

# News & Notes from ISAZ



Image courtesy of those highlighted in the  
"Experiences of Students in Veterinary Social Work" article.

## Recurring Columns and Content

[ISAZ President's Message](#)

## Articles and Updates

[Doctoral Student, Grace Phillips](#)

## A Message from ISAZ President - Michelle Szydlowski

Dear ISAZ Members,

Our 2026 ISAZ conference in Paris was a spectacular success! Our local hosts (and main sponsors), The Adrienne & Pierre Sommer Foundation, were not only amazing colleagues in conference planning, but went above and beyond all our expectations. Without their support, Paris would have been an unattainable dream locale. My favorite part of the conference is always reconnecting with old friends, many of whom reside in countries different than my own. The ISAZ conferences are an amazing learning opportunity, but also a chance to catch up, brainstorm new ideas, and simply enjoy spending time together.

A huge thank you is due to the Adrienne & Pierre Sommer Foundation, as well as to Christine Tardiff-Williams and the rest of the ISAZ programs committee. Planning an event of this size and scope is challenging, and they made it as smooth as possible. I would also like to thank our Gold and Silver sponsors, Waltham Petcare Science Institute and Purina. Their ongoing support has allowed us to continue offering the best (according to our participants) annual conference in the field.

None of our events would be possible without the ISAZ board, who serve without compensation of any kind. These board members take on everything from recruiting to communication to development, giving their time and energy to keep the society strong and healthy. Thank you to our board members and board volunteers. We are always interested in welcoming new volunteers, so reach out to Abbey or myself if you are interested in helping on a committee.

I am already getting excited about the 2027 conference, which will be held June 28-30 in Roeselare, Belgium! I hope to see you there, and thank you again for being a part of ISAZ.

Michelle



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# ISAZ 2027 CONFERENCE

Save the Date!

