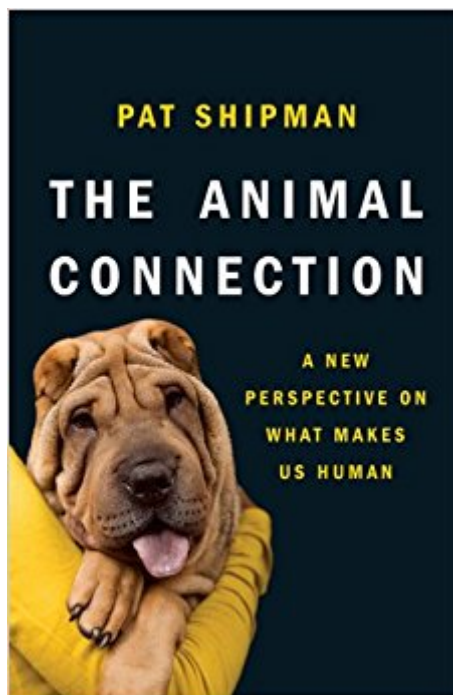




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# **The Animal Connection: A New Perspective On What Makes Us Human**



## Synopsis

"Both animal lovers and readers who are interested in human psychology will not be able to put this fascinating book down." — Temple Grandin, author of *Animals in Translation* and *Animals Make Us Human*

Why do humans all over the world take in and nurture other animals? This behavior might seem maladaptive—after all, every mouthful given to another species is one that you cannot eat—but in this heartening new study, acclaimed anthropologist Pat Shipman reveals that our propensity to domesticate and care for other animals is in fact among our species' greatest strengths. For the last 2.6 million years, Shipman explains, humans who coexisted with animals enjoyed definite adaptive and cultural advantages. To illustrate this point, Shipman gives us a tour of the milestones in human civilization—from agriculture to art and even language—and describes how we reached each stage through our unique relationship with other animals. *The Animal Connection* reaffirms our love of animals as something both innate and distinctly human, revealing that the process of domestication not only changed animals but had a resounding impact on us as well.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A fascinating, well written book blending human evolutionary history with the development of animal domestication (dogs, cats, horses) and the history of less friendly human-animal relations (lions and tigers and bears etc.). Humans are clearly the dominant species on Planet Earth, but we didn't get here on our own, and we are not alone. Shipman has much to teach us on both counts.

This book takes a new look at what it means to be humans, something that has always been there, our respect for animals. Perhaps we need animals to be human, to be happy. I loved reading this fantastic book.

The publisher's blurb for this book sounds as if it's about our warm, happy relationship with animals, and how this relationship has shaped our evolutionary history. However, the principle relationship discussed is predator-prey. Our tools let us kill and butcher animals more easily. Fire lets us consume them more efficiently. Language lets us hunt them better. The author spends a lot of time on stone tools and their fabrication. She discusses domestication of dogs and horses and the various speculative theories of how this happened. Only at the end does she discuss the sort of relationships we currently value with companion animals. And she laments that most people have no real experiences with nature outside the cities. They think meat is made in a factory and wrapped in plastic from the moment of its manufacture. It's a good summary of thinking about some aspects of human evolution and prehistory, but not what you would think from the cover and the blurb.

In *The Animal Connection*, paleoanthropologist and author Pat Shipman, presents a fascinating review of human evolution from a new perspective - one that focuses on our interactions with other animal species. As Shipman points out, humans are unique among all other species in having extensive and close interactions with other animals species, such as dogs, cats, chicken, cows and horses. Why is this the case and what benefits do we derive from them? Why do we share our food and resources with these other species, especially those that we do not eat or use as beasts of burden? She hypothesizes that our "animal connection" increased over our evolutionary history, and was selected for because it contributed greatly to our evolutionary success. Her book is written chronologically, beginning some 6-7 million years ago, with the first turning point around 2.6 million years ago when our lineage seemed to transition to a more carnivorous diet. This altered our position in the ecosystem, and importantly, no longer were we just prey who had to be wary of predators, now we were predators as well, and it benefited us to observe the habits of predators even more closely. As she describes key events in human history (tool making, language,

domestication) and their relationship to the human-animal connection, she provides fascinating insights into how paleoanthropologists do their work. How do you identify a tool as opposed to an odd-shaped rock? What fossil evidence is there of the shift to a meat-eating in humans? How can you tell if an ancient antelope skeleton represents a kill done by carnivores or humans? Or if humans simply scavenged a carnivore's kill? Tool making is supposed to be unique in some way to humans, but how does our tool-making differ from that of other species such as chimps and crows? How do we know when a species was first domesticated? Shipman explores these and other key issues in our early evolution, such as fire making, language, and symbolic behavior. As she points out, animals are among the earliest objects that we modern humans can recognize in the first human art, such as in the 35,000 year-old cave paintings of France. When we look at these amazing paintings, we cannot help but be struck by their realism; the artists had a clear and intimate understanding of animal movement and anatomy, as evident in the detailed facial expressions on the lions and horses, for example. Shipman was fortunate to see some of these paintings and writes movingly about the experience. I have read and enjoyed several of her previous books, and this is perhaps her best. It draws fully on her expertise and experience, and has a breadth and depth that would make it a great book for a college seminar or reading club. As always, her writing is enjoyable and thorough. While others before her have noted the importance of specific animals to our evolutionary success, such as the horse for transport and war, the dog as hunting companion, etc., no one has recognized as Shipman does, how unusual we are among species in the intimate nature of our relationship to other species and no one has noted the significant role it has played throughout our history. If you like animals, paleontology, archeology, and thinking about what makes us human, you will love this book.

Enjoyable and informative. Ms. Shipman has a wonderful way of presenting her views and the research. We often think on how we tame the animals in our lives. But animals have shaped human evolution! Find out how. A pleasure to read.

As is usual for her, Shipman starts with a rather vast insight. Our relations with animals have always been central to who we are. To explore this, she takes several steps back and evaluates the whole range of scientific information on early human evolution. This requires a detailed examination of tool-making and language. These examinations take about two-thirds of the book. Only then does she build on this foundation to directly re-assess the story of our relations with animals. She revises previous theories, painting a picture of evolving mutual benefit, starting with the hunter-wolf alliance

starting over 30,000 years ago. Concerning the later domesticated beasts such as horses and goats, she explores why hunters would delay killing and eating these animals. In the beginning, she argues, there were tentative arrangements of mutual benefit: protection: of wool and milk, tracking skills for help in killing change cornered prey, or food for friendship. The need for relating to animals, she nearly proves, is an essential part of what makes us human beings.

Good information without being swamped with details. Well presented. I am not an anthropologist but have been interested in evolution of language for some time, I think this book was interesting and was worth the read.

But seldom think about it. The author nails down with good research and well thought words a vital aspect of our human - and animal - condition. Bravo!

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