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Hidden Among Us: Urban WildLife and Nonfiction Writing

Cities are commonly seen as places built for and inhabited by people. Hence it still comes as a surprise when a fox, a coyote, or a raccoon crosses our path in the middle of Berlin, Urbana, or Chicago. In fact, many city creatures are considered a nuisance, pests, or a health risk, including rats, squirrels, and pigeons. But there is also a growing fascination with wild animals that live in our midst. This talk is concerned with the more-than-human city as it is reflected in recent nonfiction literature, and it considers storytelling as a relevant mode in which cities are reimagined as ecosystems where human and nonhuman lives intersect. As a hybrid genre that combines science writing, everyday observation, and autobiographical elements, these texts not only imagine the city as a multispecies habitat but take their cues from unexpected encounters with our nonhuman neighbors, thus shedding light on scenes of city life and forms of coexistence that are often overlooked.