



Hamburg Forum on Comparative Animal Law

Prof. Shira Shmuely
(Tel Aviv University)

“Animal Minds in Legal History”

Tuesday, 9 December 2025 – 5:00 p.m. (CET)

Hybrid Lecture
in Gerhard Kegel Hall and via Zoom

All employees and guests of the institute as well as
other interested parties are cordially invited to the lecture.

Please register no later than Tuesday, 8 December 2025 using this [LINK](#).

Felix Aiwanger





About the Speaker

Shira Shmueli is an assistant professor at the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas at Tel Aviv University and a recent Visiting Senior Scholar at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. She holds a Ph.D. in History, Anthropology, and STS from MIT, and earned her law degree from Tel Aviv University. Shira specializes in the history of human-animal relations and the intersection of law, scientific knowledge, and ethics. Her book, “The Bureaucracy of Empathy: Law, Vivisection, and Animal Pain in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain” was published by Cornell University Press in July 2023. Her recent publications include “‘Sentient Beings’: Cephalopods’ Minds and U.K. Law” (The Journal of Interdisciplinary History) and, with Tamar Novick, “Orangutans in Ramat Gan: Maternity Cultures in a Time of Global Trade and Local Destruction” (Animal History).

About the Topic

What constitutes animal minds is a subject of ongoing dispute among scientists, philosophers, legal scholars, and activists, who together coproduce shifting understandings of animals’ inner experiences. This talk examines how scientific understandings of the animal mind have become integrated into legal and ethical frameworks, and what this reveals about how societies define and expand the boundaries of consciousness and moral consideration across species. Through case studies of nonhuman primates and cephalopods in UK, EU, and US jurisprudence, it is traced how ideas about animal minds have shaped the legal frameworks governing human-animal relations. The talk shows how scientific knowledge, legal precedents, and ethical claims about nonhuman primate minds co-emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, bringing new terminology and expertise to the courts. It also examines how cephalopods transformed from legally unprotected invertebrates to sentient beings warranting welfare protections, demonstrating a shift from mid-twentieth-century concepts of human-like subjectivity to turn-of-the-twenty-first-century concepts of distributed consciousness.

About the Series

National and international guests speak on the state, development and future of the legal landscape concerning the human-animal relationship. It is the series’ aim to build bridges – between national and international lines of discourse, between animal rights and animal welfare law, between animal rights and rights of nature, between legal scholarship and the natural sciences and civil society.