



Dogs recent work on canid mitochondrial DNA suggests all dogs were bred from European wolves between 32,000 and 19,000 years ago, making dogs the first animals to be domesticated. They would have helped in hunting and occasionally dogs were given their own graves and grave goods to take into the next life.

Cats were first domesticated in the Near East, probably coincident with agricultural village development in the Fertile Crescent around 10,000 years ago. Wild cats would have been enticed into human habitation by the number of rodents attracted by stores of grain. Their spread may have been assisted by migrating farmers and seafaring travellers taking cats with them to reduce rat and mouse populations. The earliest direct evidence of cats living with humans comes from a Neolithic site in Cyprus called Shillourokambos where a burial dated to c.7500 BC contained a man with his cat. In ancient Egypt cats became objects of veneration; the cat goddess Bast had a role in protection, fertility and motherhood.



Neolithic cat burial from Shillourokambos, Cyprus.

Sheep all modern breeds of sheep are descended from the mouflon which was domesticated, primarily for meat, milk and skins, in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq, Kuwait, eastern Syria and south-eastern Turkey) around 12,000

years ago. Woolly sheep began to be developed around 6000 BC in Iran and wool became a valuable trading item. Some primitive sheep had their fleece plucked rather than shorn, a trait which has survived in modern Soays, a rare breed closely related to the mouflon. On archaeological sites skeletal remains from primitive sheep can be difficult to distinguish from those of goats.

The earliest cheese production may have involved sheep's milk and provided a way of preserving a highly nutritious foodstuff. The earliest evidence comes from Poland in the 6th millennium BC but it is widely thought that the practice probably developed at an earlier date in the Middle East.

Goats first appear in the modern Iran and Turkey around 10,000 years ago through domestication of the Bezoar wild ibex. They were used for milk production and their dried dung used as fuel.

Cattle developed from wild aurochs (*Bos primigenius*), a large and powerful animal with forward-facing horns up to 80 cm long and weighing up to 1500 kg. Domestication of the aurochs began in the southern Caucasus and northern Mesopotamia, and genetic evidence suggests that they were independently domesticated in India (to produce the zebu) and possibly also in northern Africa. Earliest evidence of domesticated cattle dates from c. 8,500 BC in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic cultures in the Taurus Mountains. They were bred for smaller size and a more amenable temperament. Aurochs survived in Europe until 1627 when the last one died in Poland.

Only about 35% of the world's adults can safely consume milk, the remainder being lactose intolerant. It is believed that lactose tolerance (lactase persistence) developed in man between 7000 and 9000 years ago probably among dairying communities of northern Europe, eastern Africa and northern India. Some 95% of the modern populations of Britain and

Scandinavia are lactose tolerant in adulthood compared with only 30–60% in southern Europe and less than 20% in much of South America, Africa, India and China.



A moufflon ram: progenitor of all modern sheep.

Horse – wild horse bones have been found in deposits from Pakesfield (Norfolk) dating to around 700,000 years ago and horses were hunted at Boxgrove in Sussex some 200,000 years later. However, domestication seems to have taken place relatively late, about 5,500 years ago in Kazakhstan in the Eurasian Steppes. Genetic studies indicate that no direct ancestor of modern horses survives but Przewalski's horse may be closely related. Damage to teeth caused by the use of a bit suggests horse-riding developed in the same area soon after domestication. Use of horses revolutionised transport and warfare both by their being ridden and by pulling chariots.



Cave painting of a horse from Lascaux c.15,000 BC.

Further Reading

Fowler, P. 2009. *The Farming of Prehistoric Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Pryor, F. 2011. *Farmers in Prehistoric Britain*, The History Press

<https://www.rbst.org.uk/>

Adventures with Rare Breeds, a booklet for children which contains a list of farm parks which can be visited.

Place to Visit

Butser Ancient Farm, Hampshire
<http://www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/>

This factsheet was prepared for the Prehistoric Society by Judie English

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