

CONFERENCES

9th Annual Conference for Critical Animal Studies, SUNY Cortland, New York, April 10th 2010.

Sarat Colling

The Institute for Critical Animal Studies recently celebrated its 9th Annual North American Conference at SUNY Cortland, New York. Located 30 minutes south of Syracuse and north of Ithaca, the beautiful setting and excellent campus facilities were appreciated by the 220 participants from around the world.

This year's conference, "Abolition, Liberation, and the Intersections of Social Justice," opened on April 10th with a welcoming address from ICAS co-founder and SUNY Cortland teacher Anthony Nocella. He discussed how Critical Animal Studies is a rapidly growing field of study which breaks down the socially constructed human-animal binary and studies all species in order to achieve total liberation and freedom. With fifty presenters speaking on topics such as coalitional politics, animals and disability, prison abolition, eco-sustainability, LGBTQ issues, feminism, food politics, the AETA, anarchist perspectives and more, the panels and workshops provided for a full and invigorating day of learning, inspiration and community.

The sessions were broken up by a delicious lunch of Greek food and the Critical Animal Studies awards ceremony which acknowledged a number of scholars in the field (see the ICAS website for a list of award winners). During the awards ceremony we heard from William Skipper, Chair of SUNY Cortland's Sociology department, who welcomed Critical Animal Studies into the school and emphasized the importance of studying human's relationship with other animals. Throughout the day attendees browsed the booths of various organizations including The Vegan Police, Mercy for Animals, Lantern Books, peta2, Canadian Animal Liberation Movement, and Transformative Studies Institute, for educational information, books, t-shirts and other animal-friendly goodies.

Norm Phelps, an animal rights activist and author of 25 years, Andrew Jones, a Professor of Sociology researching the cultural and structural roots of the ecological crisis, and Lauren Corman, who teaches Critical Animal Studies at Brock University gave the plenary talk. Their thought provoking presentations were followed by an interesting discussion on eco-feminism and to what degree animal advocates should build coalitions with other social justice movements. It was an honor to hear from them, as well as all of the other fabulous presenters who work toward compassion for all. Finally, the day ended with a screening of the newly released documentary film *Skin Trade*.

A tour of the Watkins Glen Farm Sanctuary on April 11th served as an appropriate closing event for the ICAS conference. During the tour over 50 participants had the opportunity to connect with nonhuman animals who have been rescued from various situations of cruelty, such as factory farming. As the ICAS activists and academics work for animal liberation, it was a pleasure to spend the afternoon supporting an organization dedicated to compassionate living through rescues, education and advocacy.

The Critical Animal Studies conference is run entirely by volunteers. While previously free, this year ICAS charged a fifteen dollar registration fee to cover costs. We anticipated 100-150 attendees and were pleasantly surprised to find out that more than 220 people showed up for the conference! However, due to this year's popularity we sincerely apologize if anyone did not receive everything on the lunch menu, and appreciate your understanding. To remedy this, next year we will provide an online registration option so that everyone may register conveniently prior to the conference.

ICAS would like to express much appreciation to those who made the event happen. This includes the SUNY Cortland sponsors: Women's Studies Center for Gender and Intercultural Studies (CGIS), Anarchist Studies Initiative, Institute for Disability Studies, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology Center for Ethics, Peace, and Social Justice (CEPS), Criminology Club, Social Advocacy and Systems Change Journal, and *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies*; as well as the Non-SUNY Cortland sponsors: Central New York Peace Studies Consortium, Center for Green Criminology and Security Studies,

Transformative Studies Institute, Political Media Review, Sacco and Vanzetti Foundation and Save the Kids. We would like to thank the Conference Committee: Judy K. C. Bentley, Andrew Fitz-Gibbon, Elizabeth Green, Ashley Mosgrove, Caroline Kaltefleiter, Mechthild E. Nagel, Sarat Colling and Anthony J. Nocella, II. Thanks also to the facilitators: Jackie Riehle, Doreen Nieves, Ashley Mosgrove, Anastasia Yarbrough, Brittani Mannix, Ronald Pleban, Elizabeth Green, Jamie Alvito and Timothy Rodriguez. Finally, we greatly appreciate all of the dedicated presenters, booth participants, amazing volunteers, and everyone who attended and encouraged others to join in.

Next year will be the 10th Annual Conference of Critical Animal Studies. We hope you can make it!