



How the Dog Became the Dog: From Wolves to Our Best Friends

Mark Derr

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How the Dog Became the Dog posits that dog was an evolutionary inevitability in the nature of the wolf and its human soul mate.

The natural temperament and social structure of humans and wolves are so similar that as soon as they met on the trail they recognized themselves in each other. Both are highly social, accomplished generalists, and creatures of habit capable of adapting? homebodies who like to wander.

How the Dog Became the Dog presents domestication of the dog as a biological and cultural process that began in mutual cooperation and has taken a number of radical turns. At the end of the last Ice Age the first dogs emerged with their humans from refuges against the cold. In the eighteenth century, humans began the drive to exercise full control of dog reproduction, life, and death to complete the domestication of the wolf begun so long ago.

How the Dog Became the Dog: From Wolves to Our Best Friends Details

Date : Published October 27th 2011 by Harry N. Abrams (first published March 3rd 2011)

ISBN : 9781590207000

Author : Mark Derr

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Science, History, Animals, Dogs, Environment, Nature, Biology



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Rick Lamplugh says

How the Dog Became the Dog
A Book Review by Rick Lamplugh

After a winter of living, working, and wolf watching in Yellowstone's wild Lamar Valley, My wife Mary and I returned to our small hometown. I was walking downtown one day when I saw a stylishly dressed couple coming toward me and carrying a hairless Chihuahua. I stopped them and asked about their dog. They gushed about the dog's loving personality and said it had come from an excellent breeder, one of the best in the northwest. When I petted the dog, I felt it trembling, though the sun was out and the spring day was warm.

As they walked away, I flashed on an image of a wolf pack attacking an elk on a snowy valley floor. How, I wondered, did we get from those wild creatures to hairless Chihuahuas, from *Canis lupus* to *Canis lupus familiaris*?

Mark Derr's book, *How the Dog Became the Dog*, (Overlook Duckworth, \$16.95), explains the journey well. Derr is qualified to speculate on how the wolf became the dog (or W2D as he abbreviates it); He has studied this question for over twenty years and is the author of *A Dog's History of America* and *Dog's Best Friend*.

The book is filled with facts and digs deep into W2D. He looks at the transformation of wolf to dog through the filters of many branches of science: geology, anthropology, zoology, paleoarcheology, biology, and genetics, to name just a few. If you have a scientific mind, you'll dine on his facts and figures which are presented clearly. If you long for flights of fancy, Derr provides a few of those when he allows his imagination to take charge and writes some vivid passages describing wolves and early humans interacting. I enjoyed that writing and would have liked even more.

For a longer review, see my blog:

<http://www.ricklamplugh.blogspot.com/>

Pam says

This one gets a mixed reaction. There is a ton of information here, and I like the way Mark Derr takes apart and examines the different theories addressing the domestication of dogs. But --- I've had Mark as a grad school instructor and know that he's very disorganized so this was NOT a surprise -- the book cries out for editing and organization. The same stories are repeated in different chapters. Topics are addressed thoroughly, then reappear several chapters later. Some details beg for citation, justification, fact checking ... So. Consider yourself warned. You can get a lot out of this book, but you will have to work hard for it.

Adam says

We owe much to our faithful companions. Unfortunately, as is often the case with humans, we do not pay back friendship well. We get much more from the dog than they get from us. This marvelous book chronicles the self domestication of the dog through the fossil and genetic records and describes how we wound up with the pure breeds of today. If you are a dog lover like I am, this book is a must read. If you aren't a dog lover, then you are irredeemable. I loved this book, and it made me vary sad about the way repay our best friends loyalty. Adopt a shelter mutt. You will save a life, and get a better, more representative member of *Canis Lupus Familiaris*.

Debra Daniels-zeller says

Well-researched and filled with fascinating facts and I really liked learning about the possibilities of how the wolf became the dog. It's an intriguing story that is still unfolding, and is intertwined with human existence. One thing I really liked about this book was how the author debunked previous theories about wolves hanging around the campfire and adapting and simply transforming into dog. The actual physical record is hard to trace but the author also brings dingos into the picture and it was previously thought that dingos were a separate species, unrelated to dogs. Yet the physical record indicates that some dogs may have dingos in their lineage. This book had some surprising information, but the downside was the audio version was boring and I don't think it was the fault of the reader. Also, sometimes information was complex and especially statistics are better viewed in written form. This is one of those books. There was lots of important information, but mostly it sounded like a school lecture more than a book.

P.K. says

Interesting book, but I wish he more clearly delineated his own subjective hypotheses from where we actually have strong evidence in a theory. Was somewhat rambling as well and bogged down at points.

