

Jana Bailey
University of Maryland

Sportsmen's Perceptions of Animals in American Periodicals, 1850-1880

In mid-nineteenth-century America, 'sportsmen' included hunters, fishermen, and trappers, as well as racehorse breeders and trainers, dog breeders, and yachtsmen, all of whom had contacts of varying degrees and complexity with animals. Sportsmen wrote about their experiences, perceptions of, and beliefs regarding animals in articles that appeared in *Forest and Stream* and other popular periodicals of the era. In *Forest and Stream*, a periodical devoted to sportsmen's pursuits, contributors expounded not only on the animals they hunted or fished, but also on other animals.

In popular periodicals, sportsmen described animals in both realistic and mythical terms. Sportsmen usually refrained from the sentimentalism that other nineteenth-century Americans used to describe animals, but some individuals tended to exaggerate, and others continued to pass on mythical ideas regarding animals that persisted from earlier centuries. Editors occasionally attempted to dispel fanciful ideas in their responses to some of these articles. Naturalists and explorers also frequently wrote articles for periodicals. They reported sportsmen's beliefs and experiences and rendered their own judgments, also dispelling or questioning exaggerated accounts and mythical ideas. The tension between accuracy and exaggeration, realism and sentimentalism, resulted in different attitudes and ideas among sportsmen and between sportsmen and other people.