Read about the domestication of cats, then answer the questions about the text, choosing either A, B, C or D as the best answer.

For centuries, the common view of how domestication had occurred was that prehistoric people, realizing how useful it would be to have captive herds of food animals, began capturing wild animals and breeding them. Over time, by allowing only animals with "tame" characteristics to mate and produce offspring, human beings created animals that were less wild and more dependent upon people. Eventually this process led to the domestic farm animals and pets that we know today, many of which would fare quite badly in the wild, having lost their ancient survival skills and instincts.

Recent research suggests that this view of domestication is incomplete. Prehistoric human beings did capture and breed useful wild animals, and those species became tamer over time (they generally changed physically, too, developing larger bodies and smaller brains than their wild cousins). But specialists in animal behavior now think that domestication was not simply something people did to animals - the animals played an active part in the process. Wolves and wild horses, for example, may have taken the first steps in their own domestication by hanging around human settlements, feeding on people's garbage and crops and getting used to human presence and activity. Individual animals that were not too nervous or fearful to live near people produced offspring that also tolerated humans, making it easier for people to capture and tame them.

In this version, people succeeded in domesticating only animals that had already adapted easily to life around humans. Domestication required an animal that was willing to become domestic. The process was more like a dance with two partners than a triumph of humans over animals.

At first glance, the taming of cats seems to fit nicely into this new story of domestication. A traditional theory says that after prehistoric people in the Near East and Egypt invented agriculture and started farming, rats and mice gathered to feast on their stored grain. Wildcats, in turn, gathered at the same places to prey on the rats and mice. Over time, cats got used to people and people got used to cats, until at some point cats were tame. New studies of wildcats, however, seem to call this theory into question. Wildcats don't share hunting and feeding territories, and they don't live close to people or seek out human settlements as food sources. Experts do not know whether wildcats were partners in their own domestication. They do know that long after people had acquired domestic dogs, sheep, goats. cattle, and horses, they somehow acquired tame cats. By mating the least aggressive cats with one another, they produced animals with increasingly tame qualities.

Inizio modulo

1. According to traditional theories of domestication, how were wild animals tamed?

    selective breeding

    capturing only smaller animals

    aggression and control

2. What is suggested in the new theory?

    that animals were less afraid than thought

    that wolves and horses were the first to be domesticated

    that animals had an active role in their domestication

3. Why is the word "dance" used in the 3rd paragraph?

    that animals and humans were close

    there were two active partners

    that it was complex and not simple to understand

4. What probably attracted cats to human settlements?

    warmth

    other cats

    food

5. What characteristic of the cat causes a problem for the theory that cats were domesticated like wolves were?

    independence

    greed

    friendliness

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