a caged Benjamin has garnered over four million views on its YouTube channel and so assessing its popularity contributes to scholarly attention given to the problem of animal privacy in filmed wildlife documentaries and footage of animal abuse in zoos and slaughterhouses.[33] For Brett Mills, televised wildlife documentaries "allow viewers to […] [see] animals and locations far beyond their geographical proximity, without the concomitant environmental impacts caused by travel and hospitality."[34] Their production, however, rests on "an assumption that animals have no right to privacy," particularly when it comes to activities "rendered demonstrably private in the human realm; mating, giving birth, and dying."[35] As such, according to Mills, the filming of non-human animals—even when associated with an ethos of care and conservation—can uphold "the superiority of humanity."[36] Elisa Aaltola concurs with Mills, arguing that invasive nature documentaries, where "animal suffering" is "captured on film for purposes of entertainment," tend to "concentrate on the most harrowing aspects of animal life in order to put forward explicit and prolonged scenes of suffering for curious audiences back home to watch in excitable horror."[37] The famous footage and photography of Tasmanian tigers, however, were not originally produced for entertainment and, in their candid portrayal of caged and malnourished animals, bear a stronger resemblance to the "images of farmed animal suffering" that Aaltola also examines.[38]

31 Robert N. Paddle and Kathryn M. Medlock, "The Discovery of the Remains of the Last Tasmanian Tiger *(Thylacinus cynocephalus)*," *Australian Zoologist* 43, no. 1 (2023): 99, https://doi.org/10.7882/AZ.2023.017.

32 Paddle and Medlock, "Discovery," 99.

33 See NFSA Films, "Tasmanian Tiger in Colour," September 2021, 1 min. 25 secs., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gt0X-27GXM.

34 Mills, "Television," 195.

35 Mills, "Television," 196, 198–9.

36 Mills, "Television," 201.

37 Aaltola, "Suffering," 22.

38 Aaltola, "Suffering," 19.

In attending to examples of leaked footage from slaughterhouses, Aaltola acknowledges that "[o]ne may feel a distinct sense of privacy violation when looking at the final moments of a starving hen, […] or of a cow, falling over and calling out in bewilderment before being struck down by impatient slaughterhouse workers."[39] Yet, she insists that "[a]nimal advocates seek to make visible that which has become increasingly hidden" knowing that "images can communicate suffering and spark moral epiphanies in a way that moral argumentation alone may struggle to."[40] Although the imagery that remains of Tasmanian tigers has not been leaked by activists, it is certainly the case that, without the footage and photographs of specimens living in zoos, the animal would not have found its place in Australian history and the global iconography of human-induced extinction.

Where the extinction of a once-maligned animal native to Tasmania now sits at the heart of animal conservation, Australia's economy is reliant upon the mass slaughter of the non-native animal depicted in Ford's *The Undead* as the victim of predation.[41] The treatment of sheep, however, does not feature in Australia's state-sponsored animal welfare rhetoric, and it is undercover exposés by animal rights activists that have drawn attention to their suffering in Tasmanian abattoirs. Two recent exposés by the Farm Transparency Project, in 2017 and 2023, have involved film footage from facilities owned by the island state's major abattoir, Tasmanian Quality Meats. The 2017 footage, the Farm Transparency Project reported, showed "the use of dogs to herd and harass terrified sheep, who were then shoved, thrown and hit with paddles and pipes to force them towards the electric stunner."[42] The dogs themselves were then locked in "metal and concrete cages, where they were left overnight, barking and running at the bars in boredom and frustration."[43] The exposé also reported similar scenes involving calves being reared for the veal and leather industries. They concluded that "[w]hat we saw was horrifying, yet, we know that this violence is standard across Australia."[44] Following the emergence of further footage in 2023, Tasmanian Quality Meats were reported to Tasmania's Department of Natural Resources and Environment and the company's export license was suspended.[45]

In the same year that this treatment of animals in abattoirs was being exposed, the history of white settler racism towards Aboriginal peoples was also brought into the spotlight by the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice referendum. The 2023 referendum offered an opportunity to give the country's First Nations peoples full recognition and redress the long-standing forms of racist, colonial violence perpetrated against them

