

In the fall of 2025 philosopher, Jes L. Harfeld and biologist, Sussie Page did a special session of 'Filosofaen' (The Philosofa) at Aalborghus High School in North Jutland, Danmark as part of the 'Philosophy in the Wild-project'. The aim was a dialogue on 'our wild neighbours' between first the two scholars and then between the students and the scholars. The following are some of the reflections that the students provided afterwards.

My thoughts on "Our Wild Neighbors"

During the meeting with Jes and Sussie, I began to wonder how humans can actually decide to "own" the world. We behave as if the Earth was created only for us, but we are also just animals among many others. I especially thought about the example of the fox: on one hand it has the right to its own life and its place in the food chain, but on the other hand I can understand the problem when it eats chickens and creates insecurity. But isn't that simply part of living—that we must share the world with other species?

This made me reflect on how humans have created a kind of isolated life where we protect ourselves from nature and its consequences, and where we are afraid to get our hands dirty. How did we become so privileged? At the same time, I thought about how life started in the first place. From small cells and bacteria to everything we see today. Overall, I have the impression that animals, humans, and all the consequences that come with them are simply part of living on Earth, and that there is a tendency for us not to have the same love for animals and nature as we once had.

"Our Wild Neighbors" was a presentation we heard in philosophy. It was about how we as humans can take better care of our "wild" neighbors. Why are classic pets like cats and dogs valued above fox cubs that live in the forest? This started a line of thinking for me. In principle, they are just as important as traditional pets, and none should be considered above others.

In the presentation they examined different issues, and therefore we can include **practical ethics** as well as **normative ethics**. Practical ethics examines concrete ethical problems using the tools we get from normative ethics, which both Jes and Sussie used in the presentation. The ethical issue here would naturally be **animal ethics**.

Jes also mentioned something I found very interesting: can we create **animal-friendly architecture**? Old buildings are fantastic for wildlife in cities. Small holes and niches are good for animals because they provide habitats and living spaces. But new buildings are so "perfect" that there are no holes or niches, and therefore no space for animals. I thought this sounded like a really good idea—to involve engineers and architects in this debate and see whether it could be possible to help biodiversity in cities with animal-friendly architecture.

The meeting with Jes and Sussie – Filosofaen

"Our Wild Nature" was a presentation by Jes and Sussie who had a dialogue at Filosofaen about humans and our relationships with the animals we live close to. It was about how we as humans can behave more ethically toward animals in our everyday lives.

Many animals enter our properties, such as our gardens, and here we ourselves are the rulers over how the animals are treated. Sussie talked about how we should see animals as our fellow citizens, which really started many thoughts for me. This might actually be true, since we have taken animals like dogs and cats into our homes and live closely with them.

Therefore, it should not be such a big contrast between them and the animals that thrive in the wild and free. Many animals have had to adapt to urban areas and would primarily move with us if we as a society moved elsewhere. Therefore, I also think we should not punish them for having changed their living conditions and habitats.

Animals become part of several communities for us, and just because we are the species that has developed the most and dominates the less intelligent species—who do not have the same technology and agency—I do not think that gives us the right to kill an animal simply because it enters our gardens.

As humans, we have already broken nature's self-regulating balance, since we exploit animals to a large extent. Therefore, we can argue that because we have the power, a moral responsibility follows regarding how we should use it.

Our Wild Neighbors – My experience

I had an "aha moment" during the presentation "Our Wild Neighbors," when Jes and Sussie questioned who actually "owns" nature—whether it is us or the animals.

It made me think about how human-centered our worldview actually is, and how we often see animals as either threats or cute pets depending on the context—often to our own advantage.

Sussie's point that a kitten has more rights than a fox, even though they are both animals, is something I can understand within our society and its norms. This started many thoughts for me.

Why do we have such strong cultural and negative associations with animals, such as calling someone a "pig" or a "rat"? And how does that influence our ethics regarding how we should treat certain animals?

Jes' idea of animals as fellow citizens with the right to space and respect reminded me of Mary Midgley, who said that we should expand our moral circle. So perhaps we should not just tolerate animals, but actively include them in our society and architecture. What would such a society look like?

What thoughts did it start? My curiosity? Ethics?

I thought it was very interesting, especially hearing about the philosophy regarding wild animals that not only wander around in our cities but also live and can think like us.

The thoughts I had were simply: what is it actually like to be a wild animal surrounded by humans? What do they think about us when they see us? And do they think the same things about us that we think when we see them wandering around our cities?

