

# Out of the Wild

by Matt Comeskey

When did the chicken cross the road? Probably about eight thousand years ago – no joke! That’s when some scientists think chickens were first **domesticated**. What about dogs, cats, and other animals? When did they start living with people. And why?



## Dogs

The **ancestor** of the dog is the grey wolf. Many thousands of years ago, grey wolves and people were not friends. They competed for food. Sometimes they even hunted each other. Scientists think that around thirty thousand years ago, grey wolves started living closer to people. That way, they could take any scraps of food that people hadn’t eaten.

After thousands of years of this easier lifestyle, some grey wolves began to change. They didn’t need to hunt as often, which meant they didn’t need such large paws or big teeth. These became smaller. Their pointed ears became floppy. They looked cuter. They also became friendlier towards people. Slowly, over a very long time, these grey wolves became dogs.



Grey wolf

Dogs could protect people from danger. They could pull sleds and carry things. On cold nights, a person could cuddle up to a dog to keep warm. People trained dogs to help them round up and move other animals. As time went on, dogs and people became good friends.

## Kurī

When the tīpuna of Māori came to Aotearoa New Zealand, they brought kurī (dogs) with them. They knew kurī would help them survive in the new land. The dogs provided meat, and their hair and skin were used to make kahukurī (cloaks) and blankets. Kurī were also good companions. Māori used them for hunting, and some chiefs kept kurī as pets.

These kurī were small, long-haired animals that were once found throughout the Pacific. Scientists think the ancestors of these dogs came from Asia. When people from Asia began settling in the Pacific over three thousand years ago, their dogs came too. Later, these kurī slowly disappeared because they bred with dogs brought by European settlers.



## Cats

Scientists are still working out when cats first started living with humans. Some people think it was almost twelve thousand years ago. This was around the same time that people began growing crops, such as wheat and lentils. These crops attracted **rodents**, and of course, the rodents attracted wild cats.

Wild cats that were brave enough to come into town could catch and eat lots of rats and mice. People were happy to see the cats getting rid of all the pests. They encouraged the cats to hang around, and the cats decided to stay. Over ten thousand years later, today's cats are not much different from their ancient wild ancestors.

Have you noticed that cats aren't as helpful as dogs? Perhaps that's because dogs have been living with us for much longer. It might take another twenty thousand years before your cat will fetch a ball for you!



## Sheep

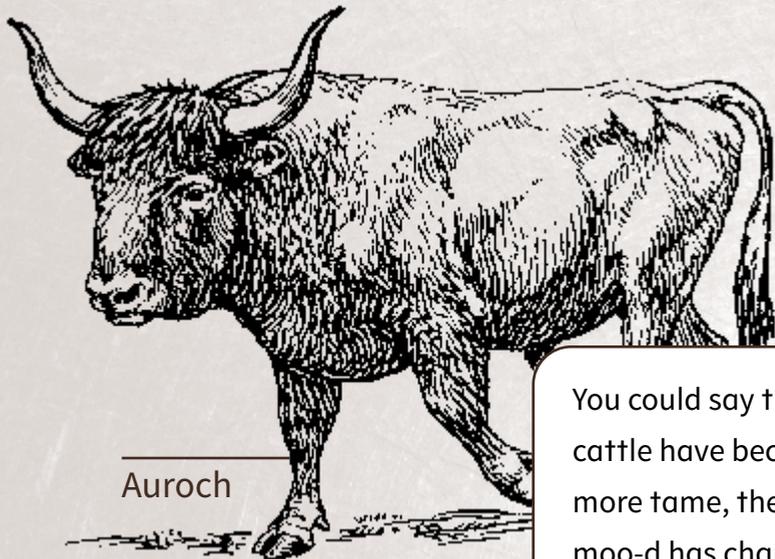
It's thought that the ancestors of sheep were animals called mouflon. People began taming these animals about thirteen thousand years ago. First, they farmed sheep for their meat. Later, they also farmed sheep for their milk and wool.



Mouflon

## Cattle

**Evidence** shows that cattle were domesticated around ten thousand years ago. The ancestors of cattle were called aurochs. They were impressive creatures! Aurochs were much bigger than today's cattle and had huge, sharp horns. Over thousands of years, cattle have become smaller. They are also more relaxed around people.



Auroch

You could say that as cattle have become more tame, their moo-d has changed!

## Chickens

What about that first chicken that crossed the road? It's thought that the earliest chicken was a red jungle fowl. Jungle fowl are smaller than today's chickens. They're more **aggressive** too. As jungle fowl became domesticated, they became more like the chickens we see today. They grew quieter, easier to control, and fatter (better for eating). They also laid more eggs.



Jungle fowl

## How do domesticated animals help us?

Domesticated animals help us in lots of ways. Farm animals give us meat, milk, and eggs to eat. In some places, cattle help **plough** the land so that people can grow crops. We use sheep's wool for clothing and to make rugs and blankets. Dogs can be trained to help us and protect us. Cats catch rats and mice. This was very important before modern medicines because rodents often spread diseases that made many people sick. Both animals provide friendship.

So next time you see a domesticated animal, think about what they do for us and be grateful.

## Glossary

**aggressive:** violent

**ancestor:** an animal that another animal is descended from

**domesticated:** changed over time from wild to tame

**evidence:** information that shows something is true

**plough:** dig over the ground before planting

**rodents:** small mammals, like rats and mice

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