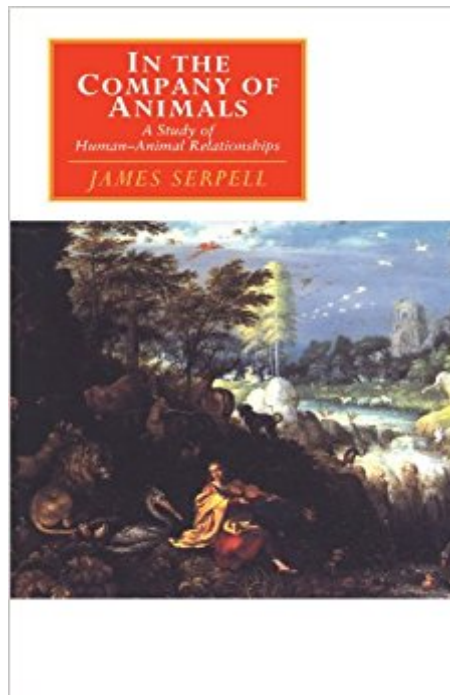




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# In The Company Of Animals: A Study Of Human-Animal Relationships



## 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

"Arguing by copious example in a thoroughly well-researched and well-written book, Serpell demonstrates that pet-keeping appeals both to a wide variety of cultures throughout the world, and to all social classes within Western society." Stephen J. Gould, *The New York Review of Books*"In the Company of Animals is a work of cross-cultural panache. Serpell writes passionately and well about a subject that seems to have fallen between the cracks of specializations. His overview is sweeping and provocative." *Time Magazine*"Why did James Serpell feel the need to write a book in defence of pet-keeping? Surely this is one aspect of human behaviour that requires no advocacy. But read on. Indeed, read this book, for it is full of fascinating comments on a subject that many of us have taken for granted." Desmond Morris, *BBC Wildlife*

Contrasting the way we love some animals while ruthlessly exploiting others, this study provides a detailed and fascinating account of the ways in which animal companionship can influence our health. It provides a key to the moral contradiction inherent in our treatment of animals and nature.

I loved this book. I have read other sources of information on anthrozoology, but none were nearly as comprehensive, well-researched, and well-written as Serpell's work. This book has it all. It presents a fairly complete history of human-animal relationships throughout the western world. It also uses scientific research to assess the human-animal bond, and is peppered with many fascinating anecdotes and examples. With all these elements combined, it becomes a real page-turner. Great for anyone, whether you are looking for an introduction to anthrozoology, or you are just looking for a good book to read with your dog or cat on your lap. A+

This is among perhaps a half dozen books which illustrate the valuable human/animal relationships. I read as many as I can, and I highly endorse this book. None of us has to be alone; and all of us benefit from knowing more about this deep part of our world. RDS

As a professor of anthropology who teaches a course on Anthrozoology at Western Illinois University, I highly recommend *In the Company of Animals*. Anthrozoology (the scientific study of human-animal interaction) is a dynamic new area of study and Dr Serpell is one of the founders. This book is required reading for my course, and students love it! Serpell's work explores the phenomena of domestication and pet keeping, or companion animals (as we prefer to call them now), from a cross-cultural and evolutionary perspective that is highly anthropological. Shame on us! An Anthropologist should have written this book! I highly recommend this work.

*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. Among my favorites are the dual roles of puppies in Southeast Asian households (pets and dinner), Adolf Hitler's commitment to animal welfare, and the love people have for dogs coupled with an equally passionate loathing for their immediate progenitor, the wolf. Serpell, however, goes further than listing the foibles that characterize human-animal relationships. He develops an explanation, suggesting that these paradoxes ultimately reflect the evolutionary processes which have shaped the human mind. Serpell believes that moral conflict that emerges in our relationships with animals stems from a tendency we inherited from our hunter-gatherer forbearers -- the penchant for meat. By nature we are exploiters of animals. But unlike tigers and wolves and boa constrictors, we are carnivores with a sense of guilt. As a result we have developed psychological mechanisms that allow us to maintain the "myth of human supremacy." He believes this is an illusion which developed as cultures shifted from hunter-gatherer economies to those based on the slaughter of domestic animals. This hypothesis provides a powerful perspective on the contradictions seen in human-animal relationships. While readers may not agree with all of Serpell's ideas, they will find that *In the Company of Animals* is a beautifully written book that is rich in both facts and provocative ideas. It will appeal to both animal lovers and the scholars who study them.

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If you want to know the actual reasons why we humans are so inclined to love our pets, and gain some fascinating insights into how beneficial it is for us to have pets, then read this book.

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