I really wondered about animal life itself and what it is like to live as a wild animal in a city filled with people.

Our Wild Neighbors – My experience

Something that made me curious and opened my eyes to a new perspective was the idea of **shared ownership**. I had never thought about the fact that the garden is just as much the animals' as it is ours.

The tree in my garden may be a home for different animals, and therefore I do not simply have the right to cut it down just because I believe it is my garden.

I also thought it was interesting how cultural narratives can conflict with facts. We use the word "rat" as an insult and look down on the animal, even though it is just as capable and intelligent as a dog. We feel enormous empathy and care for our pets, but not for wild animals.

Should we simply kill wild animals just because they make us uncomfortable or because we are afraid they will eat our chickens? Here I think it is interesting to look at ethics and risk assessments and consider whether we should simply give animals more time to adapt to city environments.

Our Wild Neighbors – My experience

It made me think about how we humans often take it for granted that we have more right to space than wild animals. It also made me think about the fact that nature was here before us and has always been here.

I wondered why we so easily move animals or change their habitats, but never really question our own right to be there.

It also made me realize that ethics is not only about humans, but also about how we treat animals and nature. Maybe we should think more about how we can share space and nature rather than compete for it.

As Mary Midgley said: “mixed communities”— communities where humans and animals live together and influence one another.

Filosofaen

I do not feel that I had a big “aha moment” during our lecture on Monday. I feel that I already knew most of what they talked about, but it was interesting to hear some more basic and fundamental arguments for their ideas.

I found it most interesting to hear about Jes’ suggestion of animal-friendly architecture in cities. I have never heard anyone talk about that before, but I think it makes a lot of sense.

I also think that people living in cities must be more adaptable when it comes to living with animals. For example, with sounds—like if magpies were to live inside our walls, as Jes mentioned.

But overall I thought it was an interesting dialogue. It was not necessarily a lot of new knowledge, but it was interesting to hear it from people who actually know a lot about the subject.

Our Wild Neighbors – My experience

I heard Jes and Sussie talk about how we should see animals as fellow citizens instead of pests or obstacles.

It made me think about how humans often treat “good” animals like pets and “bad” animals like foxes or rats.

I wondered why we accept some animals as part of our lives but see others as something negative, even though they are simply trying to adapt.

It made me think about whether we owe something to the animals that live alongside us. Should we change our cities so there is space for them as well?

It was interesting to hear about how we as a society could use architecture and technology to take more consideration for animals in our environment.

Ethical reflections

My “aha moment” was realizing that we actually live side by side with wild animals all the time, and that our actions affect them more than we think.

I started thinking about utilitarianism, where we could ask whether it benefits the greatest number of beings if we limit animals’ space for our own comfort. In other words, perhaps we should include animals when we evaluate what is beneficial and useful.

At the same time, I thought about deontological ethics—perhaps we have a duty to protect animals and nature regardless of what benefits humans the most.

I wondered why we often see animals as a problem, even though they are simply following their nature, while humans are the ones who have taken their homes.

This made me think about how we can create a more respectful community between humans and animals.

Reflections on the meeting

The meeting with Jes, Sussie, and Filosofaen gave me a real aha moment and started many reflections. I became especially interested in morality, because humans often do not think about how our actions can destroy animals’ habitats.

It is neither ethical nor morally right to throw garbage into nature or report a fox to the municipality just because it enters the city. I actually feel sorry for the fox.

I also wonder why we accept that badgers, foxes, and other wild animals are run over on highways. Why don’t we build fences or find other solutions so both animals and humans can be safer?

It makes me think that we often behave as if humans are worth more than animals, even though we actually share the same nature.

Overall, I now reflect more on how we can live together with wild animals in a better way.

The conversation between Jes and Sussie really started many thoughts, and I think it fit very well with the philosophy subject. Even though much of it was related to biology, the questions Jes asked were very philosophical and matched the philosophical way of thinking.

Final reflection

Suddenly there was a sofa in the middle of the room and I thought, “Oh, so it’s going to be that kind of lecture.”

They talked and talked about both animals and humans, but without so many clear connections. You would think that a philosopher could think clearly—and yes, Jes certainly could—but how do you even obtain the title of philosopher? Is it an education you take, or just a self-identity?

“Biologist” feels more concrete, so in a way Sussie’s words seemed to carry more weight.

I began to wonder whether greed is part of human nature. Is it in our nature to see ourselves as superior to others? We also see this between humans, but I had not really considered that we might show the same greed and desire to feel superior—special—toward animals.