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### The Animals and Us Year In Review

Harold Herzog

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# The Animals and Us Year In Review

... and how this blog got started.

Posted January 5, 2018

There's snow on my deck, the thermometer outside reads 9 degrees, and the always inscrutable Tilly is stretched out in front of the fireplace. It seems like a good time to follow the lead of one of my favorite human-animal interaction bloggers [Zazie Todd](#) and review the year by posting links to the most popular 2017 *Animals and Us* posts. But I've also got a case of end-of-the-year nostalgia. So before going straight to the greatest hits, I'll briefly reminisce about how the blog got started, how it works, and where it's been. It's a good time to reflect a bit as the 100th post appeared as the year drew to close, and the total number of hits should reach the 2 million mark in the next couple of weeks.

## How Animals and Us Got Started

I never had any desire to write a blog. In fact, I shared the disdain for blogging common in academic circles. My attitudes changed one afternoon in June 2010 when I got a call from a *Psychology Today* editor asking if I would consider blogging for the magazine. My inclination was to say no, but then I realized that [my trade book on human-animal interactions](#) was coming out in a couple of months. So, after a bit of subtle prodding from my publisher, I reluctantly decided to give it a go. I certainly did not expect much of a response when I submitted my [first post](#) a few days later, so I was stunned when two hours later, 2,000 people had read my account of how a group of wild capuchin monkeys adopted a baby marmoset and kept it for a pet. I was even more surprised when over the next week the number of hits for the post jumped to 20,000. That's a much higher readership my academic articles ever got. *Animals and Us* was off and running.

These days, I try to write one or two posts a month. I'm deeply [envious](#) of my journalist daughter Katie who whips out her edgy and funny commentaries on [politics](#) and culture in an hour or so. It typically takes me 10 to 20 hours to produce a post if you include the background reading and research. The average *Animals and Us* posts eventually gets about 20,000 reads. But it varies widely, and I am hopeless when it comes to predicting how much [attention](#) a post will get. The most popular one ([The Problem With Incest](#)) generated nearly 400,000 hits. The least popular post, in contrast, was read by less than 700 people. One of my favorite recent posts did not get nearly as many readers as I expected. It was on [The Great British Pet Massacre](#), when, over a three-day period in 1939, 400,000 Londoners suddenly decided to have their dogs and cats killed. Go figure.

## “You Won’t Get Rich.”

The editor who recruited me said I would probably enjoy blogging, but it would not make me rich. She was right on both counts. But if it is not for the big bucks, then why bother writing a blog? For one, it gives me the freedom to explore interesting issues and topics I want to learn more about. Recently, this has ranged from the [surprising effectiveness of crickets as therapy animals](#) to [the kinds of pets that will increase your sex appeal](#). I particularly like highlighting good research by young investigators. (See, for example, [here](#) and [here](#).) The blog has also had more impact than I anticipated: All of the posts are archived by the *Humane Society of the United States* in their [Animal Studies Repository](#). Unexpectedly, the posts are sometimes cited in journal articles. Posts have also been picked up by mainstream media including *Time*, *Wired*, and CNN. And some posts even wind up on syllabuses for college courses.

## Things Change, Including “Animals and Us”

In some ways, this blog is not much different today than it was seven years ago, but in other ways it has evolved. I still write for two audiences. The first consists of everyday people who want to learn about the latest discoveries about the psychology of our interactions with other species. The members of the second audience are my fellow researchers in anthrozoology. The biggest change in the blog has been an increase over the last couple of years in the proportion of posts devoted to the impact of [pets](#) on human health and [happiness](#) and on animal assisted therapies. The percentage of posts on pets and animal therapies jumped from 35% in 2010 to 80% in 2017. This reflects an impressive increase in the number of studies published in these areas and, consequently, an explosion of media depictions of animals as healers.

The problem is that these news reports are often based on flawed research, misinterpretations of data, and feel-good press releases produced by the pet products industry. In an effort to counter this trend, I've written about persistent problems with research in our field ([here](#) and [here](#)) and pointed a finger at dubious claims about people and pets (for example, [here](#) and [here](#)). But I also use this forum to bring attention to good research ([here](#) and [here](#)) as well as studies that have ignored by the press because they found pets did not improve human health and well-being ([here](#)). Snow flakes are starting to fall again, and I've reminisced enough. But I want to thank *Psychology Today* for allowing me to participate in this wonderful intellectual playground, and my thanks particularly go to my *Psychology Today* editors for their continuing support.