CHAPTER ONE

ANIMALS IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD:
PERCEPTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

In 1492 aliens invaded the western hemisphere. Conquerors from the Iberian Peninsula would dominate vast territories from that time until the Latin American independence movements of the early nineteenth century, giving them more than three centuries to modify everything from landscapes to gene pools. As already demonstrated by Alfred W. Crosby in books like *The Columbian Exchange* and *Ecological Imperialism*, the alien invaders were not only Spanish and Portuguese primates. They also included microbes like smallpox, plants like wheat, and nonhuman animals like cattle, horses and sheep.

The biological and cultural shock and synthesis experienced over the course of the three centuries between 1492 and the 1820s in many ways can only be compared to the first contact experiences described by science fiction authors. Since Thomas More, in his *Utopia*, first wrote of a fictional alien culture in a land new to Europeans, first contact in the Americas has influenced speculative fiction, but, unlike H. G. Wells’ Martian invasion in *The War of the Worlds*, the invasion of the Americas was real.¹ The changes effected on conquered Amerindians attest to the reality of the reshaping of the western hemisphere, but it also has been more than adequately demonstrated that Amerindians were simultaneously agents of transformation who

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struggled against European imposition, both resisting and compromising, even as the Europeans were sometimes capable of compromising themselves. What is still often forgotten is that all animals are animate beings, sentient and mobile in ways that plants are not. Horses and pigs escaped at times, going feral and carving out their own independent existences. Where animate life is concerned, there is always conflict and compromise. In evolutionary terms, there is adaptation and extinction.

With humans, there is also a real capacity for questions and reflection regarding the interactions of human and nonhuman animals alike. This has led humans to ask if they differ in degree or kind from other forms of animate life. While the Portuguese failed to establish universities, printing presses and communities of natural philosophers in their American territory, the Spaniards started establishing universities and printing presses in the sixteenth century. As demonstrated by Cristóvão da Costa’s sixteenth-century account of elephants, animals are certainly there in Portuguese documentation, but Spanish imperial documents by accident and design are bursting with information on nonhuman animals. This work will pursue the Spanish case study, leaving the Portuguese case study aside for later exploration. In reviewing Spanish thought and interaction with nonhuman animals, *The Animals of Spain* will approach Spaniards as animal actors themselves, always asking the extent to which the inhabitants of the Spanish empire could see this, and the extent to

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2 A. J. R. Russell-Wood writes, “For Portuguese America, ironically, it is to the scientists who came to Dutch Brazil during the administration of Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen that we owe major botanical and zoological studies....” Though individual Portuguese, like Cristóvão da Costa, José de Anchieta and Cristóvão de Lisboa, took an active interest in animals, it was “only with the Enlightenment” that the Portuguese Crown commissioned natural philosophers “to study the flora, fauna, ethnography, and geology in the tropics.” By contrast, in 1570, Philip II sent the first natural history expedition to Spanish America under the auspices of Dr. Francisco Hernández, and President Juan de Ovando of the Council of Indies systematized the collection of information, including information on nature and animals in the Americas, with the *relaciones geográficas* of the 1570s. A. J. R. Russell-Wood, *The Portuguese Empire, 1415-1808: A World on the Move* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 149-50, 196-97, 84; Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 121, 94-96; Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 52; Cristóvão da Costa, “Tratado do elefante e das suas qualidades,” in *Tratado das drogas e medicinas das Índias orientais*, trans. and ed. Jaime Walter (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1964), 281-96.