

Wiley Digital Archives

Animals of the *Royal Geographical Society* (with IBG)

A look into Wiley Digital Archives
by Dr. Catherine Oliver



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Overview

Dr. Catherine Oliver is a geographer based at the University of Cambridge. In 2020, Dr Catherine Oliver was awarded a Wiley Research Fellowship in collaboration with the *Royal Geographical Society* (with IBG), which provided her with access to their digitized archives via the Wiley Digital Archive platform.

- Introduction to the images..... 3
- The Arctic Dogs: Companions or Workers?..... 4
- The Adelie Penguins: Experiments and Exploitation 5
- Lion: Animal Conflict and Colonialism 6
- Birds: Animal Discovery & Politics..... 7
- Rock Drawings Jebel Tageru: Animal Traces 8
- Round the World: Koala Park, Sydney 9
- Polar Bears: Not So Cuddly 10
- “Ordinary” Animals..... 11



Animals of the RGS: Introduction to the Images

For centuries, geographical exploration has relied on animals for transportation and food. However, animals have been more than simply workers in the history of geography: they have been companions and collaborators. As geographers set out to “discover” the world, animals became important sources of knowledge. Of course, there is also a path of violence forged by geographical exploration. From hunting parties to stuffed animal trophies, the archives also hold stories of conflict and domination over the non-human world.

Here, I bring together eight images from the *Royal Geographical Society* (with IBG) archives to show some of these relationships with animals. The RGS’ archives began digitisation in 2018 with the Wiley Digital Archives project. Amidst the pivot to online working during the pandemic, many researchers found themselves without access to the archives and sources they needed to continue their research. Archives, museums, and libraries have worked hard to find new ways to provide access, and digitisation efforts

have been essential to new ways of working. Like many historical researchers, prior to the pandemic, I had been unfamiliar with the digital archives, and even apprehensive at the thought of working with historical materials from a distance. Would I lose a connection to the materials? Would I miss brushing off the dusty boxes and entering into a mystery?

After a few months working in the digital archive, I came to appreciate the different ways of working and engaging with archival material that the digitised archives offer. New tools and visualisations, in conjunction with careful transcription of sources and a powerful search engine built-in, offered new routes into the archives. The Wiley Digital Archives proved to be an accessible online tool that has reproduced high quality images and transcripts of hundreds of thousands of documents. This will be transformative for researchers who aren’t able to visit the archives in London, creating the opportunity for new engagements with the archives.

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Brocklehurst, P. “Priestley and Dogs at Horseshoe Bay.”
RGS Images Online, 1 Jan. 1907.
Wiley Digital Archives: *Royal Geographical Society*
(with IBG) - Part II. Accessed 28 Apr. 2022.



Nansen, Fridtjof. "The Start from the 'Fram.'" RGS Images Online, 1 Jan. 1893.
Wiley Digital Archives: *Royal Geographical Society* (with IBG) - Part II. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.

The Arctic Dogs: Companions or Workers?

The most recognisable of geography's animals might well be the sled-dog, a fixture of life for local people and explorers at both poles for centuries. These dogs are still part of daily life in places in Russia, Canada, Alaska, and Greenland and have been for 8000 years.

This picture is from the Fram Expedition (1893-1896), led by the Norwegian explorer, scientist, and diplomat Fridtjof Nansen, who set out to reach the North Pole by harnessing the natural east-west current of the Arctic Ocean. Nansen's journey north on the Fram began by sailing to the New Siberian Islands in the eastern Arctic Ocean, where he froze the boat into the pack ice and waited for this

current to carry the boat North. After 18 months, Nansen and the dog handler Johansen left with their dogs and sledges to head for the pole. They didn't make it but they did get to the Farthest North latitude at the time, reaching Franz Josef Land whilst the Fram drifted west into the North Atlantic Ocean.

The images from this expedition feature dogs as part of the group, and individual portraits. Humans and dogs spent long periods together in extreme conditions and while the dogs were first and foremost workers, it's clear that they were also valued companions.

The Adelie Penguins: Experiments & Exploitation

Adélie penguins are found along the coast of the Antarctic continent. This photograph of an Adélie penguin was taken by Herbert Ponting as part of the 1911 Attitude Survey, part of the scientific work on the Terra Nova (British Antarctic) Expedition (1911-1913), at Cape Adare on the northeastern most extremity of Victoria Land, East Antarctica. Two accounts were published on the return of the expedition: Antarctic penguins – a study of their social habits and Natural history of the Adelie penguin, looking at their behaviour and life cycle. These species of penguin have often been described as the most man-like of the penguins, and has a particular quality – a charisma – that makes them empathetic to humans and us compelled to want to know more about them.

