



Wildlife in Borderlands

KICK-OFF SYMPOSIUM WITH JARO STACUL

ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, 10 April 2026

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Edited by: Miha Kozorog

Symposium marking the launch of the Wildlife in Borderlands project, funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency under grant number J6-70232.



ZRC SAZU



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KICK-OFF SYMPOSIUM of *Wildlife in Borderlands* project

WITH JARO STACUL

ZRC SAZU, LJUBLJANA, 10 APRIL 2026

9:00 – 9:30 Coffee

9:30 – 11:30 **Jaro Stacul – discussant**

Miha Kozorog
Wildlife in Borderlands

Daša Ličen
Mapping Society Through Wildlife

Špela Ledinek Lozej
Wildlife in the Borderlands of the Julian Alps

Tatiana Bajuk Senčar
Borderwork in the Context of Cross-Border Wildlife Initiatives

Katarina Šrampf Vendramin
Wildlife Between Practice and Representation: The Viticultural Landscape of Goriška Brda and Collio

Blaž Bajič
Of Wolves (and other animals) and Men: Aestheticization, Visual Politics, and Borderland Ecologies

Dan Podjed
The Boundaries Between the Cultivated and the Natural: The Case of the Village of Drašiči

Boštjan Kravanja
Positioning Hunting Tourism within the Politics of Landscape in the Soča Valley

Sandi Abram
Borderland Predators: Wolf and Bear Biographies in the Dinarides and the Alps

11:30 – 12:00 Break

12:00 **Jaro Stacul**
Knowing One's Place: Hunters and Poachers in the Italian Eastern Alps

PLENARY LECTURE

ZRC SAZU, DVORANA ŠTIRIH LETNIH ČASOV, 10 APRIL 2026, 12:00

Jaro Stacul

Knowing One's Place: Hunters and Poachers in the Italian Eastern Alps

Most anthropological works have treated hunting in western societies as a ritual replay of humans' problematic relationship with nature, yet hunting's political dimension has so far been largely overlooked. This paper discusses hunting practices in the Italian Alps of Trentino in the context of the ascendancy of regionalist and populist political forces which have altered the Italian political landscape since the 1990s. In examining the ways in which hunting symbolically turns territory into 'private property' and becomes functional to processes such as the 'production of locality', the paper shows that hunting, as a form of interaction with landscape, also conceals memories and myths. In highlighting these connections, the paper pursues the argument that hunting also expresses local-level views of regionalist politics, especially by making landscape the context for contesting aspects of nationhood such as domination and encompassment.

Biographical note: Jaro Stacul holds a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge. He has held positions in various academic and research institutions in Australia, Britain, Bulgaria, and Canada. Currently, he is Assistant Professor of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw. He focuses on issues of populism, migration, and the state in Europe (Italy and Poland). He undertook his doctoral research on localism and regional identity in the Italian Alps of Trentino at a time when regionalist political forces were making big inroads in the area. He has recently carried out long-term fieldwork, funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, on right-wing populism in Poland, and has subsequently undertaken a new research project on the Polish diaspora in Australia. Currently, he is conducting research on how undergraduate students in Atlantic Canada balance work and study. His publications include the monograph *The bounded field: Localism and local identity in an Italian Alpine valley* and the book, edited with Christina Moutsou and Helen Kopnina, *Crossing European boundaries: Beyond conventional geographical categories*, both published by Berghahn Books.

SYMPOSIUM

ZRC SAZU, INSTITUTE OF SLOVENIAN ETHNOLOGY, 10 APRIL 2026, 9:00-12:00

DISCUSSANT: JARO STACUL

MIHA KOZOROG

WILDLIFE IN BORDERLANDS

Existing border research treated wildlife as a peripheral subject. Our anthropological study – in Slovenia and its neighbourhood – sets wild animals at the centre of border research. It will examine the contradictions in the relations between human borders and animals. Unaware of our border convention, animals cross borders freely, which prompts borderwork, i.e. specific human activities of demarcation (through narratives, physical barriers, hunting, landscape ecosemiotics etc.). But by marking boundaries in their environment, people affect animal movement and behaviour, which – in turn – has an effect on their own everyday life. The project will ethnographically explore the relations between borders and wildlife, as border effects affect the movement of wildlife and wildlife affects human borderwork, which plays out differently on different borders. We will explore how the behaviour of wildlife in various ways brings the border into the minds and activities of people living in border areas, who continually negotiate their own role along the border. In the tradition of political ecology, our study will take into account the shifting relations and mutually reciprocal influence between political and economic processes and local ecologies from the socialist period to present day.

