

Reviews

The Review Section of E&A consists of three parts. The first is made up of brief reviews of books and articles (and perhaps films, etc.) that are concerned in some way with the rights and wrongs of human treatment of non-human animals. The second part of this Section is entitled 'Replies' and contains comments on or responses to reviews published in earlier issues of E&A. By letter the Editor invites the authors of works reviewed to respond, and by this proclamation in each issue invites all other interested readers to submit comments. The third part of the Reviews Section is a list of works of which reviews are invited. Any member who wishes to review any work in this continuing 'Reviews Needed' list should contact the Editor.

REVIEWS

Emil P. Dolensek and Barbara Burn, The Penguin Book of Pets: A Practical Guide to Animal-Keeping (New York: Penguin Books), 1978

Books about pets are innumerable and, with a few exceptions, quite dispensable. This book, first published in 1976 by Viking Press under the title A Practical Guide to Impractical Pets, is one of the useful exceptions. It is, in fact, a book that most keepers of pets would profit from reading. It is full of practical information about a wide variety of animals; the central facts about more than 80 are summarized in a long appendix, Alligator to Woodchuck, which includes references to more detailed treatises on the particular animal in question. This book is plainly not intended to replace such specialized volumes: each kind of cre-

ature receives only a few pages of discussion, though some of the more common pets crop up again and again in different contexts. The book is meant to engage pet-keepers in consideration of what keeping a pet involves and what sort of pets can (with what degrees of difficulty) be kept. "Making an animal live in a human environment rather than one for which it is adapted is a form of slavery after all (ants and other social animals do it, too, so it's not exactly unnatural nor is it necessarily to be despised), and any potential pet owner should realize that and be aware of the consequences to himself, moral and otherwise."

To live with a nonhuman animal requires adjustment on the part of both keeper and kept; indeed, it sometimes become ambiguous which is which. To expect that one's pet should do all the adjusting is both tyrannical and unrealistic. "Many animal lovers I know have no pets of

their own because they cannot or will not change their lives sufficiently to suit the needs of the animals they love." Problems may be minimized by a judicious selection to begin with. "Although individual animals of the same species may vary considerably, just as their owners do, some useful generalizations can be made in terms of their characteristics and their potential as pets." Part One of this book is devoted to attempting such generalizations. The characteristics of different kinds of animals are briefly described and pets are cast into the categories of Easy (cats, canaries, ants), Difficult (dogs, cows, bees), or Impossible (bears, mountain lions). If readers find the words 'difficult' and 'impossible' to be challenging, perhaps they should re-examine their motives for wanting to keep pets. "The desire for a challenge can be satisfied more humanely--if one cannot simply resist the impulse -- by going out into nature and trying to survive in the animal's habitat rather than forcing it to survive in ours."

Now that you've decided why you want a pet, and what sort of pet you can live with, Part Two discusses ways to get, and ways not to get, the pet; adjusting the animal to your household and vice versa; feeding, grooming, exercise, communication; veterinarians, health, first-aid, communicable diseases; breeding and not breeding; ways to get rid of a pet, and ways not to, including so-called euthanasia; etc. Whether one agrees or not in any given case with the authors' conclusions, the discussions throughout reveal the ability to apply specialized knowledge (Dolensek has been Chief Veterinarian at the Bronx Zoo and a veterinary counselor to the New York City Police) with common sense and uncommon sensibility.

Sometimes this takes the form of simply deflating some popular myth. "In spite of all the moving stories we

hear about Lassie's coming home ... many animals, once they get beyond their home territory into unknown regions, cannot find their way back." Sometimes it consists in bringing us up to date. "Some ten years ago [i.e., in the middle 60s] it was estimated that about 50 percent of the animals used in laboratory experiments were originally stolen pets In addition to the more stringent laws, the tremendous increase in the number of unwanted, abandoned animals available through pounds and shelters has caused the market in stolen pets for laboratory use to dwindle considerably."

There are convincing arguments in this book for neutering most pets: not only would it help the pet-overpopulation problem, it usually has benefits for the health and well-being of the animal herself or himself. Animal experimentation is a topic that crops up only incidentally, and the authors' attitude seems ambivalent. On one page the benefits of such research for humans and other animals are emphasized, while on another we are advised not to give our pets to any place where they are likely to become the subject of experimentation. The humane society would be included in the latter, of course; "of the hundreds of thousands of animals taken in each year, less than 10 percent are placed and the rest are destroyed". The word 'placed' is delicately chosen since, as the authors have observed a few pages earlier, the "adoption" may be "to individuals or laboratories".

Dolensek, like some other veterinarians, opposes killing pets "for any reason other than a medical one, unless ... that animal has proven itself to be dangerous and cannot otherwise be disposed of". Such a principle might naturally raise questions about meat-eating, but the authors do not explore that. If you have a calf for a pet, they advise you "not to

name it if you plan to slaughter it"; probably good advice for dog- and cat-keepers too.

Despite limitations, the authors' discussion of moral issues in pet-keeping is often sensitive, illuminating, and practical. This book aims, and often is able, to incite the reader to think about the complexities of quasi-personal relations with nonhumans, complexities stemming from the concrete realities of interspecies conflict and the limitations of mutual adjustment. It is a practical guide to animal-keeping, so its primary task is not to be a moral treatise, but this practicality gives it surprising strengths when it does turn (fairly often) to discuss some of the moral perplexities that arise practically everywhere in this matter. One complaint: despite the promise of its title, it didn't tell me what to do with my penguin.

Edward Johnson
University of New Orleans