

THE WILD SIDE by Dave Gibson

Domestic Animals

Evidenced by a jawbone found in a cave in Iraq, dogs were the first animals domesticated by man 14 thousand years ago. Breeding probably began with the friendliest wolves hanging around for a handout. The animals offered security and made good hunting partners. Sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs followed providing a ready source of meat and milk allowing for more free time and the development of art and culture. Byproducts included wool, leather, horn and bone for needles and arrows, tallow for candles, and hooves for glue. Draught animals like the oxen and water buffalo allowed for easier plowing and the transport of goods by 4,000 B.C. Five thousand years ago horses brought quicker travel. Cats were believed domesticated around the same time and are the only domesticated animal that lived a solitary lifestyle in the wild – a characteristic that explains their nature. Elephants were tamed four thousand years ago in India and were a major military force there and in Northern Africa by 3 B.C. It is thought that domestication took scores of



years to achieve although research exists that shows that the transformation can take place in the span of a couple decades.

In 1959 Dr. Dmitri Belyaev purchased 130 silver-red fox for a selective breeding program near Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia. Only 5% of the offspring were chosen to reproduce based on tameness. After 4 generations some of the fox began wagging their tails when happy and barking like dogs. Eight generations into the experiment, irregular piebald spots appeared on their fur with succeeding litters exhibiting loss of musky smell, blue eyes, floppy ears, shorter legs, widened skulls, and a curly tail. Twenty years into the project the completely friendly domestic fox was born!

Economic woes have hampered the program and in 1998 they were forced to cut their fox population from 700 to 100. Most of their operating expenses are paid from the sale of the animals as pets. If you would like to purchase the newest and rarest domestic animal in the world go to: sibfox.com.

*Dave Gibson is a photographer & writer focusing on the natural world around us.
His imagery can be found on his web site at www.davegibsonimages.com*