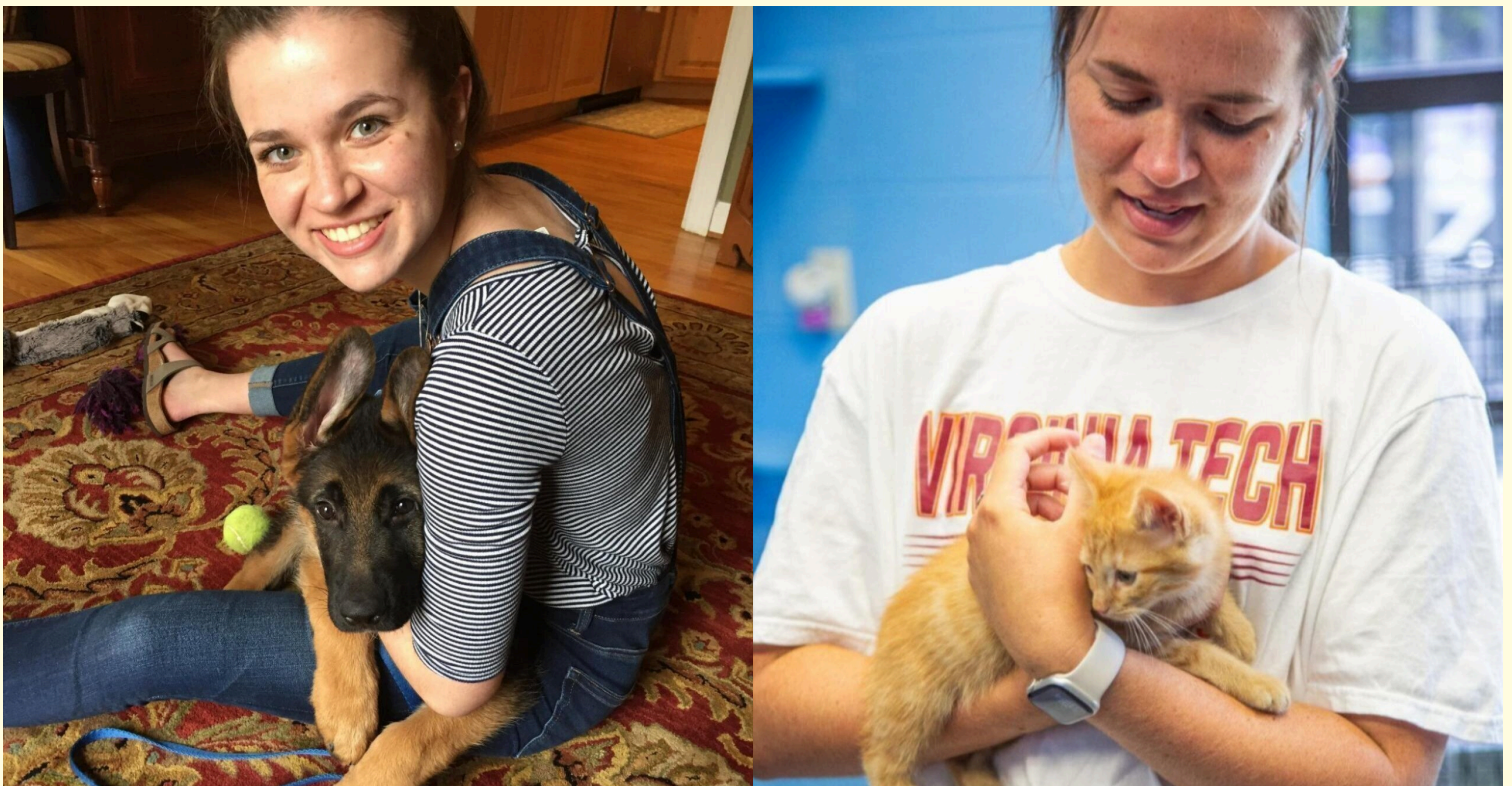
**June 28-30, 2027**

**Roeselare, Belgium**

Conference website & more details  
coming this Fall

## An Interview with Doctoral Student, Grace Phillips

Grace Phillips is a PhD student in the Animal Behavior & Welfare program at Virginia Tech in the School of Animal Sciences. After growing up on a farm, Grace hoped her future would involve understanding connections and communications between humans and animals. Grace earned her B.S. in biology and psychology from the College of William & Mary. After graduation, she worked on human-animal interaction research studies in the Center for Human-Animal Interaction (CHAI) at Virginia Commonwealth University Health, while beginning her journey as a foster caregiver to shelter animals. Grace's undergraduate degree and time at CHAI sparked her love of research, education, and inquiry, while her experiences with animal sheltering and therapy dogs enhanced her interest in animal welfare and desire to understand animal behavior. As a graduate student at Virginia Tech, Grace recently earned her M.S. in animal sciences. She is currently working towards her PhD under the mentorship of Dr. Erica Feuerbacher with research focused on companion animal welfare and behavior in both the shelter and the home.





## **Tell us about the animals who have shaped your career.**

Having grown up on a farm and been a foster for several years now, I feel lucky that many animals hold a very special place in my mind and heart. That being said, a few animals in particular stand out to me, as they have been influential in my career aspirations and interest in my areas of study.

First, I attribute my interest in exploring human-animal interactions to one of my family's therapy alpacas, Pippa. Pippa is a foundational member of the alpaca therapy program on my parents' farm (and my favorite alpaca, but don't tell the others). She has such a unique ability to find the people in a group who really need her interaction the most. Once, I was helping introduce Pippa to a teenage boy in a wheelchair. She lay next to his wheelchair (her signature move when she finds someone special) and put her head right in his lap. He smiled at her and moved his fingers around in her soft coat. His parents told me that this was the first time in a long time they had seen him smile and have that level of dexterity in his fingers; they were moved to tears. Such a beautiful moment lives in my head as a reminder of how powerful the connections between humans and animals can be. Pippa's connections with people truly inspired my HAI research during my undergraduate time at William & Mary, ultimately leading me to where I am at Virginia Tech.

Aside from Pippa, each of the incredible animals I have fostered, as well as each of my own pets, has deeply contributed to my passion for learning animal behavior, as well as my desire to explore methods that increase accessibility and success of foster programs for shelter-living animals. Each of my foster and personal pets has taught me something in their own unique way and left a paw print on me that will always stay! Above all, every animal that comes into our home, whether forever or just on their journey to a new forever home, shows me the power that a home and positive connections with a caregiver can have on the lives of animals.

