

Minutes from the First Meeting of the Animal Geography Specialty Group  
Wednesday, March 25, 2009, Las Vegas, NV

Present: 17 attendees, Julie Urbanik ran the meeting as the 'acting Secretary/Treasurer'

The meeting began at 7pm

1. A brief introduction to the animal geography specialty group was provided by Julie Urbanik. This included a summary of last year's AAG exploratory meeting, submission of bylaws and supporting documents to the AAG, the notice of approval by the AAG on 11/29/08, and appreciation of those who supported these initial efforts (those who signed the petition, the acting board – Monica Ogra (Chair), Julie Urbanik (Sec./Treasurer), Jennifer Blecha, Bill Lynn, Kristin Stewart, and Jennifer Wolch, and those who wrote letters of support – Lisa Naughton, Paul Robbins, James Wescoat, and Jennifer Wolch). This was followed by a round of personal introductions as an agenda and a copy of the bylaws were circulated for review.

2. Passing the Bylaws. The first item of business was to discuss and pass the bylaws that were approved by the AAG. It was explained that this approval was needed to make the group 'officially official' and that a vote to pass by a simple majority of those present would make us (as the AnGSG) legitimate.

Discussion:

- 1) It was noted that the bylaw articles were not numbered properly. This will be fixed and resubmitted with our approval letter to the AAG.
- 2) A question about the use of the term 'human-animal studies' in the mission statement was brought to the floor. There was a concern that this phrase may actually set an artificial boundary on what constituted animal geographies and that geographers who study animals only (perhaps from more of a biogeography perspective) would feel left out and/or not realize this might be a group for them. Julie Urbanik explained that the thinking in the drafting of this mission statement was a) to be as inclusive as possible – hence the long list of possible human-animal, animal studies topics that follow this phrase, and b) that human-animal studies is a larger multidisciplinary phrase with academic recognition and we were trying to tap into that language. There was no intent in the use of this language to exclude anyone. There was a discussion as to whether the phrasing should be changed to say 'human-animal and animal studies' and/or something similar or if 'human-animal studies' does, in fact, encompass everything to do with animals since there is really no habitat that is untouched by human activity. Julie Urbanik reminded the attendees that this type of discussion was certainly warranted, but that we could not amend the bylaws if we did not officiate ourselves. To that end, the attendees agreed to table the discussion until next year and to move to a vote on the bylaws as is (with the changes in the numbering). The motion passed with 16 yes votes and 1 abstention.

3. Filling out the Board. The second item of business was to elect a Communications Officer and a Student Officer to finalize the first seven-member board. Julie Urbanik explained that five of the Board members were voted on last year to constitute an acting board for the purpose of submitting the material to get AAG approval. It was with the understanding that these same individuals, should they chose to do so, would begin their formal terms at the closing of the 2009 meeting. The duties of each Officer were reviewed and Sharon Wilcox nominated herself for the position of Communications Officer. This motion passed with a unanimous vote. Stella Capoccia and Suzie Wiseman nominated themselves for the position of Student Officer and after discussing each of their strengths, they decided that Stella would be the one to put forth her name for voting since she was at a more advanced stage in her PhD work (and would, therefore, be a student for a shorter period of time). This was done with the open understanding that Suzi would follow in this position next year and work this year as an assistant to the Student Officer as needed. The motion to elect Stella Capoccia passed with a unanimous vote.

The first official board for the Animal Geography Specialty Group consists of:

Monica Ogra – Chair	Jennifer Blecha – General Board
Julie Urbanik – Secretary/Treasurer	Bill Lynn – General Board
Sharon Wilcox – Communications Officer	Kristin Stewart – General Board
Stella Capoccia – Student Officer	

4. Annual Report/newsletter – request for materials. Julie Urbanik explained that the specialty group needs to complete an annual report and that we would like to publicize information via a newsletter. She asked people to send the Board any relevant materials such as book reviews, theses/dissertations completed, articles/books, conference announcements, jobs, grant information.

5. Money raising/future plans. The last part of the meeting was geared to a discussion of the priorities for the specialty group. The group agreed to the following four main priorities:

- a) Create a listserv as soon as possible so that all members and non-members of the AAG may join. This listserv would be used as the major communication framework for animal geographers.
- b) Create a website. We agreed that the specialty group has a unique opportunity here to do some excellent publicity work for animal geography within the discipline of geography and among human-animal studies. There were suggestions of websites to model from (e.g., the Canadian environmental history website), and that there are even some possibilities for getting grants to pay web designers. Suggestions for sections such as podcast interviews, media links, sharing course syllabi, etc. were made.
- c) Working to benefit students. There is active interest in the specialty group from both undergrad and graduate students. To main activities were suggested to assist in making animal geography a legitimate area of study for students. First, to get animal geography listed as an orals/comprehensives field with the AAG and second, to create paper/poster competitions for undergraduates and graduate students at the AAGs (with or without monetary prizes). This was definitely seen as a goal for the 2010 AAGs in D.C.

- d) 2010 AAG meeting in D.C. Lots of ideas were put forward to really develop a cohesive presence at the meeting. Could we get a speaker from the HSUS, National Zoo, or the Animals and Society Institute? Can we have an author meets critic session for animal geography related books? Can we organize a field trip? Can we coordinate session times with other specialty groups such as Biogeography?

Before we closed the meeting, we did take a group photo to post on the website.

We adjourned at 8:15pm

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Urbanik