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# Open Forest: Walking-with Feral Stories, Creatures, Data

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**Abstract.** Open Forest is an experimental, practice-based inquiry into forests and forest data that facilitates imaginative co-creation of feral forest datasets. The project involves a series of experimental walks with various forests around the world, inviting participants

to explore local ecologies and share their experiences in the form of forest stories. To enable sharing of such personally situated stories, we experiment with various speculative material practices and devices, including the online Feral Map – a collaborative dataset of more-than-human forest experiences and knowledge. Through the experimental forest walks and stories, we explore what can constitute a forest dataset, how it can be produced, and by whom to raise questions about power, values, and structural inequalities that shape forests and their futures. We propose that caring for the futures of forests must be collaborative work. Finding ways to do this labour requires imaginative articulations of technologies, practices and data, an agenda to which CSCW is well positioned to contribute.

## Introduction

As complex ecosystems, forests provide a living environment for many species. They are places of refuge, myths, folktales, and sensorial excitement but also sites for control and industrial extraction of natural materials, especially since the introduction of scientific forestry. Dominant western traditions of forest management and environmental policies tend to see forests as a resource to be used to improve human lives – for example, through timber yields and stocks or carbon sink cultivation (González and Kröger 2020). In the times of ongoing climate breakdown, forests are also leveraged to protect – not all, but some – humans from the perils of ecological disasters such as high temperature, ozone, and other health-related consequences (Knight et al. 2021).

In recent years, a variety of ‘smart’ forest management initiatives have sprouted around the world, promising to address climate crises via universalising, data-driven interventions (Gabrys 2020, Mattern 2021, Fleischman et al. 2020, Coleman et al. 2021). These initiatives, such as mass tree planting campaigns and related processes of forest monitoring and automation, often amplify instrumental understandings of a forest as a mere sum of trees that can be mapped, datafied and turned into easy solutions to avert climate catastrophe. This “techno-vegetal solutionism” (Mattern 2021) offers only a limited acknowledgement for the diverse, situated forest epistemologies defining what a forest might be and to whom. As such, these initiatives and their efforts often become ineffective and even harmful, fueling further land depletion and displacement of local communities; amplifying environmental crises rather than enabling more sustainable futures (Fleischman et al. 2020, Coleman et al. 2021).

Forest dwellers, custodians, activists, as well as researchers across disciplines, including CSCW (e.g., Gabrys 2020, González and Kröger 2020, Ohja et al. 2019, Vitos et al. 2017) have called for different approaches to understanding and living with forests that move away from techno-positivist generalisations (‘forests as sum of data’) towards more nuanced engagements with forests as complex,

relational sites for sustenance of multi-species life, cultural narratives, and Indigenous cosmologies. In accordance with these calls for change, the Open Forest project investigates how various human and other-than-human stakeholders make sense of forests and what forest stories they can share (Botero et al. 2022, Dolejšová et al. 2022).

The project was initiated in 2020 by the Open Forest Collective, a multi-disciplinary and multi-species group of creative practitioners and researchers experimenting with co-creative approaches to engaging with forests and forest data. As a collective, we have been interested in how forest data can be approached and understood *otherwise* (Escobar 2018): in situated, relational and collaborative ways that consider perspectives of diverse forest creatures challenging the techno-solutionist, extractivist renderings of forests as resources to serve colonialist, neo-liberal agendas. Our experimental, practice-based inquiry brings together diverse more-than-human forest stakeholders – including scientists, artists, citizens, policymakers, Indigenous forest guardians, as well as dogs and trees – into a co-creative exchange of their forest knowledge and experiences.

Central to the project is a series of experimental walks organised in various forests around the world, where participants come together to *walk-with* and observe the forests around them, both in-situ and online. Their observations become inspiration for forest stories, which are shared via various engagement occasions and formats including in-person workshops, sharing circles, interactive installations and a paper-based catalogue, and online via the Feral Map (<https://feral.more-than-human-derive.net/>). The Map serves as a growing public archive of forest stories and a co-created forest dataset gathering more-than-human forest knowledge contributed by diverse walkers. Through the experimental walks and sharing of stories, the project aims to entangle the currently available (mostly quantitative) forests datasets and extractivist understandings of forests with more messy and eclectic inputs, or what we call “feral data”. We follow an understanding of feral as a quality to appraise open-ended, spontaneous, unexpected, more-than-human encounters that unfold beyond human control, embracing uncertainty and surprise as generative elements (Ampatzidou et al 2021, Bell 2018, Tsing et al 2020). We use feralness as a lens for understanding and experimenting with the complexity of forest epistemologies, as a metaphor for denoting the kind of data we are assembling, and a methodological approach guiding the collaborative project activities.

Acknowledging the constitutive role of data in creating everyday worlds (Gitelman 2013, Lupton 2016, Ruppert, Isin and Bigo 2017) our feral forest experiments question what or who can constitute a forest dataset, in a hope to contribute to the growing critical accounts of human-forest data relationships. Our aim with this exploratory work is to offer a collaborative and co-creative space for expression of diverse forest knowledge and, by extension, to make better

sense of what new forest data and relationships might be needed to support eco-social flourishing and transformational futures based on justice and care. CSCW, along with other related fields such as Human-Computer Interaction and informatics, has a long tradition in investigating and re-imagining human-data entanglements (e.g., Muller et al. 2020, Tolmie et al. 2016, Hilviu and Rapp 2015, Choi, Forlano and Kera 2020) and experimenting with alternative, care-full and collaborative modes of data production (e.g., Chancellor et al 2019, Dolejšová & Kera, 2017, Heitlinger et al 2023, Kaziunas et al 2017, Kloppenborg 2022, Le Dantec et al 2015, Puussaar et al 2022) as well as an interest in environmental issues and sustainable eco-social transformations (e.g., Costanza-Chock 2020, Dolejšová et al. 2021, Gaikwad 2020, Ganglbauer et al 2014, Light 2022, Prost et al 2015, Parmiggiani et al. 2015).

We first introduce the Open Forest collaborative activities and devices, including the walking-with forests and sharing of stories via the Feral Map. Using a few selected examples of stories gathered through our walks, we discuss how these forest stories – or feral forest data – might help expand existing understandings of human-forest data relationships. We pay attention to various challenges and concerns encountered throughout our exploratory inquiry and offer them as provocations for further debate in CSCW and beyond.

