Nonhuman animals other than human can hardly be characterized as novel historical subjects. Their remains have provided valuable evidence for historians of cultures that left little or no written trace. They traditionally have attracted the attention of economic historians, especially those who study times and places heavily dependent on agriculture. In more recent times, important animal-related institutions, from humane societies to zoos, have had their chroniclers. People distinguished in their association with animals, from breeders to hunters to scientists, have had their biographers as, indeed, have some animals distinguished in their own right, such as Jumbo, Greyfriars Bobby, or Seabiscuit. Specific animal-related issues or practices have received focused attention, and historians working in specialized areas continue to make use of such excellent studies as Richard D. French’s *Antivivisection and medical science in Victorian society* (1975). Even some much earlier work continues to be useful. Even some much earlier work continues to be useful. For example, E. P. Evans’ survey of *The criminal prosecution and capital punishment of animals*, which first appeared in 1906, has been republished twice in the last twenty years; and Gustave
Loisel’s expansive *Histoire des ménageries de l’antiquité à nos jours*, which first appeared in 1912, has not yet been superceded.

Nevertheless, the last several decades have seen significant changes in the attitude of historians toward the study of animals. One shift is simply quantitative: Animals (or the relationships between human beings and other animals) have been attracting more frequent and sustained scholarly attention. There are several ways to understand this increase. One is by analogy to a set of earlier expansions in historical perspective. Historians’ sense of what was important in the past tends to mirror their sense of what is important in the present. Shifts in social and political understandings normally are reflected, with some time lag, in the topics that scholars select for historical research. Thus, the field of labor history emerged in response to the labor movement of the early twentieth century; the fields of women’s history and minority history constitute part of the academic response to the civil rights movement and the women’s movement. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, animal-related causes—from saving the whales to abolishing factory farming—gained increasing popular support in North America and Europe. Predictably enough, successful (or even conspicuous) advocacy in the political sphere led to increased interest among historians. As each of these new fields gained acceptance within the wider community of historians, the range of historical subjects considered serious (even legitimate) correspondingly expanded. Animals can be seen as the latest beneficiaries of this increasingly inclusive or democratic trend (sometimes called “history from the bottom up”) within the historical profession.

Historical attention to animals also has been encouraged by the vigorous growth of environmental history, another field that developed in tandem with an activist political movement. Environmental history currently is one of the most vital and attractive areas of historical scholarship. In addition to a fresh set of subjects, it offers a fresh set of approaches and a way of understanding history that is inherently synthetic and trans-national. Animals ordinarily have not been among the most prominent concerns of environmental historians, who have tended to focus on the roots of such modern issues as pollution or on large and contested concepts like “wilderness” or “nature.” But the relationship of animals to these themes is clear, as is the ineluctable role of animals in considerations of our relation to the nonhuman world. Further, the intellectual appeal of environmental history has drawn some