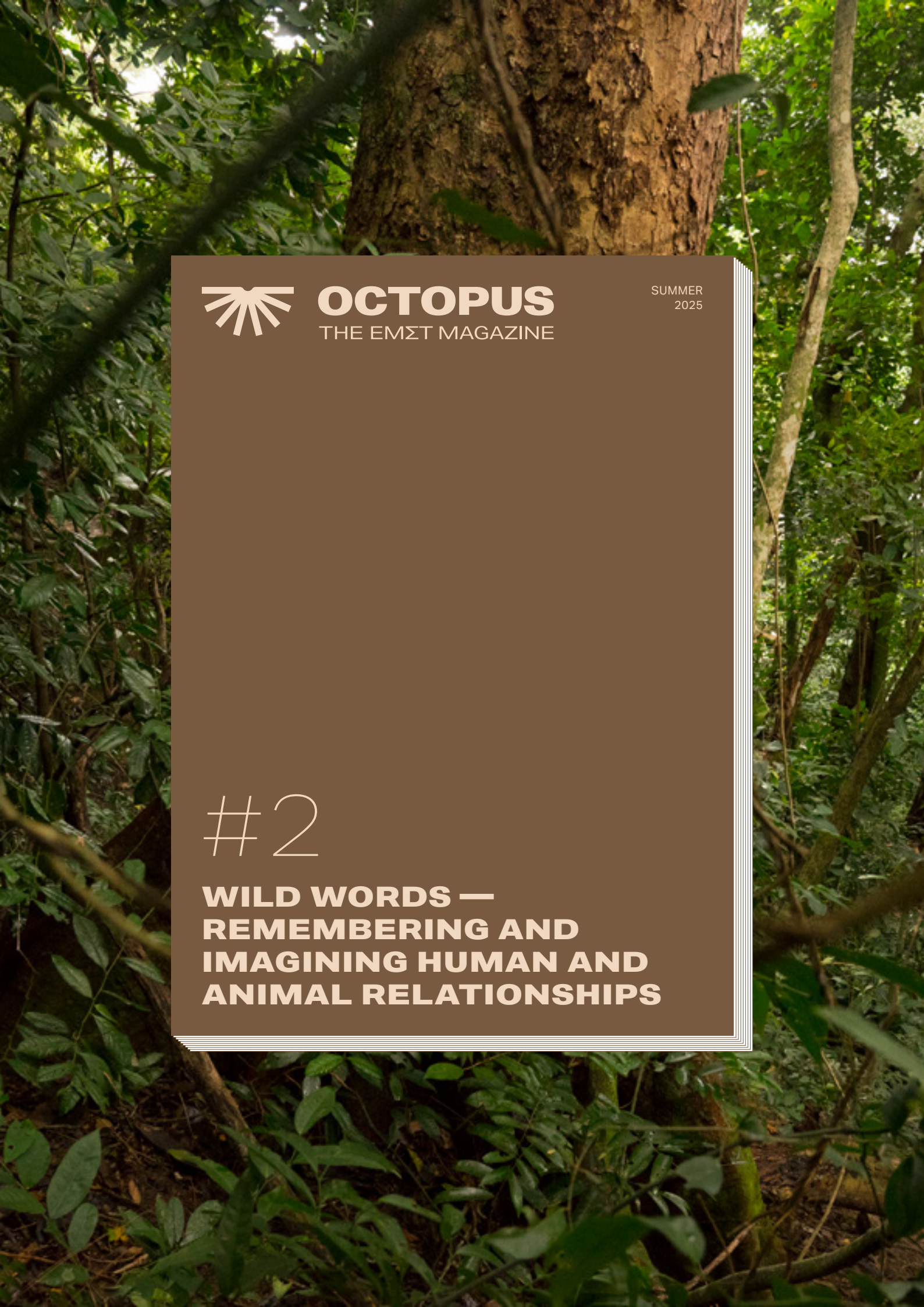

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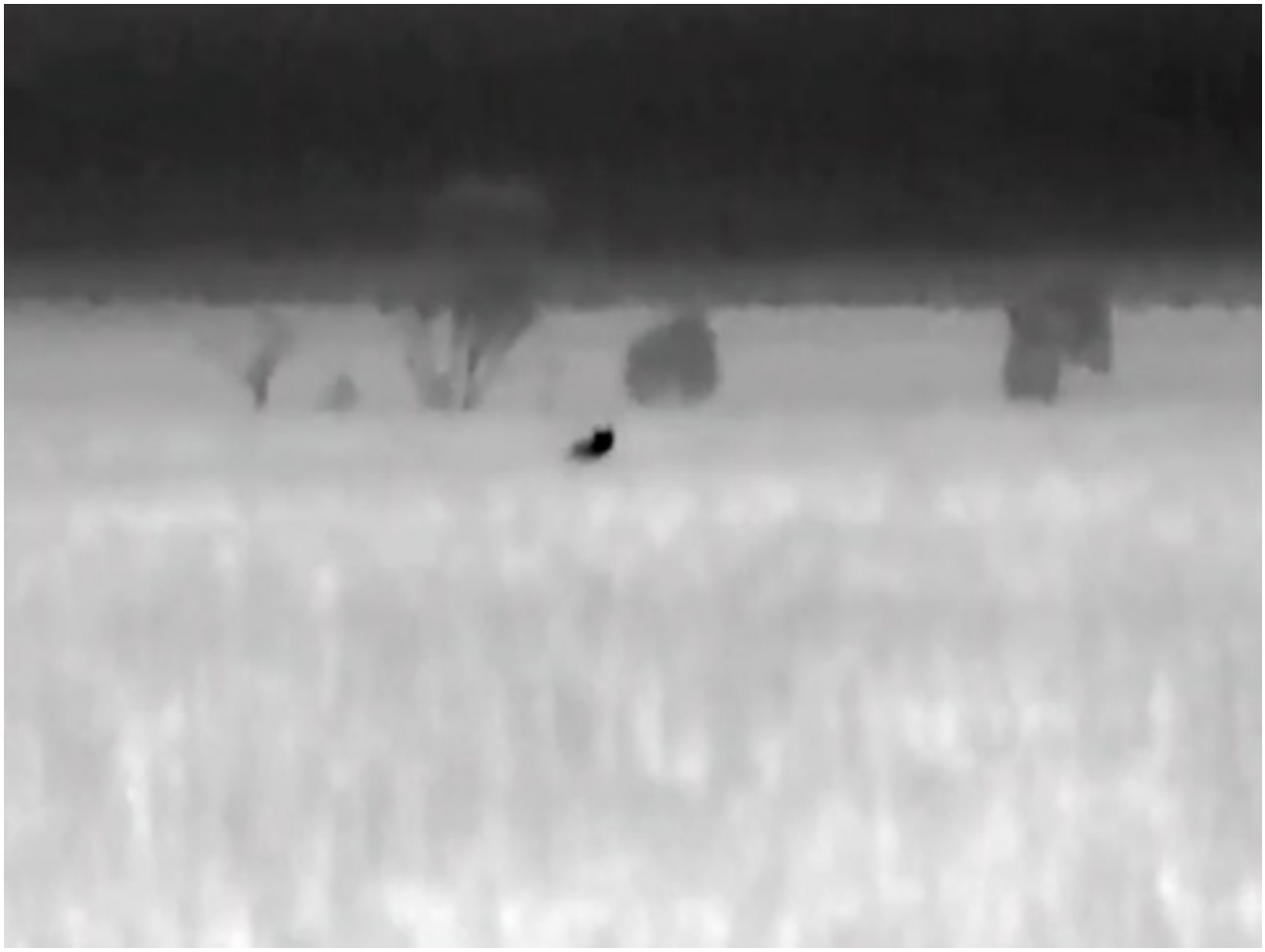
#2

WILD WORDS — REMEMBERING AND IMAGINING HUMAN AND ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS

CHRIS PEARSON
DOGS BEYOND THE SOFA



Michela de Mattei, *True Believers See More Patterns,* 2024
Ongoing video archive of thylacine sightings
Video still, 18′ 42″ (in progress)
Courtesy of the artist