## Open Forest

### Experimental walking-with

In the Open Forest, walking is embraced as a way of becoming responsive to a place: a bodily practice that can activate modes of situated, relational participation and facilitate imaginative knowledge production (Kanstrup et al. 2014, Springgay and Truman 2018). The experimental walks are centred around the elements of surprise and curiosity, inviting participants to walk with one another as well as with the surrounding local forest. We walk both physically and remotely, sometimes with actual forests and other times through data-based representations of them (figure 1). Remote participants join the walks using proprietary video conferencing systems such as Zoom and we bring them along using our laptops and mobile phones.

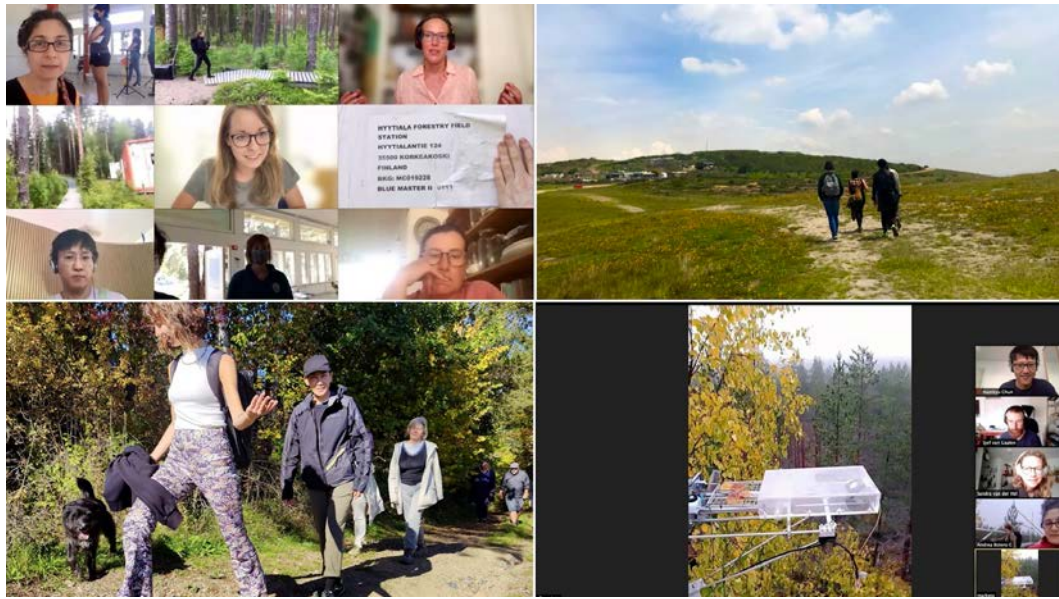


Figure 1: The Open Forest walks take place both physically and remotely via videoconferencing.

The walks are guided by various human and other-than-human navigators with good knowledge or sense of local landscapes (figure 2). Our walking guides have so far included Indigenous forest guardians and healers, forest scientists and data managers, a dog and a river, as well as artistic strategies of *Dérive*, which invite walkers for spontaneous psychogeographic explorations of a local ambiance challenging the capitalistic production of urban space (Debord, 1958).



Figure 2: The Open Forest walks are guided by various human and other-than-human navigators.

Local trees and other forest creatures are considered participants, in both the walking experiences and the larger eco-social phenomena happening in and around forests, such as biodiversity loss and climate change. This relational walking-with follows various approaches: some walking guides share narrated trivia about the local forest area, such as its culture, species and history, which then serve as the key points of the walking route. Other guides, including Chewie – an Open Forest Collective member of canine origin – use their own sensory instincts and invite participants to follow without any predefined route.

At the end of each walk, we articulate our experiences in the form of forest stories, which are shared either in collective sharing circles organised after some of the walks, or by each participant individually. Stories shared on a paper are first compiled into the Open Forest Catalogue, a colourful clip-binder notebook that allows for an easy adding of new pages, and later digitised and uploaded into the online Feral Map, which is our main story archive with over 150 forest stories at the time of writing this paper. In addition to the walks and sharing circles, we have also designed and showcased Open Forest installation (figure 3) which offers another entry for people to engage with the project and share forest stories (Open Forest Collective, 2022).

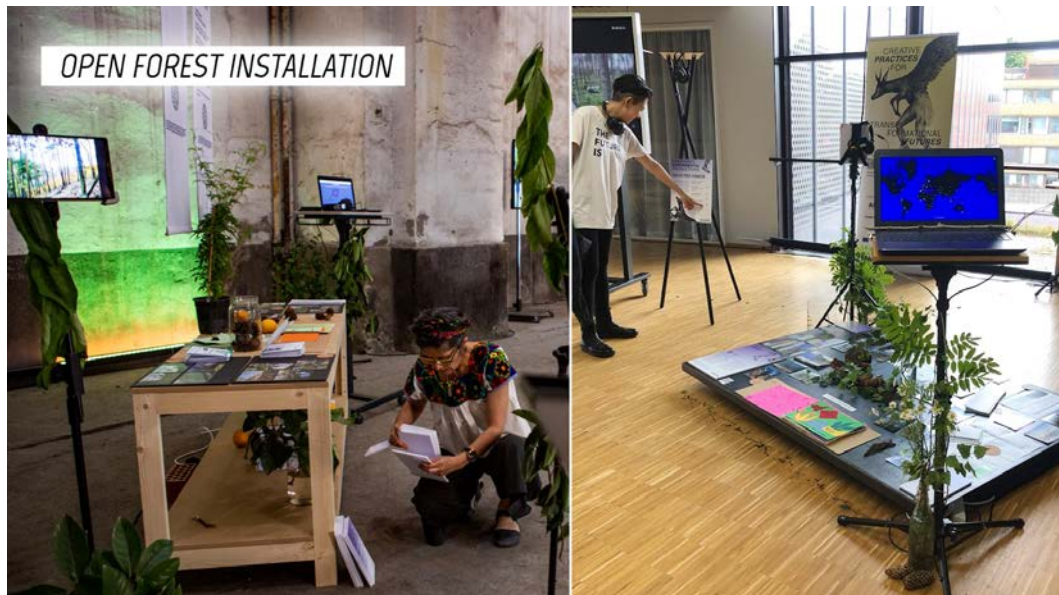


Figure 3: The interactive Open Forest installation is regularly showcased at public exhibitions and festivals.

