

## INTRODUCTION

**P**ets have been important to humans for many thousands of years. Dogs, for example, were domesticated in Mesolithic times (more than 10,000 years ago in the Middle Stone Age) by our hunter-gatherer forefathers – likely for very practical purposes – guarding camps, hauling sleds and the like. But if early dogs were anything like their modern counterparts, they soon ingratiated themselves as friends and loyal companions.

Our ancestors took a fancy to other animals as well. Cheetahs were first tamed by the Sumerians and were kept by the ancient Egyptians. In later times, they were companions to a number of historical giants, including Genghis Khan, Akbar the Great and Charlemagne. Hawks and falcons were also tamed and trained as hunters and hunting companions to generations of men throughout prehistoric and historic times.

The common house cat has been with us for four or five millennia. The ancient Egyptians frequently embalmed them, perhaps to keep their human owners company in the afterlife.

In later times, the Prophet Muhammad reportedly once cut off the sleeve of his robe so he wouldn't wake his sleeping cat, *Muezza*, when he was called to prayer. The 18<sup>th</sup> century English writer, Samuel Johnson, would personally fetch oysters for his favorite cat, *Hodge*, so his servants would not come to dislike the animal from having to serve it themselves.

In more recent times, many of our villains and heroes have been pet lovers. Josef Stalin was apparently a cat fancier; Adolph Hitler liked large dogs; United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt owned a Scottish terrier named *Fala*; and his successor, Harry Truman, had a pet goat named *Dewey's Goat*.