



Wild by Nature: North American Animals Confront Colonization

By Andrea L. Smalley

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From the time Europeans first came to the New World until the closing of the frontier, the benefits of abundant wild animals—from beavers and wolves to fish, deer, and bison?appeared as a recurring theme in colonizing discourses. Explorers, travelers, surveyors, naturalists, and other promoters routinely advertised the richness of the American faunal environment and speculated about the ways in which animals could be made to serve their colonial projects. In practice, however, American animals proved far less malleable to colonizers' designs. Their behaviors constrained an English colonial vision of a reinvented and rationalized American landscape.

In *Wild by Nature*, Andrea L. Smalley argues that Anglo-American authorities' unceasing efforts to convert indigenous beasts into colonized creatures frequently produced unsettling results that threatened colonizers' control over the land and the people. Not simply acted upon by being commodified, harvested, and exterminated, wild animals were active subjects in the colonial story, altering its outcome in unanticipated ways. These creatures became legal actors?subjects of statutes, issues in court cases, and parties to treaties?in a centuries-long colonizing process that was reenacted on successive wild animal frontiers.

Following a trail of human–animal encounters from the seventeenth-century Chesapeake to the Civil War–era southern plains, Smalley shows how wild beasts and their human pursuers repeatedly transgressed the lines lawmakers drew to demarcate colonial sovereignty and control, confounding attempts to enclose both people and animals inside a legal frame. She also explores how, to possess the land, colonizers had to find new ways to contain animals without destroying the wildness that made those creatures valuable to English settler societies in the first place. Offering fresh perspectives on colonial, legal, environmental, and Native American history, *Wild by Nature* reenvisiones the familiar stories of early America as animal tales.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Smalley does a fine job of showing how the eradication of wolves, beaver, brown bear, wild boar, and lynx in England by the sixteenth century helped to shape the approach English colonists took to the animal populations they found in North America. Placing animals at the center of the story of colonization, *Wild by Nature* is a provocative and persuasive book."

(Ted Steinberg, author of *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*)

About the Author

Andrea L. Smalley is an assistant professor of history at Northern Illinois University.

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