## Feral Map

The Feral Map makes the collected forest stories available for further reflection and asynchronous engagement outside of the walks' scope, which helps to enable iterative interactions and reach broader audiences. Each forest area where we organise the walks is added to the map as a new location (or 'patch') to collect local stories (figure 4). However, map contributions are not limited to the forest patches we have directly engaged, and a story can also be added anywhere outside of these locations. Anyone, including those who did not participate in the walks, can share their stories in any forest locations they like, thereby contributing to an evolving dataset of diversely situated forest experiences and observations.

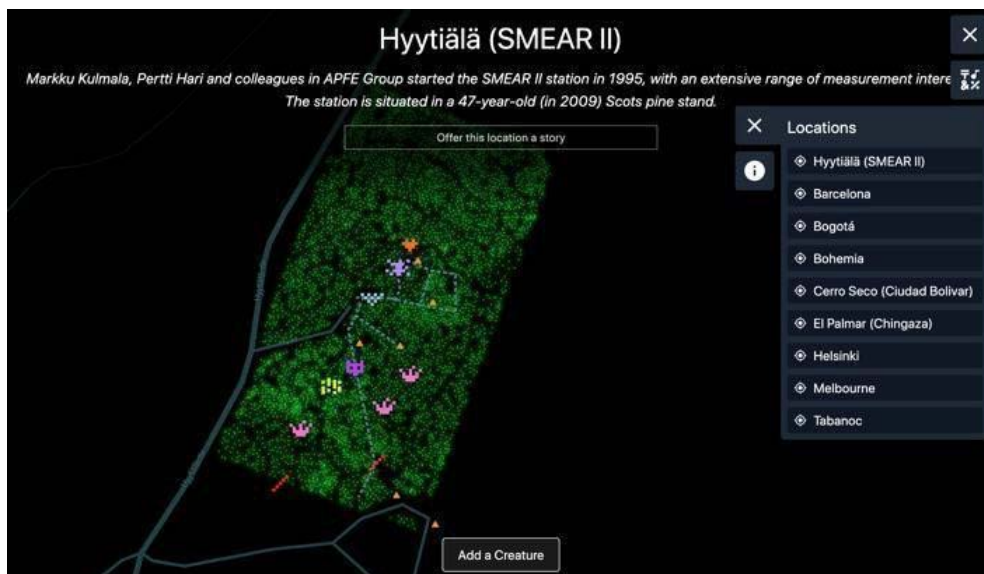


Figure 4: Feral Map and a forest patch in the Hyttiälä station, Finland.

On the map, stories can have various formats and contain text as well as images, audio, and links to external pages: some stories include personal accounts of human-forest relationships expressed in words and pictures, while others document local forest traditions and mythologies. Apart from adding stories to the existing forest places and data points, participants can also add new points of interest, or new 'creatures' as we call them. Offering these creatures to the map is left deliberately open: participants can add creatures of various kinds, such as an animal or plant, but also more abstract ones, such as an ambiance or a glitch (figure 5). By adding these new creatures, they can share their personally situated views on what makes the local forest, thereby drawing attention to what might not be visible otherwise.

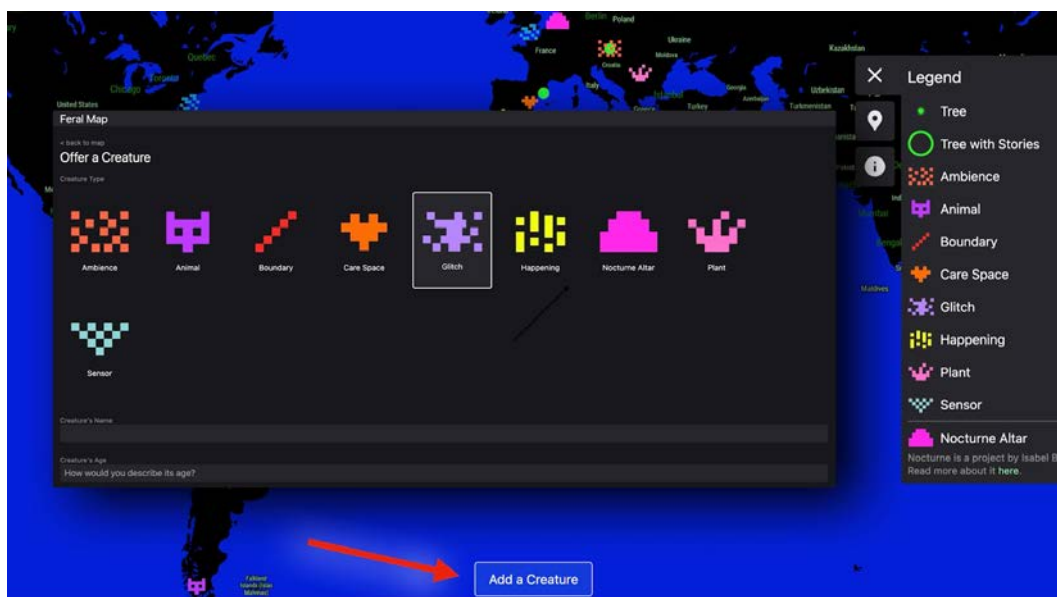


Figure 5: Various new forest ‘creatures’ can be added to the Feral Map dataset.

Besides the content added by participants, the map has been seeded with data points generated automatically using various existing, open and publicly available forest datasets. For instance, we have used urban forest datasets maintained by the city of Melbourne and the city of Helsinki, which allowed us to include all trees that exist in these locations and are monitored by the local municipalities.

We have used the Feral Map as our main portal to collect forest stories during and after our walks in various parts of the world, including (what is known today as) Finland, Australia, the Czech Republic, Colombia, and the United Kingdom. In the following sections, we discuss our walking experiences and stories gathered from four selected forest patches: the Hyytiälä forestry field station (FI), the ancestral territory of the Kamëntša people Bëngbe Uáman Tabanoc (COL), the Melbourne urban forest (AUS), and the protected landscape area Křivoklátsko (CZ).

