



RESEARCH PROJECT

BIOrdinary

BIODIVERSITY DILEMMAS IN ORDINARY PLACES

BIOrdinary expands our understanding of biodiversity by focusing on places marked by habitation, trade and agriculture.

Essential to our needs for food, shelter and resources, these ordinary places currently fall outside global biodiversity agendas.

We explore biodiversity dilemmas in seven ordinary places that involve migrant species - tea plants, mosquitos, fish, oysters crabs, minks and goats. Researching the intertwined social and biological histories leading up to these dilemmas and local communities' engagement with these crises, BIOrdinary asks: what would a more just and democratic biodiversity agenda entail?

HOME

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PERIOD

4 years

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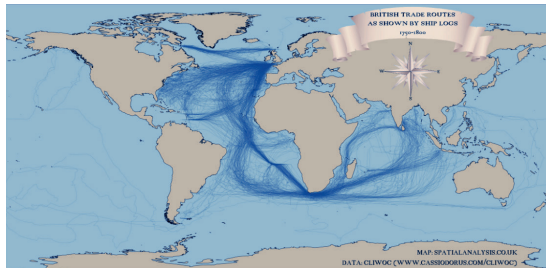


The missing 70%

Current biodiversity agenda aims at protecting 30% of the surface of the planet, largely in ecological hotspots. BIOrdinary turns attention to the missing 70%. With the help of anthropological tools, we explore shifts in biodiversity in ordinary places marked by human activity.

Imperial routes and species on the move

Transatlantic trade and colonial cultivation practices set in motion global sociobiological processes that unevenly redrew the map of human/non-human relations. The project's seven case studies examine their aftermath: the life-trajectories of species displaced by imperial trade, infrastructural projects, domestication, plantations and aquaculture.



Scapegoated by global biodiversity policy, non-native species can be well integrated into environments and social, political and economic life. There are no easy answers or quick fixes to the biodiversity dilemmas evolving in these places.

Global warming has added a new dimension to environments with non-native species: alien and endemic species react differently to climate-induced changes. Some species thrive, others suffer. We cannot rule out that migrant species will survive future heatwaves, while local species perish.

“Who decides when a migrant species is an intruder or a climate refugee?”

The trial of species

How we talk about new species in our environment influences our responses to them. Mobile species have their own histories. Some moved of their own accord. Others were brought along by humans or hitched a ride on infrastructural projects and international trade.

What responsibility do we have for migrant species? Should we eradicate them to protect native species or learn to live with them? Who decides when a migrant species is an intruder or a climate refugee?

Biodiversity for whom?

The larger aim of BIOrdinary is to formulate a more just, inclusive and democratic biodiversity agenda, based on local understandings and practices that involve living with migrant species.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

	2023	2024	2025-2026
WORK PACKAGES	WP1: Perspectives More-than-human histories of species mobilities.	WP2: Practices Vernacular Understandings.	WP3: Policy Democratizing Biodiversity.
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	Historicizing biodiversity dilemmas in ordinary places.	Understanding diverse communities' engagement with biodiversity dilemmas.	Envisioning a more just, inclusive, and democratic biodiversity agenda.

CASE STUDIES

RESEARCH TEAM



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CASE 1. Travelling Tea Plants in East Africa



British settlers brought the Assam tea plant from India across the Indian Ocean to East Africa.

Dense forests were turned into monocultural plantations. Climate change and plant breeding - reducing the genetic diversity - have now made these plantations highly vulnerable. Tea plants have escaped into nearby forest and become "invasive".

"Plants do move, but at a pace and in manners that humans tend to miss. British planters carried seeds across the Indian Ocean to grow tea on colonized lands."

CASE 2. Emergent Ecologies in the Mediterranean Sea



The Mediterranean Sea is undergoing one of the world's largest marine transformations. Successive dredging has turned the Suez Canal into a "highway" for tropical marine species (jellyfish, rabbitfish, crustacea and algae). Thriving in a warming Mediterranean Sea, these tropical species are changing the biota.

"There is more to fish than food and biology. Migratory fishes tell stories about past world-orders and global shipping. Escaping marine heatwaves and underwater deserts, they also co-write the future of our seas."



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CASE 3. Mobile Hungry Crabs in Sicily



After hitching a ride on cargo ships, blue crabs are arriving on the Sicilian coast. Noted for their appetite, their presence mobilizes concerns about the damage they have caused to biodiversity elsewhere, but these newcomers could be a valuable bycatch for local fishers.

"What do you do with a hungry species? As "tasty, voracious" blue crabs arrive in Sicily, we are offered one potential answer - eat them!"



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CASE 4. "Invasive" Mosquitos in Urban Singapore



Aedes aegypti mosquitos are highly mobile and proficient vectors of diseases. Having evolved to prefer human habitats they are increasingly making urban Singapore their home, provoking large-scale projects to eradicate this 'invader' in the name of public health. Yet, these programs often also drastically reduce biodiversity.

"To avoid undermining biodiversity, permaculture farmers in Singapore delegate the killing of mosquitoes. They cultivate biodiverse spaces where natural predators flourish and keep the mosquito population in check."

CASE 5. Migrant Oysters on the West Coast of Sweden



These molluscs, imported from the Pacific Ocean, escaped from European aquafarms and hitchhiked on warming sea-currents to the Western shores of Sweden. Accused of outcompeting local species and cutting summer guests' feet, they are also ecosystem engineers, reef builders and a potential new marine nutrient.

"Hammering Pacific Oysters away from the cliffs of Bohuslän means also destroying marine societies that include other species that have found their home on Pacific oyster reefs."



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CASE 6. Runaway Mink in the Stockholm Archipelago



Minks were first brought to Sweden from North America for the commercial exploitation of their fur in the 1920s. Absconding from captivity or released by animal activists, minks now threaten the diversity of native species, particularly birds, in the Swedish archipelago.

"Eradicating the invasive North American mink in the archipelago is becoming a team effort of outsourced labor. Civilian residents are encouraged to have "at least one" kill-trap for minks on their land."

CASE 7. Colonising Goats in Aotearoa New Zealand



Since being introduced by colonists for meat and dairy, goats have been an environmental problem in Aotearoa, disturbing delicate native forests. Now, goats exist both as a problematic feral population to be culled, and a potential for better, more sustainable dairy - if properly contained.

"What is being missed when we only focus on either removing or containing goats? I am drawn to those more-than-human possibilities beyond these rigid approaches."



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