Keywords: international borders, borderwork, wildlife, everyday life, farming, hunting, nature conservation, political ecology, Yugoslavia, Slovenia

DAŠA LIČEN

MAPPING SOCIETY THROUGH WILDLIFE

Looking at a society through its ideas about what constitutes wildlife, how it should be regulated, by whom, and who is perceived as most closely resembling it, reveals far more than is immediately apparent. Using discourses surrounding wild boar, deer, jackals, and other

animals inhabiting the Karst Plateau and its surrounding areas as a case in point, one can identify multiple overlapping social tensions. While the national border is the most obvious, other divisions also warrant attention, particularly the rural–urban divide between those who live alongside and manage wildlife on a daily basis and those who do so from a distance.

Keywords: wildlife, rural–urban, Karst, human–animal relations, borderwork, hunting

ŠPELA LEDINEK LOZEJ

WILDLIFE IN THE BORDERLANDS OF THE JULIAN ALPS

This presentation focuses on the case study of the Italian-Slovenian borderlands of the Julian Alps and borderwork effected and affected by wildlife animals. For now, we have decided to focus on observing bears, wolves, and ibex; in the future, we will expand or narrow the selection of species.

The study focuses on two main dimensions. First, it compares nature (wildlife) protection discourses and practices in two adjacent protected areas: Parc of the Julian Prealps (*Parco delle Prealpi Giulie*) in Italy and Triglav National Park (*Triglavski narodni park*) in Slovenia. Preliminary research suggests that levels of wildlife protection, at least in practice, are significantly higher in Italy than in Slovenia. Consequently, we will explore how such differences are negotiated within the recently established transboundary UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve Julian Alps, which covers the area of both parks (and beyond).

Second, we will also examine interactions between local residents and wildlife (as well as imaginaries and discourses that legitimize and support such practices). Particular attention will be given to livestock breeders, who are most directly affected by wolves and bears, and to the discourses through which they legitimise demands for the cull. In addition, the study analyses the ambivalent role of hunters who are usually part of the locals (sometimes also breeders themselves) and they simultaneously represent and act for conservational regime (sometimes also working as park rangers) and/or engaging in entrepreneurial activities – trophy hunting tourism. Preliminary research indicates that relations and practices of livestock breeders toward large carnivores are relatively similar on both sides of the border,

whereas hunting practices differ substantially between Italy and Slovenia. The article therefore seeks to explain these divergences and identify the underlying social, political, and ecological factors shaping them.

Keywords: wildlife (bears, wolfs, ibex), Triglav National Park, Parc of the Julian Prealps, UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve, Julian Alps

TATIANA BAJUK SENČAR

BORDERWORK IN THE CONTEXT OF CROSS-BORDER WILDLIFE INITIATIVES

Triglav National Park, located along Slovenia's northwestern border, is not an entity unto itself but has a long history of cooperation with and active participation in transnational initiatives such as the Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve and the Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Julian Alps – dedicated to the protection of biodiversity broadly defined. In this project, I am interested in mapping out and tracing the borderwork involved in cross-border wildlife initiatives. Such initiatives are numerous and varied, involving diverse partnerships – be they with protected areas, municipalities, state agencies, and regional authorities. In particular, I intend to examine partnerships and initiatives encouraged and financed at the level of the EU, which has its particular policy priorities in terms of cross-border cooperation and biodiversity protection. These include, for example, the LIFE WolfalpsEU and the LIFE Lynx initiatives, which include Slovenian organizations and institutions (particularly the Triglav National Park Administration and the Slovenian Forest Service) as participant institutions. The main questions guiding this research involve identifying and exploring similarities and differences between transnational and nationally defined visions of wildlife conservation and wildlife. Furthermore, this line of inquiry will also explore how these initiatives or projects “translate” across borders and jurisdictions, not only across scales but also across borders – be they geographic, political, social, or administrative – and how they play out at the level of practice.

Keywords: wildlife conservation, Triglav National Park, transnational initiatives and partnerships, European Union

KATARINA ŠRIMPF VENDRAMIN

WILDLIFE BETWEEN PRACTICE AND REPRESENTATION: THE VITICULTURAL
LANDSCAPE OF GORIŠKA BRDA AND COLLIO

This research will explore the relationships between wild animals and human practices in the viticultural landscape of the Goriška Brda and Collio regions. It addresses how the presence and movement of wildlife (wild boar, deer) influence vineyard management, particularly practices of protection, boundary-making, and adaptation. In this context, boundaries are understood not only as state or administrative lines, but also as ecological, symbolic, and economic processes that are continuously produced and transformed through everyday interactions between humans and animals. Particular attention is given to the ways in which representations of wild animals are incorporated into local identities and tourism practices, for example through their visual presence in vineyards, wineries, and hospitality settings.

