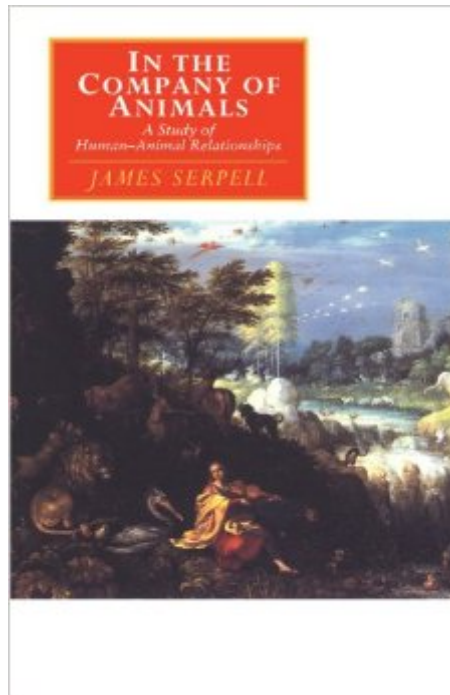


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In The Company Of Animals: A Study Of Human-Animal Relationships



Synopsis

In the Company of Animals is an original and very readable study of human attitudes to the natural world. It contrasts the way we love some animals while ruthlessly exploiting others; it provides a detailed and fascinating account of ways in which animal companionship can influence our health; and it provides a key to understanding the moral contradictions inherent in our treatment of animals and nature. Its scope encompasses history, anthropology, and animal and human psychology. Along the way, the author uncovers a fascinating trail of insights and myths about our relationship with the species with which we share the planet. James Serpell is the editor of *The Domestic Dog: Its Evolution, Behavior and Interactions With People* (CUP, 1995).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the Company of Animals is the single best introduction to anthrozoology - the study of human-animal interactions. A woman once told me about her experience reading it. She said simply, "That book changed my life." Serpell is both a powerful writer and a leading scholar in this field. The first half of In the Company of Animals is largely concerned with the who, what, and why of maintaining non-human animals as companions. In the breadth of his coverage, Serpell displays an impressive command of psychology, ethology, history, cultural anthropology, and behavioral medicine. A brief sampling of a few representative topics illustrates the span of Serpell's intellectual vision: the role of pets in sixteenth century witchcraft, the effects of watching aquarium fish on blood pressure, bestiality, social parasitism, and why dogs rather than pigs became companion animals.

Serpell argues that individuals who keep pets have often been viewed with scorn, suspicion, and pity. At times, pet owners have been subjected to persecution and even death. Thus, this part of the book is essentially a defense of companion animals. Serpell reviews recent studies documenting the benefits of pets to human health, psychological well-being, and the amelioration of loneliness. He concludes that the company of animals serves to buffer their owners from the interpersonal isolation all too common in modern industrial societies. The second half of *In the Company of Animals* focuses on the darker side of human-animal interactions. Serpell is particularly adept at describing paradoxes inherent in our interactions with other species.

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