39 Aaltola, "Suffering," 24.
40 Aaltola, "Suffering," 29.
41 For an account of the Australian sheep industry, see "Sheep Grazing in Kempton, Tasmania," the National Archives of Australia, n.d., https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/environment-and-nature/sheep-grazing-kempton-tasmania#:~:text=Sheep%20were%20also%20taken%20to,of%20the%20Australian%20wool%20industry.
42 "Tasmanian Quality Meats Abattoir", Farm Transparency Project, last modified 2025, https://www.farmtransparency.org/facilities/61420-tasmanian-quality-meats-abattoir#:~:text=Footage%20of%20sheep%2Flamb%20slaughter,one%20slaughtered%20while%20fully%20conscious.
43 Farm Transparency Project, "Tasmanian".
44 Farm Transparency Project, "Tasmanian".
45 See Eliza Kloser, "Tasmanian Quality Meats Abattoir Facing Suspension After Activists Film Slaughter Practices," *ABC News*, December 8, 2023, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-09/tasmanian-quality-meats-abattoir-accused-of-cruelty/103205378.

by European settlers and their descendants. This history is epitomized by the dehumanization and mass killing of Aboriginal Tasmanians that was sanctioned by the British government during the so-called 'Black War' of 1824–1832.[46] The colonial policy to decimate Tasmania's Indigenous population was of a part with the aim to extinguish the Tasmanian tiger. As the Aboriginal Tasmanian artist Vicki West states:

> The history of the 'extinction' of the thylacine closely parallels the extinction myth of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, with both having a bounty on their heads under colonial rule, and with both being seen as pests in their own environment. The impact of this 'cleansing' of the landscape to conform to colonial pastoral ideals continues to be felt today.[47]

The referendum resulted in a rejection of the proposal to formally enable Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders to advise the government on laws.[48] Thus, although the demonization of the Tasmanian tiger coincided with the dehumanization and genocide of Aboriginal Tasmanians, no recognition of the human costs of European settler colonialism has been established in Australia that corresponds with the country's annual National Threatened Species Day.

The establishment of Australia's National Threatened Species Day has, moreover, seen the settler government belatedly recognize a need for co-existence with a marsupial that Aboriginal Tasmanians had lived alongside and respected for over 40,000 years. While Maynard acknowledges that "[t]here is a paucity of historical information about the First Tasmanians' relationship with the thylacine," there is evidence that Aboriginal Tasmanians afforded Tasmanian tigers privacy in life and in death.[49] For instance, where British settlers displayed taxidermized Tasmanian tiger specimens in natural history dioramas, often presenting them with bared teeth in a way that upheld "the community's fear and hatred of the species,"[50] aboriginal communities are known to have given Tasmanian tigers "formal burials, a treatment suggestive of a relationship of special significance."[51] This included constructing a small "hut to cover the bones" of dead Tasmanian tigers so as not to leave their remains exposed on the ground.[52] According to Katie Glaskin, such

46 For an historical account of the genocide of Aboriginal Tasmanians, see Clive Turnbull, *Black War: The Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines* (Lansdowne Press, 1948) and Benjamin Madley, "From Terror to Genocide: Britain's Tasmanian Penal Colony and Australia's History Wars," *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 1 (2008): 77–106, https://doi.org/10.1086/522350.

47 Quoted in Maynard, "Tasmanian," 324.

48 See Hannah Richie, "The Voice: Australians Vote No in Historic Referendum," *BBC*, October 14, 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-67110193.

49 Maynard, "Tasmanian," 320.

50 Maynard, "Tasmanian," 317. See also Jack Ashby, "How Collections and Reputation Were Built Out of Tasmanian Violence," *Archives of Natural History* 50, no. 2 (2023): 244–64, https://doi.org/10.3366/anh.2023.0859.

51 Katie Glaskin. "Extinction, Inscription and the Dreaming: Exploring a Thylacine Connection," *Anthropological Forum* 31, no. 2 (2021): 169, https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2021.1937513.