Lesha Symons Ervin says

A lot of science, but also a good story. Well done.

Grace says

This book was a little repetitive and I couldn't really narrow down a main take-home point. I was hoping for some historical and scientific information on the transition from wolf-->dog. While this book WAS full of interesting historical information regarding Neolithic peoples & wolves, it was hard to figure out exactly what the author was trying to argue. Altogether, it could be that there is still so much we don't know, so perhaps that is why it was hard to pull together into a text.

The book has useful information regarding species of wolves and how their lines helped shape the modern dog. Overall, hard to find an actual "point" and hard to articulate what I learned from it. The book tried really hard, but the writing was mediocre. The author was pretty repetitive and there are some glaring cases of poor editing. Not a bad read, but not quite as in-depth as I was hoping for. Still learned quite a bit.

Gilda Felt says

This is really the story of both dog and man, as the author intertwines the history of the two species. Much is conjecture, as it would have to be, but sometimes I felt that the author went a bit too far. To say something is true, often without a footnote, makes it hard to differentiate between what is verifiably true and what is not. This was especially true when he wrote about the relationship between wolves and/or dogs and Neanderthals. Did they begin the journey between canine and hominid? Or did the journey wait for homo sapiens?

What also didn't help was how the author jumped around in time. It was only at the end, when he reached the relatively modern age, did the book start following a linear path.

That said, I did learn somethings about dogs I wasn't aware of after the book reaches the time where records started being kept. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to give this book a higher rating.

Seema Rao says

Popular scientific non-fiction about the history of the dog, but wasn't as well-written as I had hoped. The author's snarkiness really bugged me.

Marti Booker says

The author would have been better off simply making this an epoch-spanning novel. Instead, he blithely makes up his own fantasies of what the past was like, ignores any facts that disagree with his fantasies, and generally acts as though the truth, since it is currently scientifically unproven, can be bent to be whatever we wish it to be. If you like his arbitrary classifications (dogwolves, wolfdogs, socialized wolves, uhh, probably a few more I forgot), have fun with it. I'm not going to waste my time reading the rest.

Greg says

This is a dog. He is the most popular dog in the world. Why? Because if you google Dog he is the first one that comes up in the image search.

This book is about him and his ancestors.

I thought this book would be kind of interesting. Instead it kind of sucks.

A slogging and tedious read filled with a mixture of facts, wild conjecture, strange teleological extrapolations, wild hippie mystical bullshit and enough liberal guilt to make me wonder how the author can get out of bed in the morning with the weight of all the historical wrongs piled up on his DNA (seriously? you want to get PC about the possibility that *homo sapiens* wiped out neanderthals? and what is with this furless biped bullshit? if you're going to start referring to humans (as you like to call them, furless bipeds (you smug fuck)) that way why not call dogs just one part of the furry quadped family? Birds as the feather wing creatures?).

I like to measure a book's factualness on the footnotes. I think some people like to think that because there are notes it means that the book is well researched. I like to notice when not so important points to an argument are noted and then more important points that are conjectures being slipped by as facts are undocumented. Then I like to wonder why include footnotes at all. There are quite a few books that pull the factualness sleight of hand this way. This book doesn't do it too too much, but there are facts given that should have been documented, especially if anecdotal things are documented.

I do not write my reviews with any plan or focus. It shows. If I were writing a book, one which I was being paid for, and which was a factual book with a general thesis and arguments and all of that I'd organize the fucking thing. I would possibly use an outline, or at least sketch out what should go in each chapter and make each chapter it's own topic or argument or something like that. Another approach could be to write out your entire argument and tangents in just about every chapter, with adding a fact here and there as you go along and make the whole thing read like a repetitive and boring mess. This book boldly goes for the latter approach.

Do you want to know what I hate about non-fiction books? I didn't think so, but I'll tell you anyway. Too many of them don't need to be books. With the amount of information really known and being given in this book a very nice magazine article could have been written, and I don't mean one of those pop-science single column jobbers you might find in some glossy weekly, but a good lengthy *National Geographic* or *Science* article. This is another book that suffers from the author has a pretty interesting idea but not an expansive enough idea to really be a hundred thousand word book. You'd think the evolution of dogs would be something a big book could be written about, and probably in the right hands a big interesting book could be written, but the material here could have been a great magazine article. Too many non-fiction books, who knew? type books just aren't really bookworthy.

One could sum up this book by saying, scientists don't know where the dog came from, there are some theories, some have been disproven, some sound good, but there is still a lot about the past we don't know. We also don't know that much about where *homo sapiens* came from, or their direct ancestors, actually there is a lot about the past we don't know, we know some things but we don't know that much. Here is what I think a possible story could be.

