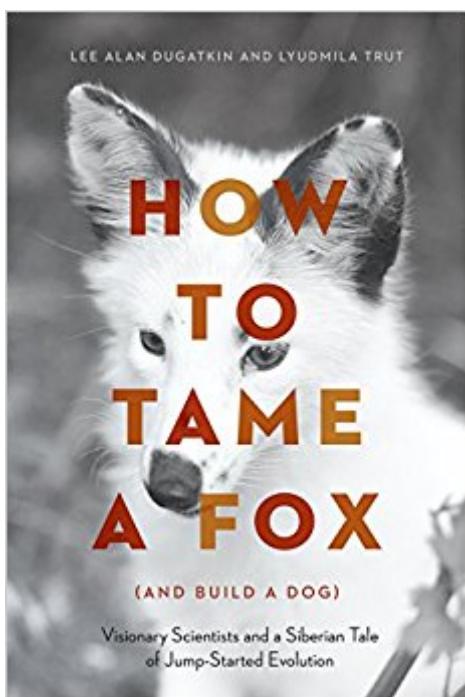


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# How To Tame A Fox (and Build A Dog): Visionary Scientists And A Siberian Tale Of Jump-Started Evolution



## Synopsis

Tucked away in Siberia, there are furry, four-legged creatures with wagging tails and floppy ears that are as docile and friendly as any lapdog. But, despite appearances, these are not dogs— they are foxes. They are the result of the most astonishing experiment in breeding ever undertaken—imagine speeding up thousands of years of evolution into a few decades. In 1959, biologists Dmitri Belyaev and Lyudmila Trut set out to do just that, by starting with a few dozen silver foxes from fox farms in the USSR and attempting to recreate the evolution of wolves into dogs in real time in order to witness the process of domestication. This is the extraordinary, untold story of this remarkable undertaking. Most accounts of the natural evolution of wolves place it over a span of about 15,000 years, but within a decade, Belyaev and Trut’s fox breeding experiments had resulted in puppy-like foxes with floppy ears, piebald spots, and curly tails. Along with these physical changes came genetic and behavioral changes, as well. The foxes were bred using selection criteria for tameness, and with each generation, they became increasingly interested in human companionship. Trut has been there the whole time, and has been the lead scientist on this work since Belyaev’s death in 1985, and with Lee Dugatkin, biologist and science writer, she tells the story of the adventure, science, politics, and love behind it all. In *How to Tame a Fox*, Dugatkin and Trut take us inside this path-breaking experiment in the midst of the brutal winters of Siberia to reveal how scientific history is made and continues to be made today. To date, fifty-six generations of foxes have been domesticated, and we continue to learn significant lessons from them about the genetic and behavioral evolution of domesticated animals. *How to Tame a Fox* offers an incredible tale of scientists at work, while also celebrating the deep attachments that have brought humans and animals together throughout time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A story that is part science, part Russian fairy tale, and part spy thriller. . . . Sparkling." (New York Times Book Review):Dugatkin is a veteran science writer with a knack for turning sprawling subjects into compact, enjoyable narratives. Ms. Trut, now in her 80s, is both a co-author and a subject of the book, an unusual arrangement. But her intense participation adds a rare degree of intimacy to this science story." (Wall Street Journal)"A cheerful, easy-to-read account that expounds upon the wonders of scientific achievement. . . . The authors weave other charming histories of other scientific studies and events throughout the book, including the discovery of hormones, pedigree analysis, animal communication, human evolution, and Belyaev's travels in international scientific circles. Writing a simple, straightforward narrative suitable for lay readers, Dugatkin and Trut spin complex genetic science into a fascinating story about adorable foxes." (Publishers Weekly)â€œOur furry companions evidently descended from wild wolvesâ€œ•resulting from thousands of years of human selection. Nearly 60 years ago Russian researchers Trut and Dmitri Belyaev decided to domesticate wild foxes to learn in detail how the journey from wild beast to household pet happens. They set up their experiment on a farm in Siberia and over the following decades mated the tamest animals from each successive generation. In this book, biologist and science writer Dugatkin and Trut recount this grand experiment. The result: a host of docile foxes and the identification of the genetic underpinnings for their domestication.â€œ• (Scientific American)â€œCan new kinds of animals be brought into being outside of DNA tinkering and Frankensteining? Most certainly, as a long-running Russian experiment reveals. . . . The science is profound, but the authors write accessibly and engaginglyâ€œ•and their vulpine subjects are awfully cute, too. Of compelling interest to any animal lover and especially to devotees of canids of all kinds.â€œ• (Kirkus Reviews, starred review)This intriguing, well-written account of an ongoing experiment in canid domestication should delight readers interested in the origins of the human-animal bond.â€œ• (Library Journal)"Itâ€œ•,â€œs a story of science. . . . But it's also very much a human story. . . . It's a story of persistence against all odds." (The Hoopoe, NHBS)"Trut and Dugatkin lovingly recount some of the experiment's milestones, including the first fox born with a wagging tail and the first one with droopy ears. . . . At every step, the authors skillfully weave the science of domestication into the narrative of foxes becoming ever-more

