

## **From socialized wolves to tame elephants: a guide to human-animal relationships**

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### **Abstract:**

Concepts like habituation, taming, socialization, imprinting, and even domestication are widely misunderstood and their utilization is rather confusing. Yet, these phenomena differ significantly in the essence (or absence) of human-animal relationship involved and its effect on animal welfare. Moreover, these terms are used to identify individual animals and often to justify the husbandry and management practices as well as means of human-animal interaction.

In this paper, a semiotic approach (predominantly the Umwelt theory) is used to develop a more sufficient conceptualization in the field of human-animal relationships and relations. The interdisciplinary theoretical contribution will be supported by the author’s case-study in socialization of captive red foxes in Norway (2013), by her internship working with captive socialized wolves in USA (2014), and by her volunteer program working with rescued captive elephants in Thailand (2015).

With the example of wolves and foxes, this study explains why some animal species need to be socialized with humans to have a higher welfare in captivity than their tamed or merely habituated conspecifics. Also, the consequences of habituated wild animals (common in the Anthropocene) and the complex process of imprinting will be brought to light. The paper explains the effect of different taming methods, among others, using the example of Asian elephants being tamed by the method called *phaajaan* or “breaking of the spirit”. Whereas this method is so culturally embedded that the resulting fear-based human-animal relationship and poor welfare for the animal’s lifetime receives little to no consideration from the locals. The importance of understanding the relationship between a man and animal will be explained by various examples, including working elephants being mislabelled as “domesticated” and *phaajaan*, therefore, justified as the traditional way of “domesticating” an elephant.

It will be proved that habituated, tame, socialized, human-imprinted and domesticated animals all have a different perception of humans and are not equally suitable for life in captivity. The paper concludes that considering the human-animal relationship or relation and the treatment practices it requires, improves our understanding of captive animal welfare, animal behaviour and human-animal communication.

Keywords: human-animal relationships, Umwelt theory, animal welfare, animal behaviour, human-animal communication