

Our Oldest Companions: The Story of the First Dogs

Pat Shipman

Belknap Press (Oct 19, 2021)

Hardcover \$25.95 (272pp)

978-0-674-97193-6

In *Our Oldest Companions*, Pat Shipman delves into the history of canine domestication, marveling that dogs have chosen to associate with humans. Focusing on coevolution and the dingoes of Australia, she illuminates “how mutually dependent we are.”

Gray wolves were present in Eurasia hundreds of thousands of years ago, but never lived alongside Neanderthals as far as we know. By 36,000 years ago, however, early modern humans had “wolf-dogs” for companions. Dogs were bred to enhance their tolerance of humans and their bonding and communication abilities.

In the settlement of Australia, dingoes came by boat just as colonialists did. Indigenous people had been present on the continent for tens of thousands of years by that point. Before long, though, they started to include dingoes as ancestors in their Dreamtime narratives, and to bestow on them the same cave burial rituals granted to humans.

The book goes into considerable scholarly depth about evolution and how scientists make speculations based on fossil evidence. Its tone is academic, and it concentrates on the Australian case, but Shipman uses maps, figures and photographs, and rhetorical questions to spark general curiosity.

The erudite *Our Oldest Companions* makes a remarkable story out of the long partnership between humans and dogs.

REBECCA FOSTER (November / December 2021)

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