However, in 2012, a team of researchers discovered that a third pamphlet had been written by Levick, but refused for publication: the Sexual Habits of the Adelie penguin, and it was printed in 1915 but declined for publication. Levick “commented on frequency of sexual activity, autoerotic behaviour, and seemingly aberrant behaviour of young unpaired males and females,” dismissing this as “depraved.” It’s perhaps no surprise in the aftermath of an expedition that ended tragically that the publication was halted from release. The refusal to publish this report tells us about social mores at the time: the expedition, despite living with these penguins, knew that what they were seeing wouldn’t go down well.



Lion: Animal Conflict & Colonialism



Baker, White Samuel. "Watercolours." Albums, 1861–1873.
Wiley Digital Archives: *Royal Geographical Society* (with IBG) - Part I. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.

Samuel Baker was an English explorer, officer, naturalist, big game hunter, engineer, writer and abolitionist. He began hunting in Scotland and consistently hunted throughout his life in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. His "observations of the animal world" through the lens of his gun are recounted in his book *Wild Beasts and Their Ways* (1890). The *Royal Geographical Society* holds his "Watercolours" collection, of which the above image is part.

The images that Baker painted often juxtapose animals with the explorer and with the local people, as well as capturing some of the landscape. At

the time, *The American Naturalist* reported that '[Baker's] observations have the value derived from long familiarity with most of the species which he describes. This record is the more useful as many of the species which he has hunted have been already much restricted in numbers and distribution, and some of them are probably doomed to extinction.' Baker was considered a "conservationist," but the images today reveal entangled histories of colonialism, extinction, and destruction that followed geographical exploration.

Birds: Animal Discovery & Politics

John Hanning Speke and James Augustus Grant set out in 1860 to search for "the source of the Nile." Along the way, they witnessed and documented many different species of animals and plants, like these birds. However, their journey was not smooth – and was riddled with personal and physical strife. On their return to England in 1863, they were welcomed as heroes, but Speke's discoveries soon had doubts cast upon them, notably by Speke's nemesis and former expedition companion – Richard Francis Burton.

Alongside these doubts, the expedition faced severe financial losses, with Grant's notebooks being sold to recoup some of them. To try and settle the score, debate was scheduled between Speke and Burton at the *Royal Geographical Society* for the 16th September 1864. The night before, Speke died by an accidental self-inflicted gunshot while shooting birds in Wiltshire. Despite no evidence and witnesses, Burton spread that this was a deliberate act, as Speke feared the debate.



Rock Drawings

Jebel Tageru:

Animal Traces

In the history of geographical exploration, animals have not just been companions or workers, but have also been essential to understanding other culture – both contemporary and historical. These rock drawings were photographed by Bill Kennedy-Shaw in 1935 at Jebel Tageru in Sudan. Jebel Tageru is a mountain plateau situated on the southern edge of the Libyan desert, and Kennedy-Shaw had travelled the desert extensively in the 1920s and 1930s as a botanist and archaeologist. In 1928, D. Newbold had published a book, 'Rock-pictures and Archeaology in the Libyan Desert.' In it, Newbold argued that 'our ultimate aim in the study of rock-pictures is to identify their artists and their

wielders ... to discover their origins and their relations with the outside world.' Cattle, like those in this image, dominated the earliest rock art in this area, according to Friederike Jesse (2020), suggesting that these engravings were probably made by cattle herders. This observation can, interestingly, also tell us about the climate of the region and how that impacted which animals were employed: based on this evidence, it is likely that camels no longer frequented the region as conditions became more arid during the 2nd millennium BC (p.286). Animal art can tell us not just about historical communities and life, but is also evidence of changing climates and environments.



Round the World: Koala Park, Sydney

In the *Royal Geographical Society's* archives, there are huge collections of notebooks and photographs, but not all of these are from big expeditions that usually only feature men. In fact, some of them – like the collections these images came from – are from pioneering women explorers. As Dr Sarah Evans has written about the digitisation of archives: 'the tools from Wiley Digital Archives can help us reconstruct some of these networks, and allow us to start telling more well-rounded histories of exploration and geography and all of those involved.' One reason that the digital archives makes these histories more accessible is that it allows users to search across the whole archives, rather than in just specific parts.