Keywords: viticultural landscape, human–animal relations, boundary-making, Goriška Brda, Collio

BLAŽ BAJIČ

OF WOLVES (AND OTHER ANIMALS) AND MEN: AESTHETICIZATION, VISUAL
POLITICS, AND BORDERLAND ECOLOGIES

This paper outlines an individual line of inquiry focusing on the visual politics of human-animal relations. It starts from the premise that animals and landscapes do not simply appear as given objects of perception, but are constituted through competing regimes of representation. Hunters, farmers, conservationists, state institutions, and tourism actors produce different visualizations of animals in line with their particular interests, moral economies, and practical engagements. This inquiry will approach this process through the concept of aestheticization (Bajič 2024; 2025), understood as the production of a specific semiotic and affective grammar (Mazzarella 2017) through which animals become legible as noble, destructive, invasive, vulnerable, or worthy of protection, and landscapes as wild, fragile, abandoned, traditional, or governable. It will ask how borders and borderland figure in not merely the setting of these representations, but also a resource within them: mobilized as signs of authenticity,

otherness, threat, ecological value, and legitimacy. The project thus asks how visual representation mediates between political ecology, affect, and the contested governance of wildlife in border regions.

Keywords: wolves, visual politics, aestheticization, affect

DAN PODJED

THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE CULTIVATED AND THE NATURAL: THE CASE OF THE VILLAGE OF DRAŠIČI

This contribution examines the relationships between local residents and the natural environment in the Bela Krajina village of Drašiči, located along the Slovenian-Croatian border. It highlights viticulture and winemaking as key economic activities that shape not only the landscape but also everyday practices, identities, and the area's image as a tourist destination. The analysis goes beyond an anthropocentric perspective and also includes wildlife as a significant actor that co-creates the space and influences the perception of order and disorder in the landscape. The paper demonstrates how local residents, through their daily interactions with the environment, establish and question the boundaries between the 'cultivated' and the 'natural', which often prove to be fluid and ambivalent. Particular attention is paid to narratives about what belongs in the space – what is 'native' – and what is understood as 'alien' and undesirable.

Keywords: human-nature relations, vineyard landscape, multi-layered relations, spatial narratives, Bela Krajina, Drašiči

BOŠTJAN KRAVANJA

POSITIONING HUNTING TOURISM WITHIN THE POLITICS OF LANDSCAPE IN THE SOČA VALLEY

This presentation examines hunting tourism in the Upper Soča Valley as part of a broader field in which tourism, nature conservation, and heritage are constantly negotiated. It focuses on

the border area around Kobarid (especially Breginj and the Mt. Stol ridge) and draws on ongoing ethnographic engagement in the area, including work with local hunters who host predominantly foreign clients, especially Italians. Rather than treating tourism as a clearly defined sector, the paper approaches it as a practical and discursive frame that organizes different activities and gives them meaning. Within this frame, hunting appears as a relatively marginal but revealing practice that does not easily fit dominant ideas of the region as a space of sustainable and non-invasive encounters with nature. The paper explores how such distinctions take shape in practice, and how different actors position hunting within the wider tourism landscape. By following these tensions, it suggests a way of understanding how value, legitimacy, and meaning are negotiated in a contemporary multi-use tourist landscape in the Soča Valley border area.

Keywords: hunting tourism, overlapping outdoor activities, tourism landscape, Upper Soča Valley

SANDI ABRAM

BORDERLAND PREDATORS: WOLF AND BEAR BIOGRAPHIES IN THE DINARIDES AND THE ALPS

This presentation outlines a research design focused on two individual representatives of large carnivore species, namely the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) and brown bear (*Ursus arctos*). It proposes an animal biographical approach (Krebber & Roscher 2018) to reconstruct sections and segments of each animal's life through a combination of monitoring traces, institutional records, media narratives, and local accounts. By "following" each of these two individuals in their migration through the cross-border corridor linking the Dinaric and Alpine regions, the paper hints at how the same animal was treated both as charismatic and conflict species, depending on the actor in question, and the larger context.

Keywords: gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), predators, Dinarides, Alps