

Animal Log Assignment

IDS 312: Predators, Pets, and Pests

Fall 2020

Assignment Description

This assignment was inspired by John Steinbeck's efforts in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* to "see everything our eyes would accommodate...and build some kind of structure in modeled imitation of the observed reality" (1-2). In your own Animal Logs **you will closely observe one animal per week**; after each sustained observation, you will then share your Log with the rest of the class. You will write a total of four Logs this term. The purpose of the Animal Log Assignment is to become attuned to the wild and domesticated animals that live both with and around you—to become aware of their physical features, habitats, movements, behaviors, and perhaps even desires. Each Log documents your observations of just one animal during one moment.

Throughout the term, you should observe different types of animals for each of your Logs. While I do not want to limit your choices too much, I do want you to experiment with different environments, species, and times of day for this assignment. Therefore, I ask that you choose different "categories" of animals to observe, and I've given you some choices below. When categorizing animals, words like "domesticated" and "wild" are highly contested and occasionally problematic, and we will spend a lot of time deconstructing them in this class. Despite the problems often associated with these terms, I've used them here as broad frames for encouraging diversity across your four Animal Logs:

"Domesticated" Animals or Animals in Captivity (Choose 1-2 from this category)

- Livestock
- Zoo animals
- Pets (yours or someone else's)
- Animals in pet stores
- Any caged or contained animal
- Stray animals

"Wild" Animals (Choose 1-2 from this category)

- Insects, worms, and arachnids
- Birds
- Wild or otherwise "untamed" animals/wildlife
- Reptiles
- Big-game species
- Predators
- Aquatic species

Length, Point of View, Links, and Images

Length: Each Animal Log Post should be between 450 and 850 words. Your response to a classmate's Log should be between 100 and 300 words.

Point of View: Since Animal Logs depend on your own observations and points of view, it would make sense to write your posts in first-person singular point of view: *I, me, my*. Third-person point of view would also make sense when describing the animal(s) you are observing: *The tarantula reared up on its hind legs in an aggressive manner when it saw me approaching.*

Links/Research: While research is not required for the Animal Log Assignment, you will probably find that you need to conduct informal research to learn more about the animal(s) you are observing. For example, if you observe a bird in your apartment's courtyard, and you don't know what kind of bird it is, it would make sense to do a quick Google search: "red bird orange beak Tempe Arizona spring" OR "Arizona birds." If you are able to identify the animal online, feel free to include the links in your post as a reference.

Images: If you are able to capture a photo or video of the animal you've observed, include it as an attachment or embedded image in your post. (See the course Announcement on adding images to Discussions.) You might also (or instead) include a photo from the Internet—but make sure to link it. If you are unable to identify the animal you observed but you captured a picture of it, feel free to ask your peers for help in the Animal Log Post! Likewise, if one of your peers has misidentified an animal in their post, feel free to correct them. Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference between different birds, reptiles, and insects!

Suggested Process for Conducting Your Observation and Writing Your Log

1. Find a location to conduct your observation. Make sure to bring your phone/camera and something to take notes on.
2. Once you've found an animal to observe, try to watch it for at least 20 minutes. The longer you are able to observe the animal, the better. With more elusive or "wild" animals, you might only get a few minutes (or seconds!) to conduct your observation, which is fine. If you are observing birds, fish, or insects, it might be difficult to focus on just one individual animal; in those situations, feel free to expand your observation to the entire group, flock, or school.
3. Take notes: How does the animal move or act? What sounds does it make? How does it interact with other animals? How would you describe its physical features? If you are able to touch it, what does it feel like? How does it engage with or respond to you, if at all? What do you know about this animal? What is its habitat? What does it eat? Where did you observe it, and at what time of day?
4. After you've conducted your observation, reflect on the experience. Do you know the animal's name (species, type, etc.)? What did you learn about the animal by watching it? What might you need to research?

5. Informally research what you don't know by doing quick Internet searches or reviewing guidebooks. If you can't find what you are looking for, no worries—you can always ask your peers for help with identifying the animal in the Animal Log Discussion Board.
6. Write your post, telling us what you witnessed and learned during the sustained observation. Be sure to be as specific as possible when describing the animal; for example, say "golden eagle" instead of "bird," or say the dog's fur "appeared to be two inches in length" instead of simply saying it was "long." Feel free to include links and images with your post. Make sure to also respond to a peer's original post.

Posting Guidelines and Assessment

This assignment requires one original Log (55 points) and a short response (10 points) to one of your classmate's Logs, both of which are due by the deadline that appears in Canvas. After this deadline passes, you will have 24 hours to post or respond for half credit (see the Late Work Policy in the Syllabus for more information). See the word-count guidelines above, and make sure your Logs reflect the different animal categories noted under "Assignment Description."

For each of your Animal Logs, you will be graded on originality and specificity of your written observation, adherence to the guidelines established in the prompt, and grammar/sentence structure.