These images of "teddy bears" and "kangaroos" at Koala Park in Sydney are part of an archive donated by Mrs F Powers, called "Round the World," primarily made up of photographs taken in 1937. The collection begins in 1926, with photographs from Kashmir, followed by a selection from the South of France and New York in 1934. The

majority of these photographs are of landscapes – mountains, waterfalls, trees, and national parks. Over the course of Powers' photograph collection, the images move from sepia to colour, marking a new moment in capturing the landscape on camera.

The photographs differ slightly in Sydney, in that they were taken in a zoo, with animals collected and on display to the public. These differ from photographs taken by male explorers of around the same time in that they move away from imagery of conquering wild foreign lands, and instead centres a vision of everyday encounters. What is particularly useful – and interesting – about Powers' collection is that although the collection is without accompanying notebooks, her dedicated inclusion of captions and postcards allows researchers to piece together her story. Powers had travelled to Sydney on the SS Mooltan in 1932, then heading to New Zealand on the SS Niagara. Unfortunately, Powers' preference for landscapes and animals, rather than portraits, makes it difficult to know who she was travelling with, and why.



Round the World, 1937 (Includes Loose Images Taken Slightly Earlier) Donated by Mrs F. Powers." Albums, 1926–1937. Wiley Digital Archives: *Royal Geographical Society* (with IBG) - Part II. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.

Polar Bears: Not So Cuddly

Polar bears are another quintessential geographical animal: when people think geographical exploration, they think polar bears and penguins! A pet peeve of polar scientists is the depiction of the two species together in winter scenes, when in fact polar bears and penguins live on opposite poles. This arctic species is often depicted as an empathetic character – and a firm favourite in nature documentaries. However, as those same documentaries have also taught us, life in the wild is often violent and without a happy ending.

Unfortunately, this photograph is loose in the collections and lacks sufficient detail to identify which expedition it was taken from. There were several expeditions at the Arctic in 1907, which is the date on the photograph, including the Denmark expedition, the

Anglo-American Polar Expedition, and Frederick Cook's expedition in which he claimed to have been the first to reach the pole, a claim both unproven and disputed.

In late 2021, it was reported that polar bears had been documented hunting reindeer for the first time (although this is not the first time it has happened!), raising questions about the future of Arctic species like the polar bear in a warming world. Images like these in *Royal Geographical Society's* archives are essential for telling the stories of these amazing creatures outside of cuddly stereotypes. They also evidence the changing diets and pressures on animals across the world for more than a century, and could be essential to environmental interventions to save them.



"Two Cubs Eating Their Mother." RGS Images Online, 5 Nov. 1907. Wiley Digital Archives: *Royal Geographical Society* (with IBG) - Part II. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.



"Ordinary" Animals

Chickens have been an important part of human cultures for the last 10,000 years, as food, but also in folklore and medicine. In the archives, marketplace images are often overflowing with chickens and other animals. In this picture, from the Harry Johnston photographs collection, 'market women' in Barbados (1908) are taking chickens to market. They are carrying chickens in both baskets and their arms, presumably on their way to sell these chickens.

The red junglefowl, which is the primary ancestor of domestic chickens (along with grey junglefowl, Sri Lankan junglefowl, and green junglefowl), is a tropical bird which ranges across much of South-east Asia and South Asia. The contemporary chicken – *gallus gallus domesticus* – is a global bird. First through cockfighting, then through showing, and finally for meat and eggs, "the chicken crossed the world because we took it with us" (Andrew Lawler, *How the Chicken*

Crossed the World, 2016). In 2019, the global numbers of chickens totalled around 25.9 billion, living across every country except Vatican City and every continent except Antarctica.

The global reach of the chicken is clear in the *Royal Geographical Society's* archives, with poultry sellers and farmers often being the subject of photographs. Chicken keeping and poultry trading has been documented for hundreds of years in the geographical archives, across countries and continents. Reports of chickens the world over were unlikely to be praised for ground-breaking knowledge, but the composition of these photographs including chickens are interesting in how they depict cultures other than the photographer's own, and in recognising that geography is not just about exceptional situations, but everyday lives!