That would only be half of the book, the other half can be summed up by saying, I'm also against the breeding of dogs as pure breeds and I'm going to rant and froth at the mouth periodically about this and disparage certain types of dogs for looking like puppies for their entire life because of breeding and towards sniveling dogs who play it too easy for affection, unless it's my own dog where I will gush about his intelligence at playing the crowd to make sure everyone likes him the bestest.

Hey, you want to know what I find amusing? No? Well I'll tell you anyway. It makes me chuckle inside when someone tries to deep-six the entire scientific process of gathering results through tests and all of that

stuff we learn in science class by saying that the whole process is obviously flawed when it's possibly being used to champion a theory that goes against the authors own theory about how an animal becomes domesticated, but then likes to hold up science and wave it around when it suits him. Oh how I wish I had bookmarked the page when he called into question the entire scientific manner of testing hypotheses to show how wrong those Russians are who have bred those cute little domestic foxes. I won't even hold it against the author all the mean things he said about those cute little critters. My dislike from the book isn't based on the couple of places where he said mean things about domesticated and wild foxes. Honestly.

Do you want to know what I don't believe? I won't even bother with the affectation of caring if you want to or not, I don't believe our ancestors back in the ice age type time were really that bad-ass when it came to hunting. I don't think we were apex predators, who the other big bad-ass predators would kind of give the manly little nod to when we went by to let us know that we were all good with one another. I have no science for this, but I suspect we were more like opportunistic scavengers as opposed to bad ass killing machines. This is just what I think though, I have no real proof, but I don't buy the idea that we were part of the Guild of Carnivores who divided up the wild game like Mafia Dons splitting up a city for their control.

There are some other problems that I have with the book. There are teleological fallacies that I think the author makes, and which probably aren't that bad but they kind of annoy me because I get annoyed by things like that, especially when I'm already being annoyed by tedium and repetitiveness. There are also, 'what the fuck?' moments when the arrival of say *homo sapiens* is a little too biblical for me, they seem to appear fully formed and dropped onto the planet, as opposed to evolving from transitional forms where a 'culture' would have helped to form them in behavior and certain skills. This is comes up in the *homo sapien* guilt as if our species landed on the planet of the neanderthals like pilgrims to the new world, and those people helped us out and got us settled before we gave the ice age equivalent of small-pox infested blankets. I know the author doesn't mean this, but there are a few times in the book where he wonders how our species could have learned something, it must have been taught to us by this other species, which seems to presuppose a total lack of history on our species part prior to that moment, or something.

I wouldn't recommend this book. Just in case you were wondering.

ashley c says

DNF because I had to return it. It is very informative and Derr clearly knows his stuff really well. But the book needs to go through an editor. There are lots of rambling, awkward sentences with too many points stuffed in them, and a lot of information is repeated within a few paragraphs or chapters.

Joanna says

Are our current canine pets wolf-like dogs or dog-like wolves? Mark Derr doesn't know either. But he doesn't mind wasting your time with his circular arguments, frequent unnecessary personal asides and general petulant, chip-on-the-shoulder attitude toward actual research scientists. He does have a few interesting ideas, but stylistically this book is really annoying and disorganized. He could have used a good editor

Maybe if you like dogs more than I do, or have a few theories of your own, you'll find this interesting, but I got a few chapters in and decided he had already made his point, such as it was.

A rare "didn't finish" from me.

Ira Therebel says

Oh boy, where should I start. This is a very hard book to rate.

I find the topic interesting and can see that the author knows a lot about it. But at the same time the book is very hard to read. And not even because of the hard topic but because it is so incredibly disorganized. It jumps all over the place in history, repeats a lot and sometimes I am not even sure what the author is trying to tell me and where it is going. I hate to give a book with so much information only a ** rating, but sometimes organization is essential. In a book like this without a proper organization the reader can get lost and most of the facts won't even be remembered afterwards.

I don't really have an issue about Mark Derr not presenting many theories that contradict his view, but it sure would benefit if he would.

I liked his view on the dogs today. How from being our companions treated as individual living beings they became as he says "biological doll" incapable to survive on his own and basically existing just for our pleasure. If it is not the case the dogs don't have a great destiny (we all know what happens to pit bulls)

So I basically will repeat what others have said before me: a book with a lot of interesting information that really needs an editor. Some good editing and this book could be great.

Fredrick Danysh says

The author writes about how the dog socialized with humans instead of being domesticated. A history of canine-human interaction is documented in this unique view.