52 George Augustus Robinson, *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829–1934*, ed. N.J.B. Plomley (Quintus, 2008), 921.

customs were underpinned by the fact that, for Aboriginal communities, Tasmanian tigers "would have held cosmological significance," which is suggested by the animal's appearance in ancestral mythologies and rock art.[53] These include stories in which the Tasmanian tiger is a companion of the Rainbow Serpent, which is a significant figure of fertility and creation for Aboriginal Australians. This respectful treatment and stewardship sit in contrast to the images of caged and mistreated Tasmanian tigers that have proliferated after their extinction. As I will briefly discuss in my conclusion, it also sits in tension with emerging scientific attempts to bring the species back from the dead.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that Ford's *The Undead* invites viewers to comprehend the settler colonial intrusion that inaugurated the mass killing of Tasmanian tigers in the wild and the slaughter of reared sheep in Tasmania, both of which coincided with the mass killing of the island's Aboriginal inhabitants. In doing so, the painting is emblematic of Ford's aim to explore human-animal relations "from the human point of view but also […] from the animal point of view."[54] When viewed in comparison with film footage, photos, and exposés from zoos and slaughterhouses, *The Undead* can be read as both satirizing nineteenth-century natural history illustrations that frame the Tasmanian tiger as a savage, vampiric predator *and* staging a private moment of inter-species kinship between two animals whose lives and deaths have been, since the colonization of Australia, wholly directed by the economic interests of settler colonists and their descendants. In this way, Ford's artwork contributes to what Aaltola identifies as the need for imaginative "flights of fancy" that are capable of "inviting […] empathy toward animal others" alongside "the gritty realism" of documented instances of animal suffering.[55]

I have focused on these two ways of seeing the Tasmanian tiger in Ford's *The Undead* but wish to conclude by addressing a third interpretation that points to future work on the possible intersections of privacy studies and animal studies. This additional interpretation is alluded to in the reference to resurrection in the painting's title. In an interview with *Whitehot Magazine*, Ford has commented that his titles are meant to "add another layer of meaning to the image that [is not] visually there" as a means of "[opening] up another way of looking at the animal."[56] With the title of *The Undead*, Ford directs us to the fact that the Tasmanian tiger's status as a global icon of extinction has meant that it has become a prominent candidate for what is known as 'de-extinction' science that seeks to revive lost species using cloning technology and DNA resequencing.[57]

53 Glaskin, "Extinction," 169.
54 Ford, "Vaults".
55 Aaltola, "Suffering," 29.
56 Ford, "Vaults".
57 See Amy Fletcher, "Genuine Fakes: Cloning Extinct Species as Science and Spectacle," *Politics and the Life Sciences* 29, no. 1 (March 2010): 48–60, https://doi.org/10.2990/29_1_48, and Matthew Whittle and Jade Munslow Ong, *Global Literature and the Environment* (Routledge, 2024), 163–70. For an authoritative account of de-extinction science, see Beth Shapiro *How to Clone a Mammoth: The Science of De-Extinction* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

A number of de-extinction initiatives have emerged in the twenty first century and have focused on reviving such species as mammoths, quagga, ibex, and passenger pigeons, among others. Between 1999 and 2005, the Australian Museum tried and bring the Tasmanian tiger back to life using DNA samples taken from a single specimen. In 2022, research began again at the Thylacine Integrated Genetic Restoration Research (TIGRR) lab based at the University of Melbourne.[58] In the U.S., in August 2022, Colossal Biosciences, which launched only a year earlier, also announced its own Tasmanian tiger de-extinction project. In *Extinction: A Radical History*, Ashley Dawson questions the legitimacy of deploying de-extinction approaches to mass species loss, remarking that they frame "the extinction crisis as an opportunity to rachet up the commodification of life itself."[59] Indeed, for the most part, de-extinction initiatives have so far relied on the private funding of research into the revival of individual, charismatic species. This points to a possible world in which de-extinction is taken up not necessarily for the purposes of conservation or animal welfare but for ventures that could include private zoos, hunting ranges, or the exotic pet market, spaces where the privacy of humans to view, kill, or own non-human animals is contingent upon the lack of privacy for the animals themselves. As Ronald Sandler warns, de-extinction may not bring significant value to conservation efforts but could "be the basis for economic value because some people are likely to spend resources to see or own individuals of revived species."[60] As a de-extinction candidate, the Tasmanian tiger is thus facing a form of commodification for private, economic gain that is confluent with the treatment of reared sheep.