As I sit on the sofa, stroking my dog Cassie as she dozes beside me, the moment feels timeless. Worries about the world fade temporarily, and the planning, fretting, and organising part of my brain gets submerged by the hit of oxytocin that scientists say is released by petting a dog. How many people and dogs, throughout time and across the world, have experienced something similar, I wonder. Eventually, the worries crawl back into my head, and the demands of the day reassert themselves. My professional identity as a historian also kicks back in, and I remind myself that Cassie and I live at a particular moment in time and in a specific place. Both of us dwell within the historical context, our relationship formed by historical processes, such as the rise of petkeeping and canine consumerism. These have placed dogs, whose ancestors once worked, in homes with dog food, treats, toys, and comfy beds (routinely ignored by Cassie for the sofa). Cassie is a lurcher, a type of dog bred long ago for poaching in

British forests, a legacy that lives on in her desire to chase squirrels. But she – like most other dogs in the Global North – is a pet dog. Her duties, if any, are to provide emotional warmth and comfort and to charm us with her scruffy beard and fur.

Cassie on the sofa
Courtesy of the author

Cassie's world is also a geographically restrained one. She was born in the north-east of England and now lives 200 miles away in the north-west. She has been on holiday with us to various spots in Britain, but her territory is mainly the house, the local park and neighborhood, the local café (where she insists on having one of the dog treats the owners kindly provide for canine customers), and the surrounding countryside where she is dragged out for walks. Moving backwards in time, we observe how the vertiginous rise of kennel clubs, dog shows, and pedigree breeds in the nineteenth century has conditioned us to think of dogs as rooted in particular countries and regions (take terriers as an example: we have Boston, Manchester, Bedlington, Skye varieties, amongst many place-based others). Nationalist ideologies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries further strengthened the links between dogs and countries as seen in the invention of the Finnish Spitz or the tussles over whether German Shepherds/Alsatians were French or German in the aftermath of the First World War. Tellingly, German breeders called them German Shepherds, French ones Alsatians. And while it is true that humans have moulded dogs to work in specific landscapes – French

hunters lauded how their dogs were fine-tuned to catch game in their nation's patchwork pays – mobility has profoundly shaped human-canine bonds. From Arctic sled dogs to the exchange of hunting dogs between European and Asian rulers in the pre-modern period, dogs have enabled people to travel, trade, and forge connections with other societies. [1]

Tensions between the local and the global lay at the heart of Victorian British canine cultures, which provide the foundation for modern dogs and dog-keeping practices. British breeders and dog lovers saw themselves at the centre of global dogdom. They revelled in how the particularities of their landscape, culture, history, and ingenuity had perfected the human-canine bond. Under aristocratic patronage, hunters had perfected breeds that were rooted in the glorious countryside, with the Foxhound the jewel in the crown. For upper-crust cheerleaders, this breed embodied the English countryside and aristocratic hunting culture. A passion for more plebian blood sports in burgeoning industrial cities animated the mainly working-class dog fancy, men who combined a love of gambling and dog fighting with breeding and showing their canine champions. They formed part of the new dog-breeding world alongside the Kennel Club (founded in 1873). The club's well-heeled organisers, drawn from the monied gentry and business worlds, placed it at the heart of the British establishment. Meanwhile, the founding of the RSPCA in 1824, the establishment of Battersea Dogs Home in 1860, and a vibrant *fin-de-siècle* anti-vivisection movement seemed to show that the British cared for dogs as much as they were adept at breeding and showing them. The British also prided themselves on the eradication of canine rabies within their borders by 1902 through tighter dog management and surveillance, muzzling orders, and quarantine. However, the self-congratulatory mood overlooked the long history of dog fighting in Britain, the continued cruelty suffered by dogs, and the slaughter of countless street dogs in pounds and dogs' homes.

Ask for Spratt's Patent meat fibrine vegetable dog cakes with beetroot
Card advertising Spratt's Patent's dog biscuits, between 1900 and 1909 (?)
Paper, 8 x 11 cm
Courtesy Wellcome Collection.

