

Todd SIMMONS

[todd.simmons@nyu.edu](mailto:todd.simmons@nyu.edu)

*New York University*



## ***Dr. Levick and his hooligan penguins***

Much of the literature on animal boredom is derived from observations of animals in domestic, zoological, laboratory, or agricultural settings. Robert Yerkes is credited as beginning work in the 1920s that for the last 100 years has progressed in these settings through explorations that detail the triggers of bored behaviors and the differences between barren and enriched environments. Wild animal boredom, however, presents the researcher with complicated challenges.

This paper will focus on a century old pamphlet that was discovered in 2012 by an ornithological researcher at London's Natural History Museum that not only challenged how the behavior of Adélie penguins in the wild is interpreted, but provides a strong argument for mining historical literature for clues to wild animal boredom. It will accomplish this by drawing on the goal of Cynthia Burns' 2017 paper "Bestial boredom", which aimed to stimulate biological research into boredom in wild and captive animals, and her observation that it is evidence derived from the observation of captive animals of neophilic species that demonstrate that animals "proactively seek, even aversive, stimulation in barren environments".

Dr. George Murray Levick, a member of the British Antarctic expedition of 1910, deemed this rediscovered work too sexually explicit for the general public, and excised it from his book *Antarctic Penguins: A study of their social habits*, producing a small print run of copies that were privately distributed to a handful of scientists. In the popular book, Levick several times referred to the unmated penguins that congregated in groups as "hooligans", but in this pamphlet he detailed the aberrant behaviors and interpreted them through the lens of how that word hooligan was used in his time. In the paper *Dr. George Murray Levick (1876 -1956): unpublished notes on the sexual habits of the Adélie penguin*, Douglas G.D. Russell (etal.) refers to the use of the word hooligan as a "nebulous" term. Rather, this paper will show that during the time period Levick was writing, his use of the term to describe the "non-breeding wanderers, young inexperienced

breeders, and experienced unpaired males” was very specific and pointed. By examining these behaviors, which included necrophilia, sexual coercion of mated females and immature chicks, and physical abuse, Levick paints a compelling portrait of animal boredom in a barren environment.

Using this example as a beginning point, this paper argues that there exists a strong historical literature of animal observation that presents the researcher with solid work on the subject when combined with an understanding of how animal boredom can be understood throughout history by looking for words that described boredom before the word itself received wide usage.