## Forest patches and stories

### Hyytiälä

In Finland, our walks have been situated in the SMEAR II – Station for Measuring Ecosystem-Atmosphere Relations in the historical Hyytiälä forestry field station. The walks have been performed in a hybrid format and followed the guidance of two Collective members who previously interviewed several forestry researchers working in Hyytiälä to learn about the station’s history and research. SMEAR II provides a peculiar location for our inquiry: this highly



instrumentalized forest is full of sensors and other monitoring devices that provide comprehensive measurements of fluxes, storages, and concentrations of important substances in the land-ecosystem-atmosphere continuum (figure 6). These sensors and the data they collect present key points of the guided walks.



Figure 6: Snapshots from our walk with the SMEAR II forestry station.

At a recent Hyytiälä walk that was followed by a sharing circle titled *What did the cloud whisper to the forest canopy?* we shared stories to re-imagine SMEAR's data collection practices. One participant offered a story to the local Carbon Tree, a medium-sized Scots pine strapped with sensors that monitor its carbon sequestration activity in real time (<http://www.carbontree.fi/>). The story wonders about the quality of life of this particular tree that was turned into a quantitative data monitoring device, asking: Do people even notice that it is a pine species? Do they notice how beautiful its bark is? Do they care? Or has the tree become a mere sum of numeric data? (figure 7). The story poetically captures what might get lost in numeric datasets representing forests, and what might become difficult to capture about forests and how to care for them, when we rely only on quantitative measures such as carbon sink metrics.

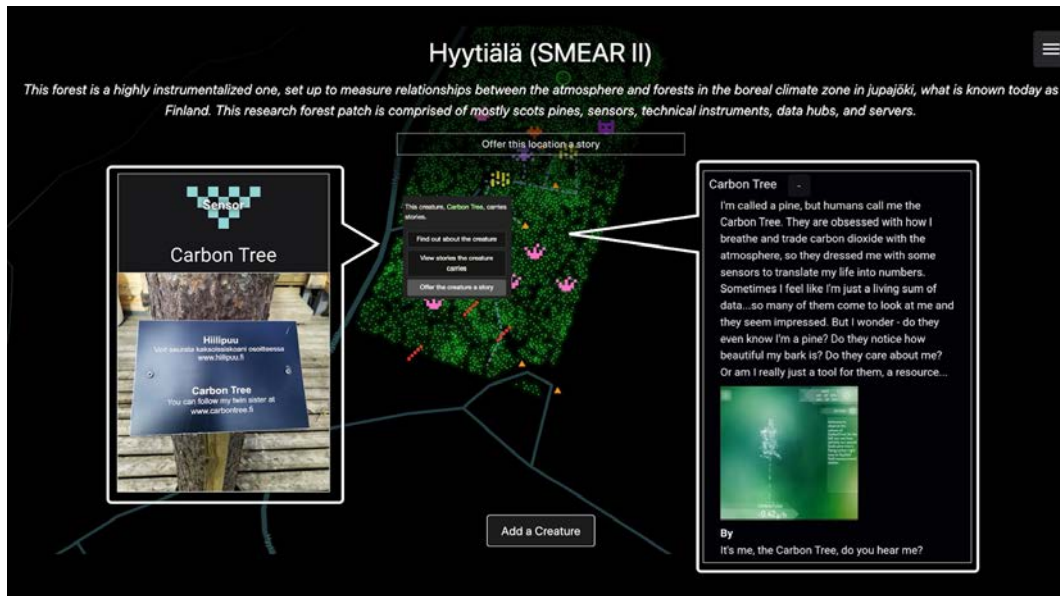


Figure 7: Carbon Tree story speculating about the life of a tree-turned-sensor.

Another story titled *Zooming into the Forest* was shared by a remote walk participant who wanted to reflect on their hybrid walking experience. The story highlights some unexpected moments brought about by the technological mediation of the walk: the low frame rate video connection provided a somewhat distorted image of the forest on their screen; the ambient noise cancelling algorithm of the video conferencing system suppressed the forest sounds experienced by those walking there physically (e.g., the experience of constant eerie humming produced by the sensing instruments mentioned many times by local walkers was not available to those walking remotely). This story (figure 8) illustrates the situatedness of forest experiences and the diverse ways how a forest can be sensed by different creatures – in this case human creatures wandering through the forest in-situ and those experiencing the same forest as a representation displayed in real time, yet across different time zones, on a screen.

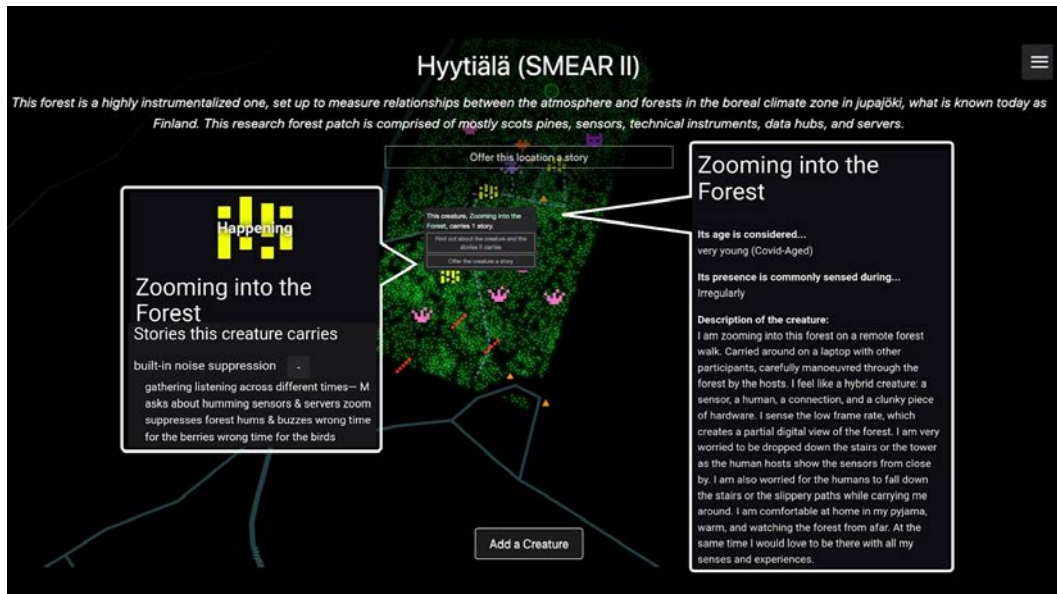


Figure 8: Zooming into the forest – a story shared by a remote participant during one of the walks.

