

Sanctuaries as Living Laboratories: Exploring Animal Autonomy and Reproductive Ethics in Italian Multispecies Communities

Giorgia Pagliuca
University of Turin & University of Gastronomic Sciences

INTRODUCTION & AIM

What happens to animals once they are **free**?

The erosion of animal farming prompts new challenges on how to integrate domesticated animals into society. These subjects are now often part of **animal sanctuaries**, spaces where traditional human-animal hierarchies are re-evaluated. These places encourage coexistence based on reciprocity, solidarity, autonomy and **care**.

However, questions may arise. For instance, **should sanctuaries allow animals to reproduce?**

METHODOLOGY



This research employs oral history and ethnographic methods to explore the knowledge production within animal sanctuaries.

Through **in-depth interviews** with caregivers and **participant observation**, it investigates how human-animal relationships challenge conventional scientific and veterinary frameworks. The study also critically examines narrative practices and ethical considerations emerging in sanctuary work in Italy.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

While this respects their autonomy, uncontrolled reproduction can lead to resource scarcity and overcrowding. Many sanctuaries opt for **sterilization**, but this raises ethical concerns.

♥ Why Allow Some Animals to Reproduce?

- **Respecting Animal Individual Agency** – Some birds have demonstrated behaviors interpreted as a strong desire to reproduce, while others have rejected the idea of it.
- **Zoodemocracy in Action** – If political participation means shaping community life, then allowing certain animals to reproduce—rather than imposing absolute human control—aligns with the idea of shared governance.
- **Ethical Complexity** – Some cases suggest that ethical sanctuary management must consider not only human-imposed rules but also animals' expressed desires.

CONCLUSION

Sanctuaries navigate between autonomy and management. While sterilization prevents overpopulation, not all animals seek to reproduce. Sanctuary life reveals **individual desires**, challenging uniform approaches and reshaping ethical frameworks in multispecies governance.

REFERENCES

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