Karen R. Jones
Beastly Britain: An Animal History
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Beastly Britain provides the history of ten British species (hedgehog, fox, sheep, pigeon, newt, herring, stag beetle, flea, black dog and plesiosaur). Rather surprisingly, despite coming from a university press, the book is written for a general urban audience. At the start, Professor Karen R. Jones invites the reader to think of the animals who are 'seared' into our early memories: dressed-up pets, imaginary friends, funny farmyard creatures or dangerous swans (p. 2). Jones commiserates with us that we have 'become more and more estranged from our environment' (p. 8) and 'forget what is good for us' (p. 9). This tone might alienate environmental scholars and outdoor workers, but the result of the wide audience is that this university press book is jargon-free, and with its evocative colour illustrations and beautiful cover, we end up with a joyful reading experience. I found I could comfortably enjoy each animal's chapter (20–40 pages) in about half an hour and often wanted to keep going afterwards.

Chapter 1: The Hedgehog starts with anatomy, ecology, evolution and life history. Jones tells us for example that hedgehogs once wonderfully 'scurried beneath sabre-toothed tigers' (p.15). This leaves two thirds of the chapter for the ancient, medieval and modern 'animal history' with literature, folklore and current conservation status. Here and elsewhere, I was delighted to see discussion of Romani, Scottish and Welsh sources as well as well-known English material (p. 29). I enjoyed the discussion of the folklore that hedgehogs suckle milk from sleeping cattle and spear fruit on their spines (pp. 22–26). Chapter 2: The Fox has another slow, accessible start. The major historical case studies here are the discussion of fox-hunting in terms of an invented tradition (pp. 68–80), and the urban fox phenomenon (pp. 80–86), both excellent and worth citing by scholars writing on the topics. In comparison to this, Section II: Farmed and Fancy is disappointing. In Chapter 3: The Sheep the research is more anecdotal, almost gossipy, with fewer detailed case studies, although I did enjoy the brief Roman history of the high status *birrus* cape (pp. 94–5). Chapter 4 covers the pigeon/dove, and includes discussion of the exploitation of the animals for racing and war (pp. 128–137). There are unfortunately a few mistakes here: Scots *doo* is a lovely word for the dove (p. 117) but not related to Scottish Gaelic *dubh* which means black, while the rock dove is not the direct ancestor of the stock dove or wood pigeon (p.118); the last common ancestor of these species lived millions of years ago.

Section III: From Stream to Sea is better. Chapter 5: The Newt includes a basic discussion of the newt itself, but scholars will enjoy the fascinating and detailed account of medieval salamander folklore (pp.155–163). Chapter 6: The Herring is one of the best researched in the book. There are memorable

discussions of the herring's auditory communication, and how this became important during the Cold War (pp. 170–4), the rivalry of the Cinque Ports, Yarmouth and Lowestoft and the visits of the Dutch herring busses (pp. 178–185), as well as the herring lassies and their successful strike action in the 1930s (pp. 186–190). The standard continues to improve in Section IV: What Lies Beneath. Chapter 7: The Stag Beetle achieves an introduction to this often-overlooked species which is both accessible and interesting. I appreciated the icebreaker story of the encounter between the author's pet cat and a stag beetle (p. 199) and enjoyed imagining the animals living on the Neolithic (not just 'Holocene', p. 200) Sweet Track. I am not sure I believe that the stag beetle was sacred to Thor (p. 205), but the case study of Victorian beetle-mania (pp. 209–218) was excellent and explains those very strange historical Christmas cards which sometimes circulate on social media. Chapter 8: The Flea includes welcome (if brief) summaries of the flea's importance to Elizabethan conceit poetry (pp. 229–30) and the Justinian Plague (pp. 235–6), although the discussion of Black Death (pp. 235–8) might have benefitted from further research. There was also an excellent discussion of the flea circus industry (pp. 242–7).

Section V: Ghosts and Monsters will likely be a highlight of the book for many readers. Chapter 9: The Ghostly Dog includes a good list of the early archaeological evidence for dogs in Britain (pp. 253–5), and an excellent summary of Britain's spectral hounds (pp. 261–72). The Plesiosaur in Chapter 10 is the final surprising species found in the book. The chapter flows very nicely from case study to case study starting with folkloric water monsters (pp. 273–81 – although it would have been worth highlighting Iolo Morganwg's forgeries here), moving to the Plesiosaur unearthed by Mary Anning (pp. 283–8) and the Victorian interest in deep history (pp. 288–95), finishing with encounters with the Loch Ness monster as a modern version of the phenomenon (pp. 295–302). The 'beastly lens' (p. 3), a way of reading sources informed by knowledge of the animal itself, which Jones adopts in other chapters is obviously abandoned in this section, although the presence of the author's dog, The Terrier, helps keep the book focused on the present, and this chapter in particular is based on insights from palaeontology, the history of geology and folklore, material which feels fresh for an animal history book.

Some aspects of Beastly Britain could be criticised by academic readers. The chapter introductions feel fluffy and unnecessary, and the mistakes mentioned above could have been caught with further academic editing. But this is to wish for a different book. This is not a collection of academic articles; the chapters are essentially lit-reviews, not original research based on primary sources. *Beastly Britain* is a considerable success in that it manages to make environmental history accessible to a general audience. The intimate writing-style and fun case studies make it an engaging and enjoyable read.

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