### Bëngbe Uáman Tabanoc

In Colombia, we walked in Tabanoc, an ancestral territory of the Kamëntša people located in southern Colombian Andes. The walks were situated in two forest gardens – *jajañs* as they are named in Kamëntša or *chagras*, which is the more commonly used Quechua word. These gardens present complex Indigenous ecosystems where trees, medicinal and edible plants, flowers, and other species intermingle under human stewardship and care (Cabildo Kamëntša 2013). Our walks were guided by the gardeners themselves, in this case two Kamëntša women (figure 9).



Figure 9: Maria Victoria guides the walk through her forest garden in Bëngbe Uáman Tabanoc.

In the past decades, the growth of monocultural agriculture, modern forest management practices and capitalist demands resulted in a steady decline of this forest stewardship practice. Remaining forest gardens that are still maintained according to traditional Kamëntša ecological knowledge and specific preferences of each gardener are maintained more as acts of sociopolitical resistance rather than as daily sustenance. In contrast to our walks with the instrumentalized SMEAR II forest, where we carefully avoid stepping on or touching the sensing devices installed on site, the walks with chagras involve touching, tasting, smelling and loads of references to the larger cosmopolitics of the place. Seasonality and what grew there at the time of our walks defined the key points of the walking routes. This focus on situated details creates an intimate atmosphere, with the gardeners sharing stories of their personal relationships to some of the species growing in their *jajañ*.

Besides gardening, Kamëntša women are renowned for weaving colourful patterned sachets called *tšombiachs* that are used both in everyday life and on special occasions (Cuarán et al 2021). *Tšombiachs* have been woven for centuries through a series of intricate pictograms that hold much of what being Kamëntša means. In many instances, the belts document – in complex ways – environmental knowledge of the territory and stories that codified Kamëntša relationship with their forest gardens past and present. During one of our walks, our guide shared stories about the spectacled bear – once a prominent inhabitant of this territory that is often featured in Kamëntša myths. Spectacled bear is the only bear species left in South America, and is now facing extinction because of habitat loss caused by deforestation. The Spectacled bear story shared on the Feral Map offers some data about this species juxtaposed with its representation in a *tšombiach* that was woven by one of our guides (figure 10). The *tšombiachs*, as particular data representations of the local ecosystem, offer a culturally and locally specific illustration of large-scale eco-social issues such as deforestation and colonialism. Our hope is that the Feral Map can help make these issues visible through the personally situated forest stories shared by local forest stakeholders – such as the one mentioned here.

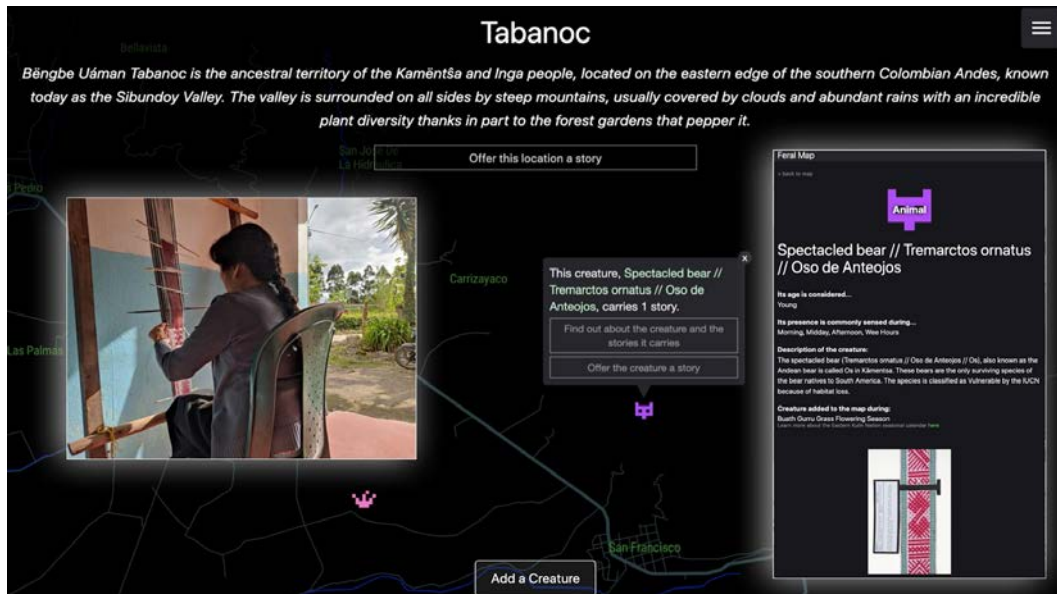


Figure 10: The tšombiach depicted in the story shows one of the pictograms that in Kamëntša mythology refers to the spectacled bear.

### Melbourne Urban Forest

The walks with the Melbourne urban forest, a complex ecosystem of more than 70,000 trees each with unique IDs, were guided by a set of More-than-Human (MtH) Dérives (<https://more-than-human-derive.net/about/>), or drifts. Inspired by the Letterist and Situationists International’s artistic strategy with the same name, the Dérives invite walkers to take an unplanned journey through local landscapes, drop their everyday relations and let themselves be drawn by chance encounters (Debord, 1958). Dérives were intended to challenge restrictive spaces created by the social and architectural conditioning in urban environments and aimed at creating new spaces for movement and action through creative, playful interactions with abstract intentions. The MtH Dérive, as an online portal with a set of drifting prompts, was developed in parallel with the Feral Map through three co-creative workshops with scientists, designers, artists, researchers and policy actors from Melbourne. Over 200 prompts for drifting through the local landscape were created and categorised into ten themes, including, for example: *Becoming* (To listen and attune to those less visible or heard), *Space-time* (To understand space and time differently), *Decentering the Human* (To not assume anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism), and *Sensemaking* (To feel, think, and know differently) (figure 11).