In choosing his title, then, Ford is not only holding settler colonial intrusion on the lives of Tasmanian tigers and sheep up for critique. He is also commenting on how de-extinction may provide present-day corporations with the means to further intrude upon the privacy of animals for profit. Ford's title encourages us to read the Tasmanian tiger's posture, where its back is turned to the human viewer, as a rejection of this new form of genetic intrusion and animal commodification. The pose places the human viewer on the outside of the scene, not as the dominant viewer, owner, hunter, and reviver of animals but as an alien, voyeuristic intruder on a private encounter between two non-human animals lacking in the right to privacy, even in death.

58 At the time of writing, the TIGRR lab website homepage prominently displays the 1933 archival footage of the Tasmanian tiger Benjamin pacing around his cage in Beaumaris Zoo. See https://tigrrlab.science.unimelb.edu.au/.

59 Ashley Dawson, *Extinction: A Radical History* (OR Books, 2016), 80.

60 Ronald Sandler, "The Ethics of Reviving Long Extinct Species," *Conservation Biology* 28, no. 2 (2013): 356, doi: 10.1111/cobi.12198.

References

Aaltola, Elisa. "Animal Suffering: Representations and the Act of Looking." *Anthrozoös* 27, no. 1 (2014): 19–31. https://doi.org/10.2752/175303714X13837396326297.

Ashby, Jack. "How Collections and Reputation Were Built Out of Tasmanian Violence." *Archives of Natural History* 50, no. 2 (2023): 244–64. https://doi.org/10.3366/anh.2023.0859.

Ashby, Jack. "Drawn to Extinction: Depicting the Thylacine." Linnean Society, May 15, 2024, Video, 55 min., 38 sec. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8qtzQkPfUE.

Banks, Peter B. and Dieter F. Hochuli. "Extinction, De-extinction and Conservation: A Dangerous Mix of Ideas." *Australian Zoologist* 38, no.3 (2017): 390–94. https://doi.org/10.7882/AZ.2016.012.

Berger, John. *Why Look at Animals?* London: Penguin Books, 2009.

Dawson, Ashley. *Extinction: A Radical History.* OR Books, 2016.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, translated by David Wills. Fordham University Press, 2008.

Farm Transparency Project. "Tasmanian Quality Meats Abattoir." Last modified 2025. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://www.farmtransparency.org/facilities/61420-tasmanian-quality-meats-abattoir#:~:text=Footage%20of%20sheep%2Flamb%20slaughter,one%20slaughtered%20while%20fully%20conscious.

Fletcher, Amy. "Genuine Fakes: Cloning Extinct Species as Science and Spectacle", *Politics and the Life Sciences* 29, no. 1 (March 2010): 48–60. https://doi.org/10.2990/29_1_48.

Ford, Walton. *Pancha Tantra.* Taschen, 2020.

Ford, Walton. "From the vaults: July 2008, Interview with Walton Ford." Interview by Ajay Kurian. *Whitehot Magazine*, July 2008. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/2008-interview-with-walton-ford/1490.

Freeman, Carol. *Paper Tiger: A Visual History of the Thylacine.* Brill, 2010.

Garrod, Ben. *Extinct: Thylacine, the Story of Life on Earth.* Zephyr, 2022.

Gilroy, Paul. *After Empire: Multiculturalism or Convivial Culture?* Routledge, 2005.

Glaskin, Katie. "Extinction, Inscription and the Dreaming: Exploring a Thylacine Connection." *Anthropological Forum* 31, no. 2 (2021): 165–185. https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2021.1937513.

Harris, George Prideaux Robert. "Description of Two New Species of *Didelphis* From Van Dieman's Land (1808)", quoted in "The Early European Thylacine Literature". REPAD: The Recently Extinct Plants and Animals Database. Last modified September 2025. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://recentlyextinctspecies.com/thylacine-archive/early-thylacine-literature-1642-1850.

Howarth, Claire. "Artist Walton Ford on His Wildlife Paintings." *Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2014. Accessed September 30, 2025. www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304572204579501810948837306.

