

I would thoroughly recommend that this book be on the shelves of all serious enthusiasts, amphibian keepers and their veterinarians.

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Super-Pets and Smart Owners: The Care of Familiar and Unfamiliar Creatures

M Moore (2002). Published by Parapress Ltd, The Basement, 9 Frant Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 5SD, UK. 166 pp. Paperback (ISBN 1 898594 74 0). Price £10.99.

The idea of a basic introduction to animal ownership, to promote animal welfare through education before purchase, is an excellent one. As a veterinary surgeon dealing primarily with exotic pets, about 90% of our caseload is the unfortunate result of poor husbandry and ignorance. To condense almost the entire animal kingdom into a small, easy-to-read text is a tall order for anyone and I applaud the author for this attempt.

However, it is my opinion that this book has been approached from the angle of a zoo-keeper rather than an average pet-owner. The author obviously has knowledge of keeping animals within a large and specialised environment such as a zoo. That is not to say that there are no specialist private keepers who have very well-maintained collections. They do a great deal of good in breeding captive stocks, which both takes the pressure from animals in the wild (which may be captured for the pet trade) and also provides animals for release back into the wild when habitats are made available in the future. The book illustrates that a huge range of species is available, but does not really outline those that are appropriate, particularly for someone with little or no experience. There is a vast difference between this specialised environment and the average domestic household.

The domestic pets such as dogs, cats, rabbits and guinea pigs are glossed over and need more emphasis. The crested seriemas, llamas, European lynx and gorillas are perhaps included just for interest, but there should be more emphasis on deterring people from even considering such specialised and dangerous animals in a domestic environment.

There are some inaccuracies in the text — for example, the feeding of dog food to vegetarian species such as Mediterranean tortoises and green iguanas is now known to be inappropriate and potentially harmful. There is no mention of feeding high-fibre grass and hay to rabbits and maloccluded incisor teeth will not wear down when rodents are fed macaroni — they need dental treatment and management by a veterinary surgeon. The illustrations are disappointing, but I understand that this is perhaps with a view to keeping the book affordable.

The general reference section at the end of the book offers hope: it is nicely presented, with bullet points giving a simple overview of husbandry and statistics relating to each species. However, the actual list would be more useful if it comprised species that are relatively simple to keep and gave recommendations for animals with which inexperienced owners should start.

Veterinary bills are mentioned and are said to be expensive, which should deter some people, but the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) is cited as an easy answer for people on benefits. There is no mention of pet insurance as a sensible option to budget for this inevitable expense. There is an increasing number of veterinary surgeons who have the necessary interest and expertise in treating exotic animals, but owners should be made aware

that they may have to travel to find them and pay more for specialist knowledge. The hygiene section is excellent, with mention of the important zoonotic diseases.

In summary, I would very much like my clients to buy and read a book such as this before deciding to purchase an exotic pet. However, it is not sufficient on its own and I wonder if it would prevent some of the disastrous impulse buys which occur all too frequently.

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Cattle: An Informal Social History

L W Carlson (2001). Published by Ivan R Dee, 1332 North Halsted Street, Chicago, Illinois 60622-2694, USA. 321 pp. Paperback (ISBN 1 56663 388 5). Price \$16.95.

Interdisciplinary studies are never easy, and combining social history and cattle production is no exception. This book is a valiant attempt by a writer of books on the American West to chart the role that cattle played in human society from domestication to the present day. The book focuses on cattle culture in Western society — American and English in particular. Unfortunately, the role of cattle in prehistory, which occupies the first few chapters of the book, was not well researched, and the reader has to reach the middle chapters on the role of cattle in American culture before the author's valuable insight into some aspects of cattle and society becomes apparent.

The book opens appropriately with a vivid description of the discovery in 1879 of the prehistoric cave paintings of cattle in northern Spain, giving the reader a taste of the lively narrative that pervades this book. The painting techniques are described in detail, although it might have been more appropriate to focus on the possible meaning of the paintings, which has been much debated by the scientific community. Interestingly, the author interprets cow-cow mounting as a stimulus to 'get the bull in the mood', but scientists usually describe this behaviour as a signal to distant, solitary bulls that there are receptive cows in the herd. The next chapter on the domestication of cattle relies on a few books written in the 1960s to conclude that cattle were domesticated around 4000 BC in Mesopotamia; however, archaeologists now believe that it was much earlier, about 6000–8000 B.C. The role of grain feeding is overemphasised — it is unlikely that cattle "scavenged for grain" on the periphery of human settlements. However, although the author's description of cattle domestication is outdated, there are some excellent analogies — for example, "today we use animals as symbols of a long-lost Eden, a connection to a religious 'wild'", and cattle are "prisoners of their huge bulk, their digestive system, and their need for a great number of calories from plants". Colourful references to early writings on cattle behaviour are provided, most notably Galton's (1871) comparison of cattle jostling to avoid taking the lead in a drove to "bashful gentlemen being reluctant to move from the drawing room to the dining room".

In a valuable insight into the transition from hunter-gatherer to agriculturalist societies, the author describes how, in the former, meat sharing supported the development of social organisation, with altruistic males favoured as mates. However, agrarian societies, most of which had cattle as their main provider, were more sexually egalitarian, and women had a central role in food production. The author continues this theme in a chapter on the role of women in cattle management, which focuses on 19th and 20th century America and is full of rose-tinted descriptions of the idyllic lifestyle of cow and carer.

The next few chapters describe the bringing of cattle to America and their use in society. Commenting on the Celtic colonisation of southern USA, and English colonisation of the