

Book Reviews

Clinton R. Sanders, Understanding Dogs: Living and Working with Canine Companions, xviii + 201pp, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1999.

There is some conflict between the title and the content of this book. *Understanding Dogs* is more a sociological study of how people relate to dogs than it is a study in how to understand dogs. Sanders uses observations of his own dogs, puppy training classes and the running of a major veterinary hospital, interviews with dog care-takers (which he equates with pet-owners), veterinarians, guide dog trainers and guide dog owners.

Sanders begins with comments on the ways pet ownership relates to self esteem, status and human sociability. Next he relates the dog owners' beliefs about the capacity of dogs for thoughtful behaviour. Commonly the owners do think that their dogs exercise reason but usually as linked to emotions such as anger. The brief account of deception in dogs is fascinating. Dogs are often regarded by owners as persons. Further discussion on this point would have been welcome in the light of its importance in developing an ethics in relation to animals. (There is very little directly on ethics in this book, though the author displays love and respect for dogs.)

Chapter Three focuses on what it is like to become a guide dog owner and these owners' ideas about their dogs unique personalities, attitudes and intelligence (including intelligent disobedience). Examples of thoughtful decision-making by these dogs are presented. The dogs' empathetic abilities are also stressed. Then the discussion moves onto how the owners interact with other humans. Here the human-centred approach of the book starts to take hold.

The next chapter on the veterinarian concentrates on the ways in which animals might cause problems in a vet clinic, not why. This does not deepen our understanding of dogs much beyond saying they experience stress and fear. There is a quite lengthy discussion about vets' dilemmas over euthanasia, clarifying how vets need to distance themselves from the owners' suffering. Very little is made of the loss to the animal incurred by death. There are some interesting points made about the consequences of regarding companion animals as persons or not but these are not taken very far.

We move on then to guide dog trainers. In the training centre studied, the trainers agreed that “dog understanding” was the most essential attribute of a successful guide dog trainer’, but this is thought not to apply to other training schools. Again the emphasis is on the human: trainers and the public, trainers and the blind. ‘Dog understanding’ is made up of a knowledge of dog behaviour and canine ethology combined with an ability to ‘read’ the dog, to understand how the dog is experiencing the training sessions. A description of good guide dogs is given: dogs with ‘some degree of basic intelligence combined with a “willingness” to learn while putting aside his or her “natural” instincts’ (p. 99). Guide dogs are distinguished as hard or soft depending on the trainer’s estimation of their sensitivity. Some views of trainers are given on whether dogs have emotions or think. The strain in behaviourist analyses is clearly revealed, yet behaviourism is central to the training programmes.

The final chapter entitled ‘Animal abilities and human-animal interaction’ promises to engage more directly with how to understand animals. Surveying and dismissing the view of animals as things, Sanders favours the idea of animals as *actors*. He argues that at least some animals have identifiable emotional experiences. They construct and use mental representations ‘in order to orient themselves to their surrounding physical and social environment’ (p. 113). They communicate these ‘thoughts’ to others. There is simply a difference in degree with humans. These general points are supported by a summary of the primate research. This is interesting but off the topic. There is an attempt to generalise to dogs but the same studies cannot be used. Anecdotes are presented (stories of specific dogs’ abilities) and some of the insights of the previous chapters are drawn together. The final section of human-animal interactions contains an intriguing discussion of play involving dogs and humans and what that reveals.

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Book Notes

Savage-Rumbaugh, Sue, Shanker, Stuart G. and Taylor, Talbot J., *Apes, Language and the Human Mind*, vii + 244pp., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.

This book attempts to draw out the philosophical implications of the Kanzi (and Panbanisha) research for theories of language acquisition and mind. Kanzi is a bonobo (non-human ape) who works mainly with Sue Savage-Rumbaugh acquiring considerable linguistic skills. The first 70 pages detail this research, which allows plenty of space to develop the philosophical arguments. This is done well but it is such a fertile ground, there is much more that could be said.

Dolins, Francine L ed., *Attitudes to Animals: Views in Animal Welfare*, x + 262 pp., Cambridge University Press, Oxford, 1999.

The sub-title to this collection is misleading. It consists of 17 papers with only 3 specifically on animal welfare. (One is by Mary Midgley.) The others cover issues to do with animal subjectivity, eg happiness in chimpanzees; attitudes to animals and the use of animals in research and education. Two of the most interesting contributions deal with wild animals and endangered animals.

Manguel, Alberto, ed., *By the Light of the Glow-Worm Lamp: Three Centuries of Reflections on Nature*, ix + 373pp., Plenum Trade, New York, 1998.

Famous and not so famous authors are reprinted here reflecting on nature. Charles Darwin, Thoreau, Mark Twain, Audubon, Gerald Manley Hopkins, D.H. Lawrence and Nabokov are a few of the well-known names. The essays or extracts are collected around four themes: landscape; birds; beasts; insects and fish. The beast extracts focus on: the cat, beaver, bonte-quagga, narwhal and monkey. This is an eclectic and entertaining edition.

Payne, Katy, *Silent Thunder: The Hidden Voice of Elephants*, 288pp., Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1998.

The result of 12 years studying elephants in Kenya, Namibia and Zimbabwe, *Silent Thunder* explores the abilities of elephants to communicate with each other, sometimes over long distances, using infrasound - sound below the range of human hearing in communication. Detailed observations of elephant behaviour, beautifully written, are also presented. A timely book given the resurgence of the ivory trade.