Kloser, Eliza. "Tasmanian Quality Meats Abattoir Facing Suspension After Activists Film Slaughter Practices." *ABC News*. December 8, 2023. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-09/tasmanian-quality-meats-abattoir-accused-of-cruelty/103205378.

Kolbert, Elizabeth. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. Bloomsbury, 2014.

Madley, Benjamin. "From Terror to Genocide: Britain's Tasmanian Penal Colony and Australia's History Wars." *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 1 (2008): 77–106. https://doi.org/10.1086/522350.

Maynard, David and Tammy Gordon. *Tasmanian Tiger: Precious Little Remains*. Foot and Playsted, 2014.

Maynard, David. "Tasmanian Tiger: Precious Little Remains." In *Animals, Plants and Afterimages: The Art and Science of Representing Extinction*, edited by Valérie Bienvenue and Nicholas Chare. Berghahn Books, 2022. 316–33.

Merola, Nicole M. "Assembling the Archive: Close(ly) Reading Great Auk Extinction with Walton Ford." In *Close Reading the Anthropocene*, edited by Helena Feder. Routledge, 2021. 45–59.

Mills, Brett. "Television Wildlife Documentaries and Animals' Right to Privacy." *Continuum* 24, no. 2 (2010): 193–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903362726.

Morton, Adam. "Australia Confirms Extinction of 13 More Species, Including First Reptile Since Colonisation". *The Guardian*, March 3, 2021. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/mar/03/australia-confirms-extinction-of-13-more-species-including-first-reptile-since-colonisation.

National Archives of Australia. "Sheep Grazing in Kempton, Tasmania," n.d. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/environment-and-nature/sheep-grazing-kempton-tasmania#:~:text=Sheep%20were%20also%20taken%20to,of%20the%20Australian%20wool%20industry.

NFSA Films. "Tasmanian Tiger in Colour," September 7, 2021. Video, 1 min. 25 secs. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gt0X-27GXM

Owen, David. *Thylacine: The Tragic Tale of the Tasmanian Tiger*. Allen & Unwin, 2003.

Paddle, Robert. *The Last Tasmanian Tiger: The History and Extinction of the Thylacine*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Paddle, Robert N. and Kathryn M. Medlock. "The Discovery of the Remains of the Last Tasmanian Tiger (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*)." *Australian Zoologist*, 43, no. 1 (2023): 97–108. https://doi.org/10.7882/AZ.2023.017.

Pepper, Angie. "Glass Panels and Peepholes: Nonhuman Animals and the Right to Privacy." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 101, issue 4 (2020): 628–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12329.

Pick, Anat. "Why Not Look at Animals?" *European Journal of Media Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 107–25. http://dx.doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/15175.

Richie, Hannah. "The Voice: Australians Vote No in Historic Referendum". *BBC*, October 14, 2023. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-67110193.

Robinson, George Augustus. *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829–1934*, edited by N.J.B. Plomley. Quintus, 2008.

Sandler, Ronald. "The Ethics of Reviving Long Extinct Species." *Conservation Biology* 28, no. 2 (2013): 354–60. DOI: 10.1111/cobi.12198.

Shapiro, Beth. *How to Clone a Mammoth: The Science of De-Extinction*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

Thylacine Integrated Genetic Restoration Research (TIGRR). Accessed September 30, 2025. https://tigrrlab.science.unimelb.edu.au/.

Tomkins, Calvin. "Man and Beast: The Narrative Art of Walton Ford". *The New Yorker*, January 18, 2009. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/01/26/man-and-beast.

Traisnel, Antoine. *Capture: American Pursuits and the Making of a New Animal Condition*. University of Minneapolis Press, 2020.

Turnbull, Clive. *Black War: The Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines*. Lansdowne Press, 1948.

U.N. Report. "Nature's 'Unprecedented' Decline; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating'." May 6, 2019. Accessed September 30, 2025. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/.

Whittle, Matthew. "Lost Trophies: Hunting Animals and the Imperial Souvenir in Walton Ford's *Pancha Tantra*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 51, no. 2 (2016): 196–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989415624957.

Whittle, Matthew and Jade Munslow Ong. *Global Literature and the Environment*. Routledge, 2024.