doglike." (Science News)"It is an extraordinary story, and "How to Tame a Fox" tells it well. . . . By the end of the book, the thesis that wolves may have been no less complicit in the process of their domestication than humans has come to seem entirely probable." (Times Literary Supplement)"Written for a general audience, it chronicles the story of a scientific gambit that was more successful than even its creators had dreamed. It's an inspiring reminder of how much we still don't know about the world, and how much can be learned by taking bold chances. It's also a cautionary tale about the risks of state-funded science that has nearly as much relevance to Trump's United States, where federal research budgets are in danger of being slashed right and left, as it does to Stalin's Russia." (Los Angeles Review of Books)"Written in an accessible style, *How to Tame a Fox* provides a general reader with an engaging summary of the fox experiments and the people who carried them out. . . . It would make a good book to assign to undergraduate studying the social dimensions of science." (Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences)"In the first book on the famous Siberian fox study, this extraordinary chronicle recounts one of the world's most important animal studies. It has not only provided stunning insights into how domestication works and how fast it can happen. It also helps us understand the origins of our deepest non-human bonds—our friendships with our dogs—and where and how they came into being." (Carl Safina, author of *Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel*)"Over the course of decades, Russian scientists transformed wild foxes into friendly pets. They used no science-fiction genetic engineering. They simply guided evolution. This landmark experiment tells us some profound things about domestication, behavior, and ourselves. Finally, someone has written a book-length account of the experience—and a fascinating one at that." (Carl Zimmer, author of *Evolution: The Triumph of an Idea*)"Dugatkin and Trut have collaborated to produce a well-written and engaging account of one the most influential biological studies ever: the fox farm experiment. Over sixty years ago, a Russian geneticist dared to start an experiment to see if foxes could be domesticated and what variables contributed to the changes domestication brought. The courage involved in starting such an experiment in the USSR of the 1950s was remarkable; the dedication and curiosity that have kept it going ever since have led to stunning new insights on the mechanisms of domestication. Every biologist should read this book!" (Pat Shipman, author of *The Invaders: How Humans and Their Dogs Drove Neanderthals to Extinction*)"An excellent book. The writing is clear and makes for fascinating popular science. This book will attract a wide audience, and I know of none other with such a dramatic combination of good science and social history." (Aubrey Manning,

coauthor of An Introduction to Animal Behaviour)

Lee Alan Dugatkin is an evolutionary biologist and historian of science in the department of biology at the University of Louisville. His books include The Altruism Equation: Seven Scientists Search for the Origins of Goodness and Mr. Jefferson and the Giant Moose: Natural History in Early America, the latter also published by the University of Chicago Press. Lyudmila Trut is a professor of evolutionary genetics at the Institute of Cytology and Genetics, in Novosibirsk, Siberia. She has been the lead researcher on the silver fox domestication experiment since 1959. Å Å

I wished this book has been more succinct and more specific about the science. I'm about half way through and it is not holding my interest very well. I'd like to know what happened with the rest of the experiment, but not sure I want to wade through the rest of the book. I often feel there are two kinds of writing about science - the scholarly literature for specialists, and the popular literature attempting to appeal to a very large audience, with very little in between. I wish there were more at the in-between level, but this book is decidedly of the popular sort.

Fascinating book about the longest running biological study of all time. Read to learn how in a bit over a decade wild foxes are turned into dog like foxes.

I had read about this experiment occasionally over the years. This book gives all the information about this experiment from start to finish. Highly recommended for anyone with an interest in genetics. This is written for the layman.

Just buy it! About as eye opening as a book can get. Very impressive experiment began in 1950 to breed foxes for tameness. Started on the sly. No grants, etc. Even more impressive results: domesticated fox in less than a human lifetime. Wow. High school readers may not understand some of the technical stuff but will get the big picture, maybe develop interest in science. Buy one for yourself and another for local school library, it's that good.

Outstanding. Wonderful science, culture and politics, and VERY human. I will send this to my 10 year old granddaughter to challenge her thinking.

Every dog lover should read this book to gain a better understanding of how their "best friend" came

into being.

How beautiful. What an amazing, imaginative experiment, and what an expression of the very best in scientific research.

This is a very easy to read & informative book. I wish I could adopt a tame/domestic fox! Maybe someday.

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