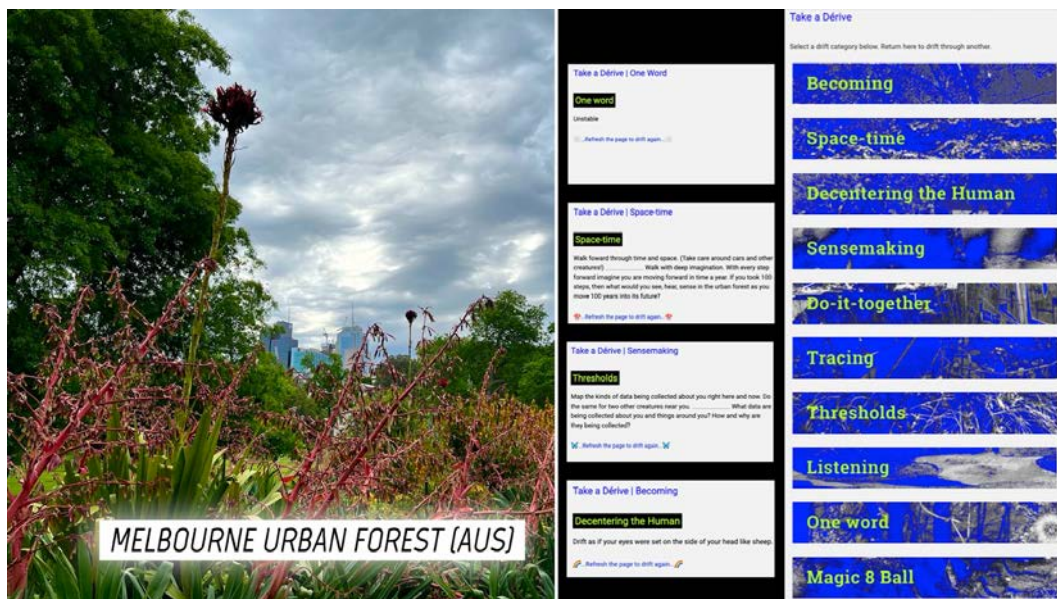


Figure 11: Melbourne urban forest and the More-than-Human Dérive prompts.

The design and engagement with the MtH Dérive were also inspired by the existing website run by the city of Melbourne named Urban Forest Visual. Drawing on the Melbourne Urban Forest dataset, which assigns 70,000 trees in inner city Melbourne with unique IDs, the website allows people to send an email to any of these mapped trees. Although reportedly meant to provide a platform for local citizens to report to the city council various issues concerning the trees, the site has been used by people around the world for an unintended purpose: to write letters *to* the trees rather than *about* them. Many of the letters express people’s affection for and personal memories involving the trees; telling important stories that capture complex (more-than)human-tree relationships that constitute the urban forest. As such, the letters should serve as critical data informing future decisions about the urban forest and, more broadly, the city itself. Yet these remain essentially invisible to most people and illegible to algorithmic systems that only feed specific sets of official, scientific data into their operation. With the MtH Dérive and the Feral Map, we hope to explore how to enrich, complicate and expand ways for these kinds of messy – yet critical – data to become a more visible and meaningful part of the past-present-future forest imaginings.

In a Feral Map story placed in the Melbourne patch titled Dewy Aura, the author shares what they sensed while drifting through the urban forest on an early morning. The story captures various sensory details, such as the fresh smell of the morning air and the soft light coming through the clouds – possibly the kind of ambient forest details, or forest data, that might go unnoticed otherwise, during a morning rush hour in the city (figure 12).



Figure 12: The Dewy Aura story capturing intimate, sensory-rich experiences of forest drifting.

## Křivoklátsko

In the Czech Republic, an ongoing series of walks takes place in Central Bohemia, in the protected landscape area Křivoklátsko, which presents a unique ecosystem with a mosaic of species-rich habitats. The Bohemian walks are guided by the Collective's member Chewie – a dog with extensive sensorial knowledge of the local forest landscape. We follow Chewie, his sense of orientation and points of interests in the local forest, letting him choose which direction to take and what is worth exploring. Chewie's sensory capacities – especially the smell that canine species use to orient themselves in the world – become key in these guided trips. Our human sensory capacities are present but their usual connection to rational decision-making is put on hold to some extent, as we walk-with and wait for what will come our way.

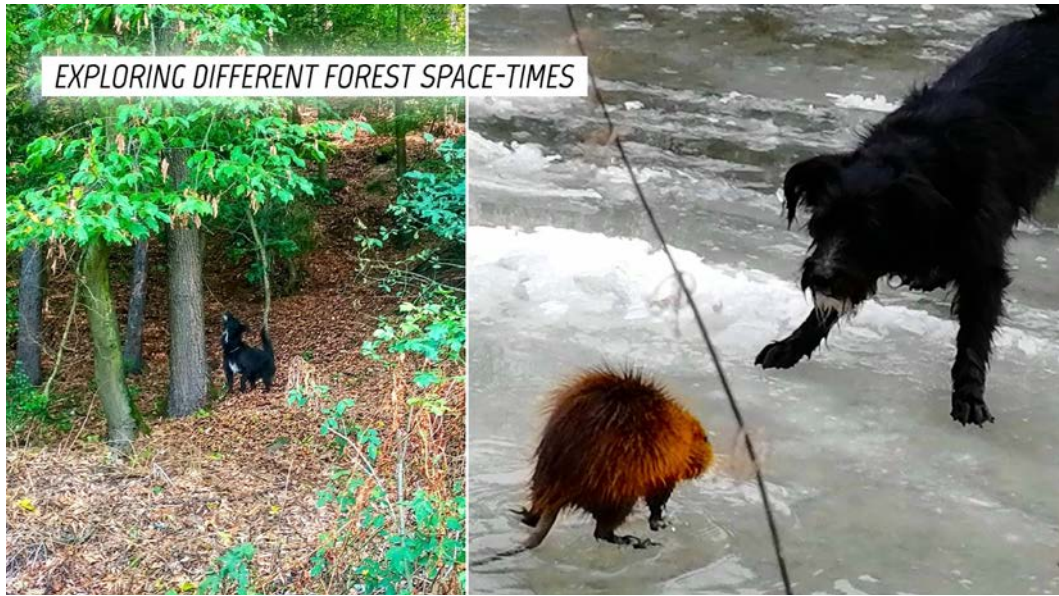


Figure 13: Serendipitous more-than-human encounters during the feral Bohemian walks guided by Chewie.