Other countries could laud their own innovations. Belgium led the way in police dogs, and Germany in militarised canines. Frenchman Louis Pasteur unveiled his rabies vaccination in 1885, and an American, James Spratt, invented the dog food market (albeit on British soil). But other countries recognised Britain, often with barely concealed envy, as the centre of canine innovation and followed suit. In 1911, the Austrian, Belgian, Dutch, French, and German clubs created the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI) to facilitate and standardise the increasingly international character of dog shows.[2] During the interwar years, other Kennel Clubs were established in countries such as Brazil in 1922, Poland in 1938, and Mexico in 1940.

Despite the rise of national kennel globes, dog breeds were often rooted in mobility that spread beyond borders. The organisers of dog shows in the United States, in response to the new breed of globe-trotting pedigree dog, established different categories for 'native' and 'imported dogs'. But the 'native' dogs were ones brought over by European colonisers from the sixteenth century onwards who had intermingled and sometimes replaced the dogs of Native Americans, as well as those developed by American breeders, such as the Boston Terrier, Chesapeake Bay Retriever, and Coon Hound.[3] As with so many aspects of the dog breed world, categories were arbitrary and overlooked messier and more mobile histories.

Bench show. New England Kennel Club, n.d.
A poster showing a variety of dogs at the New England Kennel Club's dog show to be held at Mechanic's Hall, Huntington Ave., Boston
Source: PARIS PIERCE

In line with wider imperial amnesia (wilful or not), the British have forgotten how the creation of their dominant Victorian dog culture had a colonial dimension rooted in imperial mobilities. Alongside the often-violent movement of people, goods, ideas, and plants across the globe, the British Empire circulated dogs and the trappings of modern European dogdom throughout Africa and Asia, while also shaping dog culture at home. Most strikingly, British soldiers wrenched the Pekingese from China. Sometimes referred to as 'Little Lion Dog' (Xiao Shizi Gou), Chinese breeders moulded the dogs to look like the lion statues

that guarded Buddhist temples. Colonial incursions into China during and after the Opium Wars of 1839–42 and 1856–60 ushered in a new chapter in the dogs' history. British and French soldiers looted the Summer Palace in Beijing in 1860. While other soldiers extracted priceless artworks from the palace, Sir George Fitzroy, Admiral Lord John Hay, and General Dunne took Pekingese dogs and presented them to upper-crust British women, including Queen Victoria. British soldiers transported more of the dogs to Britain in the 1890s, paving the way for British breeders to establish the breed, claiming to have saved the Pekingese. One of the dogs – Ah Cum – had been smuggled out of China and was treated as the 'patriarch' of the breed. He was stuffed after his death in 1905 and preserved in a museum. Pekingese dogs became immensely popular in Britain, spearheaded by upper-class female dog breeders. Lady Algernon Gordon-Lennox, Mrs. Douglas Murray, and Mrs. Albert Gray devised the points for the breed in consultation with Chinese diplomats based in London. In 1901, a Pekingese won the Open Class at Crufts (first show in 1891), and the breed's devotees formed the Pekingese Club in 1904. The breed's success was due in large part to its royalist histories. It became a living embodiment of a once glorious but now vanquished imperial China – and the subjugation of the East by the supposedly civilising force of the British Empire.[4]

Vintage illustration of Looty, little Pekingese dog found in Summer Palace, near Beijing, 1861. Source: Getty Images

Dogs went the other way, too. When British colonial officials, merchants, and soldiers travelled to India and other colonies, Fido and Rover accompanied them. Most times, this went smoothly, with dogs boarding ships at Liverpool, London, and other ports for a life overseas. Other times, however, disaster ensued. When the steamship *Oxfordshire* imported pedigree pet dogs from Britain to Singapore in 1884, British colonists readily purchased them from the ship's captain. Tragically, at least one of the dogs carried rabies, and an outbreak occurred in the most European district of Singapore, with four people succumbing to the disease. Yet rather than blame pedigree pooches, officials identified street dogs as the culprits and launched a cull against them.[5]

