



RESEARCH PROJECT

# BIOrdinary

BIODIVERSITY DILEMMAS IN ORDINARY PLACES

BIOrdinary expands our understanding of biodiversity by focusing on places marked by habitation, trade and agriculture.

Essential to our needs for food, shelter and resources, these ordinary places currently fall outside global biodiversity agendas. We explore biodiversity dilemmas in five ordinary places that involve migrant species - tea plants, mosquitos, fish, oysters and mink.

Researching the intertwined social and biological histories leading up to these dilemmas and local communities engagement with these crises, BIOrdinary asks: what would a more just and democratic biodiversity agenda entail?

## HOME

Department of  
Social Anthropology  
Stockholm University

## PERIOD

4 years

## PI:S

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## FINANCED BY

Formas

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### The missing 70%

Current biodiversity agenda aims at protecting 30% of the surface of the planet, largely in ecological hotspots.

BIOrdinary turns attention to the missing 70%. With the help of anthropological tools, we explore shifts in biodiversity in ordinary places, marked by human activity.

### Case studies: species on the move

The project's seven empirical cases studies explore biodiversity dilemmas involving species influxes tied to colonial histories. The case studies underline how the trajectories of migrant species are entangled with imperial sea routes and domestication processes. Scapegoated by global biodiversity protection, these species are integrated into environments and social, political and economic life. There are no easy answers

*“Mobile species have their own histories. Some of them moved of their own accord. Others were brought along by humans or hitched a ride on infrastructural projects and international trade.”*

or quick fixes to the biodiversity dilemmas evolving in these places.

Global warming has added a new dimension to environments with migrant species. Due to differences in genetical makeups, alien and endemic species react differently to climate-induced changes. Some species

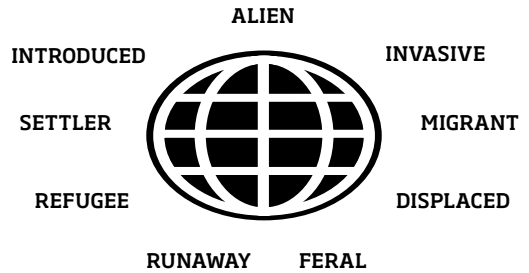
thrive, other suffer. We cannot rule out that migrant species will survive future heatwaves, while local species perish.

### Imperial routes

Transatlantic trade and colonial cultivation practices set in motion global sociobiological processes that unevenly redrew the map of human/non-human relations. In this project we examine their aftermath: the life trajectories of species displaced by trade, infrastructural projects, domestication, plantations and aquaculture.

### The trial of species

How we talk about new species in our environment influences our responses to them. Mobile species have their own histories. Some moved of their own accord.



Others were brought along by humans or hitched a ride on infrastructural projects and international trade.

What responsibility do we have for migrant species? Should we eradicate them to protect native species or learn to live with them? Who decides when a migrant species is an intruder or a climate refugee?

### Biodiversity for whom?

The larger aim of BIOrdinary is to formulate a more just, inclusive and democratic biodiversity agenda, based on local understandings and practices that involve living with migrant species and multispecies justice.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

	WORK PACKAGES	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
2024	WP2: Practices Vernacular Understandings	1. Understanding diverse communities' engagements with unfolding shifts in biodiversity.
2025/2026	WP3: Policy Democratizing Biodiversity	2. Envisioning a more just, inclusive, and democratic biodiversity agenda.

# CASE STUDIES

## RESEARCH TEAM



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Case 1: Travelling Tea Plants

### Case 1. Travelling Tea Plants in East Africa



British settlers brought the Assam tea plant from India to East Africa, turning dense forests into monocultural plantations. Climate change and plant breeding reducing the tea species' genetic diversity have now made these plantations highly vulnerable. Tea plants have also escaped into nearby forest and become "invasive."

*"Plants do move, but in pace and manner that human tend to miss."*

### Case 2. Emergent Ecologies in the Mediterranean Sea



The Mediterranean Sea is undergoing one of the world's largest marine transformations. The Suez Canal, dug to shorten the route between East and West, has become a "highway" for tropical marine species (jellyfish, rabbitfish, crustacea and algae), in search of new habitats.

*"There is more to fish than biology and food. Fish are great story tellers. They tell us about past world orders and invisible effects of global shipping. As mobile creatures, they also authors of the future of seas in their search for new homes escaping marine heatwaves and warming waters."*



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Case 2: Emergent Ecologies



EMMA CYR  
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Case title 3: Mobile Hungry Crabs in Sicily

### Case 3: Mobile Hungry Crabs in Sicily



Blue crabs, whose mobility into the Mediterranean was facilitated by an appropriation of more-than-human shipping infrastructures, are now arriving on the Sicilian coast. Noted for their appetite, blue crabs' arrival mobi-

lizes concerns about the damage they have caused to biodiversity elsewhere. At the same time, in a seascape characterized by small-scale capture fishing lying in the shadow of heavy industry on land, these recent arrivals could be a valuable bycatch for local fishers.

*"Can a biodiversity dilemma be managed by eating the invaders? As "tasty, voracious" blue crabs arrive in Sicily, the questions of who eats and who becomes food don't always have clear answers."*



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**Case 4: "Invasive" Mosquitos**

**Case 4. "Invasive" Mosquitos in Urban Singapore**



*Aedes aegypti* mosquitos, originally from Africa, are a highly effective vector of dengue and zika that are increasingly making urban Singapore their home. However, large-scale technoscientific projects to eradicate this 'invader' in the name of public health run the risk of also catastrophically reducing biodiversity.

*"Rather than simply eradicating mosquitos by destroying their habitats, permaculture farmers in Singapore taught me that mosquito-borne diseases can be prevented by carefully creating vibrant and biodiverse spaces where natural predators keep them in check."*

**Case 5. Migrant Oysters on the West Coast of Sweden**



These molluscs, imported from Pacific Ocean to aquafarms in Europe, escaped these facilities and hitchhiked on warming sea-currents to the Western shores of Sweden. Accused of outcompeting local species and being a nuisance to the leisure industry, they are also a potential new marine nutrient.

*"Hammering away Pacific oysters, in order to cleanse the invasive species that is a tourist nuisance, from the cliffs of Bohuslän where they have settled, means also destroying whole societies of other marine species that have found their shelter and habitat on Pacific oyster reefs and clusters."*



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**Case 5: Migrant Oysters**



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**Case 6: Runaway Mink**

**Case 6. Runaway Mink in the Stockholm Archipelago**



Mink was first brought to Sweden from North America for the commercial exploitation of their fur in the 1920s, before they

absconded from captivity or were released by people. Mink now threaten the diversity of several native species, particularly birds, in the Swedish archipelago.

*"Eradicating the invasive North American mink is now a team effort of outsourced labor, with civilian residents in the archipelago encouraged to have "at least one" kill-trap for minks on their land."*

**Case 7: Pastoralism and Ecological Change in Aotearoa New Zealand**



Goats, sheep, and cattle came with colonialism to Aotearoa, and have proliferated since, with pastures and paddocks now dominating the islands' landscapes. However, this grassy idyll, so characteristic of the

country, came at a cost: causing a drastic shift in endemic ecologies and devastating native species. While this pastoral assemblage has been contested since settlement, it is increasingly appearing as a pivotal socio-ecological juncture amid ecological fragility and loss.

*"What is being missed when pastures and reserves are sealed from one another? I am drawn to the possibilities between these rigid worlds and what more-than-human worlds are forming at the frayed edges of both."*



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**Case title 7: Pastoralism and Ecological Change**