
Jennifer Mather

University of Lethbridge

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**Avoiding Pitfalls in the Business of Animal Management**


This is an unusual book to find in a series on “New Directions in the Human-Animal Bond” because there is no bonding here and the nonhuman animals are secondary. This is a management book; the author makes it clear that both animal control functions and animal control issues are management ones. The author clearly has an authoritarian focus in all this: The animals are out there, and it is our job to control them properly.

Nevertheless, in many ways, this is a very useful book. It has a lot of solid grounding on how to manage the situations that arise when animals and people are in conflict. Probably, many people find themselves in the situations the author describes, and the range of practical advice is important for them. Aronson gives cases as examples, writes of different responses depending on the size of the city or area involved, and counsels groups to think about what is involved before they get in the “business” of animal control. All this makes easier reading for someone who has to use the author’s expertise.

The book has a wide range of areas, some applicable to other functions. For instance, there is a chapter on communications and relations with the media and the public, an area that organizations ignore at their peril. Another chapter deals with budgeting, revenue, and fund-raising, with a brief overview of budget preparation. There are two chapters on the law and animal control: one on the legal basis for services and the second on what legal issues need to be taken into consideration. A chapter on staffing includes the sound advice to hire people...
who like working with the public and worry about training them afterward. Personnel sometimes have to interact with upset and resentful customers; liking people needs to be a prerequisite.

Aronson goes more deeply into issues that others might not consider, having commented, “... the program by its very nature was difficult to administer” (p. ix). The section “Scope of Services” clarifies for providers how much—from enforcement to quarantine to spay/neuter and adoption, with equipment, personnel, and publicity in between—can be involved in animal control. The author urges organizations to consider their motivations carefully before getting into the job; he points out problems that have to be solved before such services, for which “the unexpected is often the norm when performing animal control services” (p. 121). There is the thorny issue of determining the animals deemed the responsibility of Animal Control, with some communities defining which animals are “wildlife” and with advice to cultivate cooperative relationships with other agencies. Finally, there is a small section on animal lawyers, a warning for a litigious future.

Animal caregivers can use the book’s extensive sections on, and examples of, problem areas to look up the problems, hopefully avoiding or, at least, minimizing them. For instance, dangerous dogs are an issue: Who decides a dog is dangerous? How do you identify a dangerous dog? Who should require dangerous dog registry? What do owners have to do if they have a dog deemed dangerous? If you decide, as one jurisdiction did, that potbellied pigs should be registered and licensed, how do you communicate this to all owners, pass an ordinance through City Council, and deal with owner complaints that the fee is too high? What do you do if fighting dogs are confiscated, quarantined, and required to be kept for over a year before a court case can come to trial? There goes the budget!

Most of the way through the book, Aronson asks why some animal control issues are both controversial and political. He has several answers. First, animals are considered by the courts to be property, and we tend to treat value and rights of property seriously. Second, many individuals view animals as family members, sometimes valuing them emotionally more than other people. We spend a lot on our companion animals, and when emotional issues come into play, judgment can just go out the window. Third, these issues are complicated, involving legal issues, political will, and private and public interest, sometimes in conflict. Finally, the author points out, organizations with widely different positions will make their opinions clear. Think of the controversy between animal shelters that euthanize animals and “no-kill” ones (on which the author does not focus): Who is doing the best thing for stray animals?

However, this reviewer finds that the animals tend to get lost in Aronson’s discussions. Except indirectly, this is not a book about animals. There is no bond here. This is about animals as both a responsibility and a management problem.
If you want to ponder our emotional attachment to animals, the philosophical issues of our responsibility to them, and the issues of how to make the planet a safe place for all of us, then this book is not worth reading. However, the book does not pretend to be about any of the aforementioned concerns. This book is about managing those with whom we come into daily contact. Were I in the business of animal care, I would want to keep this book close at hand to (a) use as a resource on what laws and regulations I might have to consider, (b) determine how to skate between competing points of view, and (c) identify how to plan proactively to avoid trouble in the first place. For these areas, this is an important and eminently useful book.

Jennifer Mather
University of Lethbridge