



Noble Cows and Hybrid Zebras: Essays on Animals and History

Harriet Ritvo

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Over the past two decades, Harriet Ritvo has established herself as a leading scholar in animal studies and one of those most responsible for establishing this field of study as a crucial part of environmental and social history. Her two well-known books, *The Platypus and the Mermaid* and *The Animal Estate*, did much to introduce and illuminate the importance of nonhuman animals to the study of human culture. Hunting and husbandry, as well as petkeeping and zoo-going, forge powerful connections between animal lives and those of humans: in fact, animals have helped define what a human is. They have also been one of the most reliable measures of humans' disproportionate influence on the environment. From domestication to extinction, the human impact on animal populations has been profound.

In the essays collected in *Noble Cows and Hybrid Zebras*, Ritvo explores our attitudes toward animals, from cruelty to sentimentality to the indifference of pure practicality, and touches on many social and scientific issues, including genetic engineering and an animal protection movement much older than most readers would think (animal advocacy was a cause embraced by many Victorians).

While Ritvo's writing represents the cutting edge in animal history, it has always been characterized by its accessibility, and these essays originally appeared not only in scholarly journals but also in *Grand Street*, *Daedalus*, and *American Scholar*. Collected for the first time in a single volume, they reveal an important dimension of human history by looking to those other creatures that have surrounded us all along.

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