The animal connection

Professor of anthropology Pat Shipman believes that when our prehistoric ancestors began to interact with animals, there were adaptive consequences.

Humans became masters of the planet for a startling reason: our love of animals gave us unsurpassed power over nature. This is the claim of Dr Pat Shipman, of Pennsylvania State University, who says in her book *The Animal Connection* that our prehistoric ancestors' intense relationship with other creatures propelled the human race towards global domination.

Shipman traces humanity's animal connection to the period 2.5 million years ago when our hominid ancestors first made tools. These crafted pieces of stone still litter sites in eastern Africa and bear testimony to the mental transformation in our ancestors' brains. According to Shipman, the ape men had a mental image of the kind of implements they needed for a specific purpose and created them by chipping away at a large piece of stone until they achieved their desired result, which were tools for dissecting carcasses. Rather than using them as weapons to kill animals or to fell trees, their primary use was to process dead animals that had already been brought down by other carnivores such as leopards and cheetahs. Until that point we had been a prey species, but the development of these devices transformed hominids from predominantly plant-eating apes into predators, who began by scavenging for meat before going on to hunt on their own behalf.

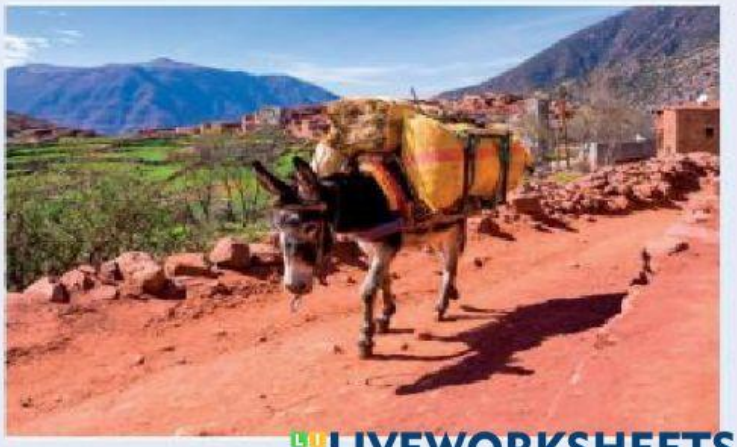
It was at this crucial point that our special relationship with the animal kingdom began. Meat provided our ancestors with a wonderful, rich and nutritious sort of sustenance but left them in a vulnerable position and in danger of being consumed themselves. To survive, they had to improve their observational skills and learn about the behaviour of a vast number of different species, not only the ones they wanted to kill but also the ones they wanted to avoid. The ability to make judgements about what other animals would do next was most likely as important to obtaining food as was the knowledge of how to manufacture stone tools. In the end, this expertise would have become crucial to human survival; in fact, the necessity for collaboration and the sharing of knowledge about how prey animals and predators behaved was to become a driving force behind the development of symbols and language some 200,000 years ago.

This is well illustrated in the paintings created by humans 20,000 to 30,000 years ago and discovered in caves in France and other locations, which demonstrate that after 2 million years of evolution, humans had become utterly fixated by animals as a result of our own dependency on them for our own survival. In these artistic creations, there are no landscapes and only a handful of poorly executed depictions of humans. There are, however, stunningly beautiful and superbly crafted artistic depictions of lions, stags, horses, bulls and many other animals which have been painted on walls, sculpted out of clay or rock and even carved out of wood.

Interestingly, dogs are rarely depicted in cave art which suggests that cave painters may have regarded them not so much as the game animals they tended to depict, but more as fellow-travellers. As it was, not long after the paintings were created, the dog became a domesticated animal. Sometime later, for different reasons, so too did the horse, sheep, goat and other animals. Shipman believes that the common explanation – food – is unlikely, since killing an animal in the wild would have had the same outcome without the need to wait. A more likely explanation, in her view, is that, rather than merely being a source of food, animals were transformed into renewable resources, providing milk, wool and opportunities for the production of tools and clothing. This transition to using animals as living tools was to give humans a decisive edge in adapting to new environments and gaining an evolutionary shortcut. The development was also crucial because humans had to learn to put themselves in the mind of these creatures in order to get them to do their bidding, thereby enhancing their ability to empathise, both with animals and with members of their own species

Shipman speculates that the affinity between humans and dogs manifested itself mainly in the hunt. Dogs would help humans to identify their prey, but they would also work, the theory goes, as beasts of burden, being fed and cared for in return. Since transporting animal carcasses is an energy-intensive task, getting dogs to do this work would mean that humans could concentrate their energy on more productive work: hunting, gathering, reproducing. Shipman argues that because of this co-operation, humans and their canine friends got stronger together over time.

Looking at the situation today, our special relationship with animals is revealed through our desire to have pets. "No other creature on Earth would waste resources on a member of another family, let alone a member of another species," asserts Shipman. It is a unique human attribute because we have evolved such close ties with specific animals over the millennia and because we are adapted to empathise with other creatures. However, as society becomes increasingly urbanised those ties are being stretched and broken "Our links to the animal world are precious and shouldn't be taken for granted," says Shipman.



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Questions 1–5

Do the following statements agree with the views/ claims given in the passage? Write

YES	*if the statement agrees with the views/ claims given in the passage*
NO	*if the statement contradicts the views/ claims given in the passage*
NOT GIVEN	*if there is no information on this*

1 Complex tools were invented so that ape men could kill large prey.

2 Developing communication skills enabled humans to compete with animals for food.

3 The main significance of the cave paintings is the high standard of the art.

4 Cave paintings portrayed more males than females on the hunt.

5 The relationship between dogs and humans in prehistoric times was mutually beneficial.

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Questions 6–7

*Choose **TWO** letters, **A–E**.*

*In which **TWO** of these ways did our ancestors benefit from domesticating animals?*

A evolving superior practical skills

B developing an understanding of emotional and nonverbal skills

C acquiring a means of companionship in the home

D expanding the range of supplies available

E obtaining an important new source of nutrition

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