Course Description

This course examines the roles that various species play as companions to humans. We will work to expand the concept of companion species by both problematizing how we live with and treat traditional companion animals, and focusing on those who are unwilling companions in our lives. Whereas domesticated animals like dogs and cats are commonly considered to be our companions, we will explore the concept of unwilling companions to see how we also live closely with animals who may not be in close proximity, like marine and wild animals, or pestiferous species, like rats, mice, and pigeons. Overall, this course endeavours to complicate easy understandings of companion species, interrogate the associations between the term “companion” and feelings like love, loyalty, and respect, and build a more robust definition of companions that carefully considers the context of the Anthropocene, proximity, and how we influence (and are influenced by) other species.

By looking to a range of cultural texts, this course takes up questions that look at companion animal relationships from all sides, such as: 1. Who do we consider to be our companions? 2. How does the designation of “companion” influence our conceptions and treatments of certain animals? 3. How does a companion animal relationship influence both human and animal lives, families, homes, and deaths? 4. Can we learn to stretch the designation of companion to animals who live in close proximity to us, but are hard to love?

Required Texts

All texts are available at NYU Bookstore, on NYU Classes, Bobst Library, and through other vendors. Please note that all readings are subject to change.

Christopher Guest’s Best in Show (film 2000)
Kornél Mundruczó’s White God (film 2015)
Jesmyn Ward’s Salvage the Bones (2011)
Ceyda Torun’s Kedi (film 2016)
Helen Macdonald H is for Hawk (2015)
Gabriela Cowperwaite's Blackfish (film 2013)
Blue Planet II (2017)
Planet Earth II (2016)
Criteria:

This seminar is designed to develop close reading, critical thinking, and conceptual analysis across a range of interdisciplinary subjects and texts. Active participation alongside careful reading and analysis is required to work through assumptions, unpack prior knowledge, and build and awareness of the significance and implications of the course topics. For all assignments (including participation) the grading criteria seeks: comprehension, clarity in presentation and writing, and innovative, critical thinking. All written assignments must be submitted through NYU Classes and use current MLA formatting.

Overview:

Participation (20%): The success of our seminar depends on active, lively, and thoughtful engagement with both the readings and your fellow students’ work. You are expected to read the required materials for the week, bring them to class with you, be prepared to discuss them during the seminar, and to listen attentively. Since the seminar runs on active discussion, I cannot re-teach you the material you miss if you are absent. If you cannot make it to class, please email me in advance and arrange to get notes from your peers. Participation will be evaluated based on: attendance, attentiveness, and the quality of your contributions. Missing more than one class without permission, lateness, distracted and distracting use of electronics, and infrequent, anecdotal, or off-topic contributions will negatively impact your grade.

Seminar Presentation (15%): Within the first few weeks, I will assign your presentation date. More details about this presentation can be found on NYU Classes.

Short Assignments (15%): You will be expected to complete two short assignments that build your analytical skills in relation to your everyday life. More details about these assignments can be found on NYU Classes.

Building-block Final Essay (50%): Responding to feedback and revising both ideas and writing are crucial parts of writing an effective essay. You will be required to complete three assignments (3 pages-10%, 5 pages-15%, 8 pages-25%) throughout the term that will act as building blocks for your final essay. Each assignment will allow you to work through and build the ideas that you will pursue in the final paper. The first assignment will require you to engage with a particular concept, explain and define it, and discuss why you think it is important. For the second assignment you will apply that initial concept to a specific text. The third assignment is a final paper in which you will examine the main concerns of the course through your own lens.

Class Administration

Students who require accommodations for a disability should consult with the Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at www.nyu.edu/life/safety-healthwellness/students-with-disabilities

Plagiarism results in failure in the class and referral to an academic dean. Plagiarism includes: copying sentences or fragments from any source without quotes or references; not citing every
source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else’s work as your own; or copying verbatim from any source. You are subject to CAS’s guidelines on plagiarism: cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity

Email Policy: Other than coming to my office hours, email is the best way to communicate with me. I will respond to emails within two days of receiving them and may take longer over the weekends or holidays.

Extensions/Incompletes: Extensions and incompletes will only be granted under exceptional circumstances. Please get in touch and discuss these requests with me well in advance of the assignment deadline.

Late Policy: Late assignments will be subtracted one grade point for lateness starting immediately after the due date/time.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

*Please note that all readings are subject to change throughout the course.

WEEK 1 - 1/28: Introductions + Syllabus
1/30: Alexander MacLeod’s “Lagomorph” + Erica Fudge’s “Introduction” in Pets

UNIT I: The Companion Species Manifesto

WEEK 2 - 2/4: Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto*
2/6: Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto* + Christopher Guest’s *Best in Show*

UNIT II: Canine Companions: On Dogs, Love, and Violence

WEEK 3 - 2/11 & 2/13: Kornél Mundruczó’s *White God* (film)

WEEK 4 - 2/18: President's Day (NO CLASSES)
2/20: Jesmyn Ward’s *Salvage the Bones*

WEEK 5 - 2/25 & 2/27: Jesmyn Ward’s *Salvage the Bones*

UNIT III: Pests & Everyday Companions

WEEK 6 - 3/4 & 3/6: *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (Guest Speaker Dr. Jordan Sheridan)

WEEK 7 - 3/11 & 3/13: Ceyda Torun’s *Kedi*

WEEK 8 - 3/18 - 3/24: Spring Recess (NO CLASSES)
UNIT IV: Unwilling and Unlikely Companions

WEEK 9 - 3/25 & 3/27: Helen Macdonald’s *H is for Hawk*

WEEK 10 - 4/1 & 4/3: Helen Macdonald’s *H is for Hawk*

WEEK 11 - 4/8 & 4/10: Gabriela Cowperwaithe's *Blackfish*

WEEK 12 - 4/15: Fish Companions and Friendship (Guest Speaker Dr. Becca Franks)
4/17: Invertebrates

UNIT V: Companions in the Anthropocene

WEEK 13 - 4/22: WRITING WORKSHOP
4/24: *Blue Planet II*, Aimee Nezeukumatathil's Ocean, & Rita Wong's Undercurrent

WEEK 14: 4/29 & 5/1: *Blue Planet II* & *Planet Earth II* "Cities"

WEEK 15: 5/6: Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees*
5/8: Anna Tsing's "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species"

WEEK 16: 5/13: LAST CLASS