The British exported dog management techniques – and fears of rabies – that they had honed in the expanding and industrialising cities of Victorian Britain. Above all, they brought their distaste for street dogs. In southern Africa, white foresters, settlers, and missionaries attacked the African-owned 'Kaffir dogs' who they encountered in the Eastern Cape and Transkei as aggressive, wild, and backward, complaining that they threatened livestock and property. In dismissing them as wayward 'curs', they overlooked how the dogs performed invaluable hunting, herding, and guarding tasks.[6]

Colonial contempt for street dogs reached its apogee with 'pariahs', the term the British accorded to the street dogs of India. Its etymology lay in 'Paraiyar', the former name of a caste-oppressed community (who are now known as Adi Dravida) from southern India, specifically in what is now Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Sri Lanka. They drummed at weddings, funerals, and other occasions, alongside other menial tasks ('drum' in Tamil is *'parai'*). Despite seeing them as victims of higher-caste oppression, the British nonetheless disdained the Paraiyars' supposed immorality, drunkenness, and brutishness and created the term 'pariah' to refer to outcasts, human and nonhuman.[7] The British branded street dogs 'pariahs' (outcasts), and this word spread throughout other colonies and in Britain itself. Colonial mobility thus sparked the emergence of new categories for dogs.

To the British, pariah dogs seemed to provide stark evidence of the historical and ongoing decline and decadence of Indian culture. An 1841 article in *Cleave's London Satirist and Gazette of Variety* claimed that "the depressing influence of the climate in which [the pariah dog is] naturalised renders it lazy and inert in the extreme". Even worse, the vegetarianism of Hindus – and therefore the scarcity of offal and meat scraps for straying dogs – purportedly drove street dogs to feast on human carcasses. This unwholesome diet made them horrifying spreaders of disease: "the bite of the Pariah is incurable".[8] This account is particularly vivid and unequivocal in presenting the pariah as a dangerous and disgusting creature that offered stark evidence of the absurdity and danger of Indian religious beliefs.

Two dogs sitting next to human bones howl at a large bat in the air, n.d.
etching, 12.2 x 16.3 cm
Courtesy Wellcome Collection

Throughout the empire, intense fear and loathing of street dogs prompted British authorities to introduce home-grown dog management measures: muzzling, dog-catching, culls in the streets, and 'humane' killing in lethal chambers in the newly established pounds and dogs' homes. In Chennai (formerly Madras), the Police Commissioner paid Indian 'coolies' to carry out the dirty work of transporting dead street dogs to the People's Park to skin and bury them. In 1875–76, 7,384 dogs were killed and disposed of by these workers.[9]

But colonial canine culls raised concerns. Some British observers worried that it would offend Indian religious sentiments and lay bare the violence of colonialism. Indian protests against British culling of street dogs erupted in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) in 1830 and 1916, while concerns about the cruelty of dog-catching methods sparked much debate and protest in early twentieth-century Calcutta (now Kolkata).[10]

British imperialists also imported less lethal aspects of Victorian dog culture than culling. They set up Kennel Clubs throughout Africa and Asia, which appealed to British breeders and colonial elites. From Hong Kong to India, the latter played a key role in the promotion and display of dogs, some of non-European pedigree. In the 1913 Madras (now Chennai) dog show, Rajapalayam sight hounds featured alongside the usual European breeds, and the Rajah of Prithapuram, a keen dog breeder, had suggested putting on the show.[11] The British also set up foxhunting clubs in India, with Foxhounds repurposed to catch jackals.

Pet dogs offered a reminder of home for homesick officials, with some claiming that they made their often-isolated lives more bearable. According to colonial dog expert H. H. King, "There are Englishmen whose lot it is to live in a lonely station, such as may be found in the heart of Africa, who, if asked to name a companion, would unhesitatingly choose a dog". A devoted and jovial dog would help ward off "loneliness" and stop their owner, deprived of the company of

"other white men", from becoming "moody and depressed".[12] Pet dogs offered a way to articulate and alleviate the colonial anxieties that lay behind the bravado of imperial propaganda. But importing dogs from Britain was far from plain sailing for worried dog owners.