Often, we walk into forest spaces and situations that we might have never encountered otherwise, as captured in some of the forest stories (figure 13). Guided by Chewie, we engaged in new (to us) forest rituals such as plunging our faces into a moss to explore the forest from different perspectives (figure 14).



Figure 14: Face moss spa practised by the Bohemian walking guide and participants.

We learned about lives of various local forest creatures spending many hours watching squirrels jumping through the canopy and otters building and guarding



their houses near the river. These experiences have been enthralling as well as exhausting and sometimes even frightening, expanding our embodied knowledge of the forest and the different temporalities of forest lives. Along with this more-than-human guidance, we explore what we can learn as humans if we reduce our control over our usual movements through time and space and instead try to attune to the different rhythms and interests of a local non-human creature.

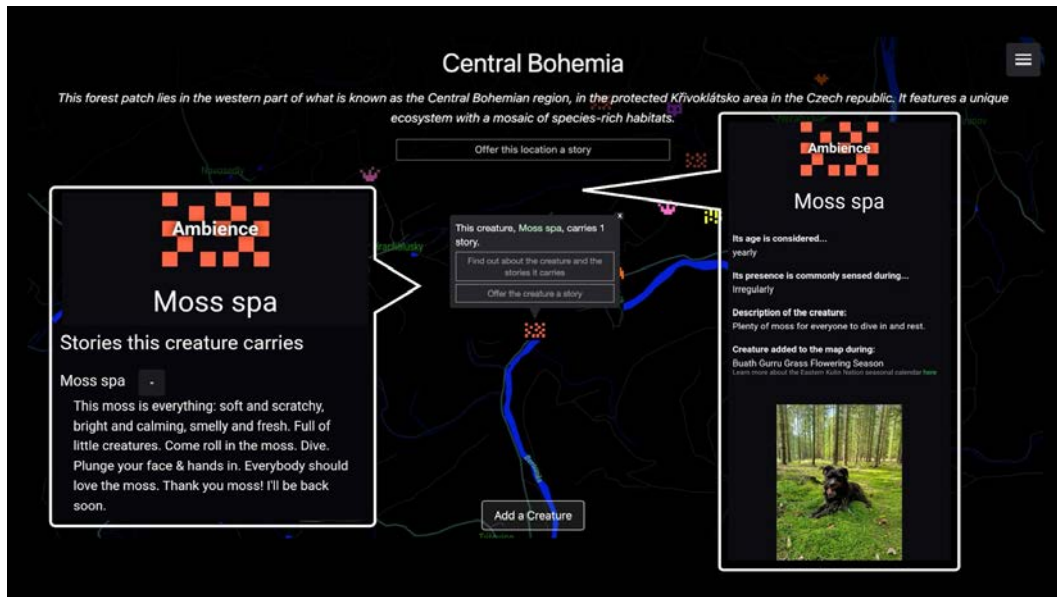


Figure 15: Moss Spa story shared by 'Chewie'.

We note that the stories resulting from the Bohemian walks, such as the Moss Spa story (figure 15), are written from the perspective of Chewie for whom typing on a keyboard does not make sense (this is similar to the case of the Carbon Tree story mentioned earlier). While aiming to playfully capture what they assumed might have been Chewie's experience, the human author of the story started 'speaking' on the dog's behalf, conveying a rather biased, human-driven interpretation of his other-than-human experience. In the context of the Feral Map, the Moss Spa story opens questions about the possibilities and limitations of embracing more-than-human perspectives in human-made datasets. Some of the questions we continue to explore include: How can we involve other-than-humans as collaborators on such datasets and capture their experiences while avoiding falling for mere representations? How can we learn from each other in a mutualistic way beyond the unidirectional mode of humans observing and learning from other creatures?

## Feral collaborative practices, feral data, feral futures

The forest stories we have collected from our walks offer alternative, diversely situated perspectives on what forests might mean and to whom, beyond extractivist understandings of forests as resources to be used for human survival and wellbeing. Along with these stories, the evolving Feral Map aims to obscure the currently available numeric data about forests, to include more nuanced or alternative data in various formats, including forest data woven into belts, generated through drifting, and inspired by a dog's forest interests and movements (figure 16). These stories offer a peculiar kind of forest data that is messy, eclectic, colourful, varied, or “feral”. In this section we present our preliminary understanding about what feral data can encompass, related theories and concepts, and what its possible uses for the reimagining of human-forest data relationships might be.

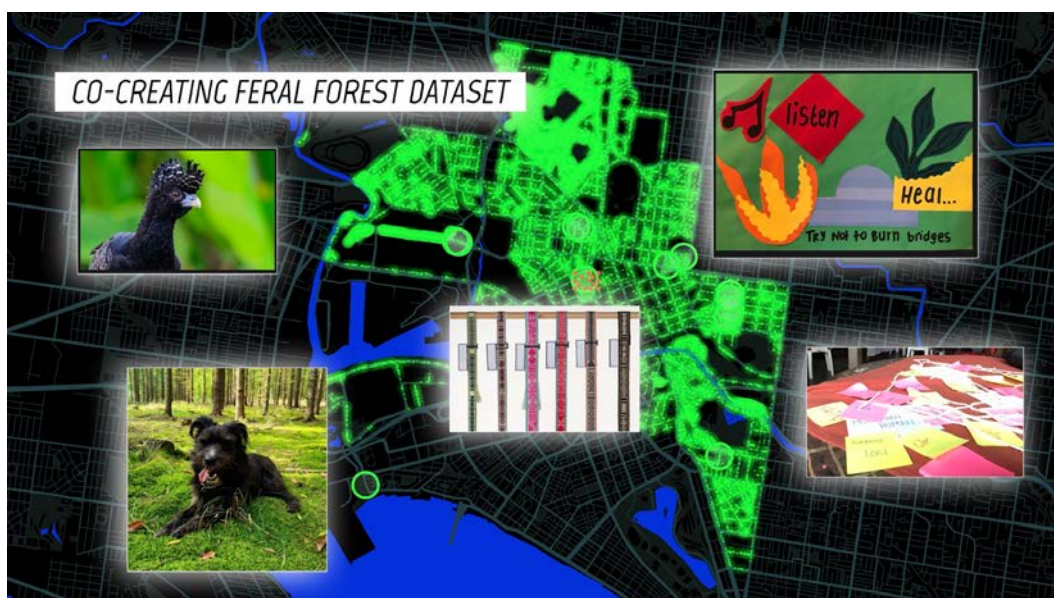


Figure 16: Feral forest data in the Feral Map captures diverse forest knowledge.