## **How did you get started in your area of study? What drew you to this line of work?**

When I was 16, I started an animal therapy program with a few alpacas on my parents' alpaca farm. After seeing the deep connections between our alpacas and people during these interactions, I was truly inspired to continue learning more human-animal connections and bonds.

During my undergrad at William & Mary, I fell in love with research and completed an honors thesis in which I used an electroencephalogram (EEG) to explore the neurological changes that occur during students' interactions with therapy dogs. Following graduation, I continued to pursue my passion for research in HAI at the Center for Human Animal Interaction (CHAI) in Richmond, Virginia. Simultaneously, I had been volunteering and fostering at local animal shelters. While I loved exploring how human-animal interactions could benefit people in numerous ways, I felt drawn to learning more about the behavior of animals and how positive interactions could improve their welfare too.

These ideas, coupled with my passion for research and fostering, led me to my program at Virginia

**What kind of setbacks have you experienced in your studies and what have you learned from them?**

When working with animals, I have learned to expect the unexpected! Sometimes, even if you believe you have thought through a study design from seemingly every angle, animals surprise you and engage with you or your study in a way you didn't anticipate. I have learned to think critically and quickly, think outside the box, and embrace constant learning when working with animals. To me, unexpected outcomes aren't setbacks, but opportunities to explore a window into an animal's experience that I hadn't considered before. Some of my best learning opportunities in animal behavior research have come from animals that challenge me to think outside of the box!

**What advice do you have for other students in this field?**

My first piece of advice for other students in this field would be to really delve into your role as an emerging "scientist-practitioner." It is so important to read the literature and stay up-to-date on best practices in our field. Taking this a step further, as scientists, it is equally critical that we make our research accessible to people who are applying our findings to animals in the field, including shelter staff, trainers, and behaviorists. We need accessible science for our work to be applied.

Secondly, I think it is so important to have as much compassion for humans as we do animals. The human-animal bond is a beautiful thing, but also complex; financial, housing, and personal influences can impact the preservation of that bond. It is important that we collaborate with animal caregivers and understand their needs in order to see sustainable change for animals. Improving animal welfare often means helping to understand and change human behavior too, while having compassion for humans along the way.

**How do you think the field of HAI practice will change or progress in the future?**

In the future, I hope to see more research on human-animal support services that are aimed at serving people and their pets together! I hope that greater availability of these services could increase preservation of the human-animal bond, keep people and their pets together, and prevent surrenders of pets to animal shelters during times of crisis.

**What is your favorite HAI-related book?**

One of my first HAI-related books was [\*The Other End of the Leash\*](#) by Patricia McConnell! I love the perspective that it brings to human-dog relationships, bonds, and communication!

**What do you think the field of HAI practice needs the most?**

As an animal behavior student, I would love to see a continuing growth of the scientific literature exploring the bidirectionality of interactions between humans and animals. Studies that investigate how interactions between humans and animals can impact both parties involved continue to be really important contributions to our understanding of best practices in HAI!

**What do you enjoy most about your work?**

Although it may sound cliché, my favorite parts of my work are the animals that I interact with daily. I strive to use my interactions to make a really positive impact on the lives of the animals I work with, but I find that the animals often leave an even greater positive impact on me. They always leave my day brighter than they found it!

**What's your biggest success to date in your career?**

Professionally, I feel that my biggest success in my career was successfully defending my master's thesis last fall! However, on a personal note, some of my biggest successes along the way are the

animals I have been able to foster and provide a safe place to land on their journey to incredible forever homes. Seeing their success in forever homes is an absolute joy!

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### **Are you a student interested in having your work highlighted?**

To send us your submission, [complete this form and upload the related files](#). We will review your submission for consideration against the Submission Categories and Guidelines as listed above. Incomplete forms will not be reviewed.

For questions, please email [ISAZCommunications@gmail.com](mailto:ISAZCommunications@gmail.com).