Early 1900s studio portrait postcard of proud white hunter, with his terrier dog, posing with trophy tiger skin and Indian antelope (blackbuck) horns, during colonial times, Bangalore, India, circa 1910
Paper, 38.9 x 57.4 cm
Photo by W. V. Eden. Image source: Alamy online archive.

Experts lined up to warn the British to keep their dogs sheltered from spicy food and heat, just as they should protect themselves from such dangers. A popular guide to keeping pets in India, which was in its tenth edition by 1933, offered a plethora of information. Overlooking the fact that millions of street dogs survived and thrived in the Indian climate, the book advised owners to lower their pet's temperature with a punkah (a fan operated by an Indian servant) and take them to hill stations in hot weather.[13] Owners also had to be aware of the potential dangers of an Indian diet. Chapattis were not an issue, but curry table scraps would cause problems.[14] Precautions were allegedly needed in southern Africa. Randolph Churchill warned colonialists about bringing long-haired dogs to Mashonaland (in what is now Zimbabwe), as tempting as it might be to have a Setter or Spaniel for hunting. Ticks would plague the dog, "making festering sores" that would lead to illness and death. He advised owners who could not resist bringing their dog to stock up on carbolic acid to treat any wounds or sores.[15]

To return to Cassie on the sofa, the place where she spends much of the time. Her geographically narrow world belies how dogs – and the ideas, practices, and cultures that envelop them – have been formed, in part, through mobility. The nationalist language of dog breeds (such as Great Danes and French Bulldogs) and the histories of certain dog types that are associated with specific locales need to be set alongside histories of canine mobility. Modern British dog culture, including breeding and shows, petkeeping, condemnation of street dogs, and the promotion of canine welfare, was a thoroughly colonial and global affair. Empire brought breeds to Britain and new ways of thinking about dogs. But the biggest impact was in the colonised countries, with the introduction of new ways of thinking about and managing dogs, which were variously adapted and resisted by local people. Canine colonialism had its limits. Street dog populations survived culls, as did more tolerant attitudes toward them. With decolonisation in the post-1945 period, these street dog cultures now exist alongside, sometimes uneasily, the legacies of British colonialism, such as the veneration of pedigree and pet dogs, dog shows, and street dog management. Histories of mixing and mobility continue to unfold.

Courtesy of Sreyashi Ray

The header is a still from an ongoing video archive of thylacine sightings compiled by Michela de Mattei. The archive features all currently available footage sourced from online communities and regarded as evidence of its existence. The archive will expand as new evidence emerges.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Pearson is Professor of Environmental History and the Chaddock Chair of Economic and Social History. His research interests lie predominantly in animal, environmental, and cultural history. He is currently Principal Investigator on *Melting Metropolis: Everyday Histories of Heat and Health in London, New York, and Paris since 1945*, funded by a Wellcome Discovery Award (https://www.meltingmetropolis.com/), and as part of this project he is working on a book on the history of the British summertime. He is also co-Investigator on an interdisciplinary project researching street dogs in India, equally funded by the Wellcome Foundation (https://rohindies.org/), His most recent book, *Collared: How We Made the Modern Dog* (2024), reveals how the shifting fortunes of dogs hold a mirror to our changing society, from the evolution of breeding standards to the fight for animal rights. Wherever humans have gone, dogs have followed, changing size, appearance, and even jobs along the way – from the forests of medieval Europe, where greyhounds chased down game for royalty, to the frontlines of twentieth-century conflicts, where dogs carried messages and hauled gun carriages. In 2021, *Dogopolis: How Dogs and Humans Made Modern New York, London, and Paris* explores the role and presence of dogs as workers, pets, pests, and beyond in nineteenth and twentieth century London, New York, and Paris.

FOOTNOTES

1. I cover these histories in *Collared: How We Made the Modern Dog* (London: Profile, 2024).
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14. M.A.W., *The British Dog Abroad: His Points, Management and Disease* (Bombay: Thacker & Co), 190.
15. "Dogs in Africa", *Book of Dog* 1927, 199.