The term feral derives from the Latin *ferus*, or wild, and is mostly used in biology in the context of feral species – once domesticated creatures that have returned to the wild and become untamed. Feral species are known to have an ambivalent relationship with their local ecosystems; they can be disruptive and invasive, even displacing local indigenous species but also contribute to the enrichment of local biodiversity. There have been different attempts to define the “feral” in particularly from an anthropological perspective. In *Feral Atlas*, Anna Tsing and colleagues (2020) define feral as emerging from within human-

sponsored infrastructures but unfolding beyond human control; carrying a potential to challenge dominant ontological and epistemological discourses. Making a departure from the concept of ‘in the wild’ research, or science, Mike Michael (2018) suggests that feral can be used as a mode of engagement that, while having elements of domestication, operates within its own rules, beyond domestication. Using the example of ‘destructive testing’ videos where users destroy their iPhones to learn more about their functions, Michael talks about feral citizen science that is motivated by curiosity to explore what is hidden or made invisible, rather than by pragmatism.

Genevieve Bell (2018), reflecting on the history of how camels were initially imported to Australia for transportation and later became feral with the introduction of locomotives, talks about data and technologies becoming feral: outliving their intended purpose and slipping the received wisdom about users, contexts, and regulatory regimes to emerge in new situations as “feral versions of their former selves” (in Scroggins, 2023:85). Here, feralness marks a deviation from a norm, thus providing a useful metaphor for thinking of data becoming wild and untamed, standing in opposition to a normative order that is assumed to be rational and orderly (Scroggins, 2023). Similar to the ambivalence in feral species’ relations with local environments, nurturing and engaging with feral data – data that is messy, uncertain, eclectic, surprising – may lead to diverse outcomes. Data as a never-neutral agent can disrupt, expose, and create new social, economic, political and environmental possibilities as well as hide, exclude and foreclose others (Gitelman, 2013). In this sense, data and societal relations embedded in them act as tools for generating futures, rather than only representing existing realities and future possibilities (Henry et al. 2022). Experimenting with data as a feral, uncertain agent acting outside its domesticated anthropocentric nature can thus reveal previously invisible meanings and open a space for various unexpected connections and outcomes.

The concepts of feralness and feral data are central to the design of our experimental inquiry that encourages surprising encounters and relations to emerge among various more-than-human forest stakeholders, and that deliberately leaves room for the unexpected to unfold beyond our control as human researchers. The forest walks are shaped by various more-than-human factors that are necessarily out of human control, such as seasons, weather, technology, dogs, and the many evolving forest lives in and around the places that we walk-with. The spontaneity and feralness of the walks influence the form and texture of the forest stories that are shared by participants and add to the constellation of forest data emerging from the project. The Feral Map itself experiments with an open curation and invites contributions in varied forms, including forest stories as well as new ‘forest creatures’ to help make visible what might otherwise stay unseen. Aligning with the ambivalence embedded in

feralness, taking this open-ended, feral approach to the map's design and curation presents diverse possibilities, ranging from strengthening people's connection with particular forest creatures and places, to spam or stories that are added rather randomly and hold limited relevance. Critical to our feral data experimentation is the focus on co-creative collaboration that brings human and other-than-human forest stakeholders into playful exchange of their forest knowledge, experiences, observations and sensory impressions. The insights shared by these project contributors through the walks and the Feral Map invite diverse perspectives on what forests can be, to whom, in what kinds of power relations. By experimenting with limiting control over our co-creative inquiry, we aim to create opportunities to learn from and better understand the diverse creatures living in and around forests whose interests may remain invisible, ignored and unnoticed. By doing so, we hope to make better sense of what new forest data and relationships might be needed to help foster shifts towards forest futures where more-than-human care and justice are taken seriously, beyond mere tokenistic gestures.

In our attempts to cultivate pluralistic, more-than-human forest imaginaries and sensemaking, we also learned about certain limitations to our feral data experimentation. These include concerns with the representational nature of some of our data, especially those generated by humans from other-than-human perspectives, as illustrated by the Moss Spa story. How do these stories reflect our own human understanding and assumptions about the feral and anthropocentrism? How can an anthropocentric technology like the Feral Map claim to 'capture' other-than-human experiences? Relatedly, how can we as human researchers and practitioners think about and do co-creation with other-than-humans? For example, what could it possibly mean to include trees as participants in our walks and similar collaborative research endeavours?

Rather than offering clear answers to these questions, the Open Forest project aims to open a space for collaborative, critical and co-creative engagements with such questions among participants with diverse perspectives, experiences and agencies. What is highlighted in the project is that as humans, we are just one of many forest stakeholders, and in order to understand, and importantly to live with forests better, we need to learn from other creatures who become the forest together with us.

## Conclusion

This paper introduced Open Forest as a project and a collective aiming to open a space for experimental exchange of more-than-human forest experiences, knowledge and data – including those that may be deemed unrecognizable, irrelevant, or disposable in the current dominant technological paradigm. Through experimental walks and story-sharing, Open Forest brings to attention the power

dynamics emerging from who might be able to legitimately produce data and tell the stories about forests, with a particular concern for what can constitute “data” and how this understanding might change as channelled through various more-than-human stakeholders. The feral forest datasets resulting from the collaborative project activities and inquiry help challenge dominant epistemological framings of forests and cultivate an acknowledgement for (some of) the many situated understandings of what a forest might be and to whom. While we only offer preliminary insights in this paper, we hope that our ongoing work can further encourage researchers and practitioners in CSCW and beyond who are interested in re-imagining environmental technologies, practices and data relationships to help foster liveable and care-full more-than-human futures.

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