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## **ISAZ 2026 Award Winners!**

### **Most Popular Non-Open Access Paper**

[Barking Up the Wrong Tree: Human Perception of Dog Emotions is Influenced by Extraneous Factors](#)

Holly G. Molinaro and Clive D.L. Wynne  
Arizona State University, USA

Vol. 38, No. 2, 349-370

### **Most Popular Open Access Paper**

[Exploring Professional Riders' Understanding and Experience of Feel Within the Equestrian Dyad](#)

Antonia Stringer, Victoria Lewis, and Emma Davies  
Hartpury University, UK

Vol. 38, No. 3, 489-503

Check out the *Anthrozoös* Most Popular Paper Award Collection!

### **[PJ-Hart Student Scholar Award](#)**

Emma Bassan  
University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna

Pursuing a Master's Degree in Human-Animal Interaction

### **[Penny L. Bernstein Human-Cat Student Travel Award](#)**

Emma Louise McVicker  
University of Exeter, UK

*Feral felines, friend or foe? How word choice influences perceptions of unowned domestic cats*

### **[Martha Bryant Student Travel Award](#)**

Jacqueline Nicole Jones  
University of Florida, USA

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*"I do it all with love." The Human-Companion Animal Bond as a Source of Strength and Stress Among Older People with HIV*

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Award**

Oceania C.. Kreutzer  
University of British Columbia, Canada

**Caregiver Award**

Lea Berger Meunier  
University of Rennes 2, France

**Student Poster Presentation Award**

First Place: Jada K. Ford  
Colorado State University, USA

*Race, Structural Inequality, and Human-Animal Relationships Among Black Americans: A qualitative study*

Second Place: Lea Berger Meunier  
University of Rennes 2, France

*From Cute to Crucial: Exploring Children's Compassion toward Marine Species*

**Student Oral Presentation Award**

First Place: Matthew P. Knight  
University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, USA

*Investigating the Influence of Animal-Assisted Services and Service Dogs on Moral Injury in Military Veterans: A Scoping Review*

Second Place: Laura Gillet  
ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary

*Who volunteers for owner-pet surveys? Sampling bias and its consequences for findings in companion animal research*

**We would also like to thank our many sponsors for their support of this year's conference!**



## Featured Articles

Research Articles

### Canine Sociability as a Human Construct: The Role of Human Perception and Contextual Variation in Flanders

Eline Wydooghe, Christel P. H. Moons, Bart J. G. Broeckx, Lin Op de Beeck, Isabelle Joos, Judith Hoste & ...show all

Pages 825-844 | Published online: 09 Jun 2026

“ Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2026.2676404>



Research Articles

### Wrestling Camels and Camel–Human Bond Among Sedentary Yörüks of Anatolia (Türkiye)

Abu B. Siddiq ✉, Süleyman Şanlı & Devrim Ertürk

Pages 601-621 | Published online: 10 Jun 2026

“ Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2026.2676403>



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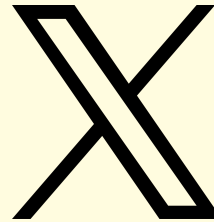
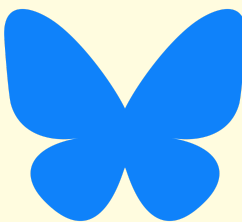
We are eager to greet new members from around the globe to build an even stronger network!

We now offer **new membership categories & discounts**, including:

- Discount Type 1 & Type 2 (for individuals residing in low-income and lower-middle income economies),
- Early Career (recent graduates within 5 years of their terminal degree), and
- Retiree (former Individual or Affiliate members with at least 10 years of previous membership and over 70 years of age).

To learn more about our other membership options and how to apply, visit our [Membership page](#).

## Follow ISAZ on Social Media



For your safety and privacy, please remember to avoid sharing any personal information, such as addresses, phone numbers, or financial details, unless you have verified the recipient's identity. It's always best to exercise caution and ensure that you are communicating with trusted individuals or entities before exchanging any sensitive information.

Thank you for helping to keep our community secure!

Interested in supporting ISAZ? Email [adm.manager@isaz.net](mailto:adm.manager@isaz.net) to learn about donation opportunities.

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