

Food Domestication and the Survivalist

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One of the indispensable elements necessary for human survival is food. Early man did not have the expediency of traveling to the local grocery store in order to obtain their daily supply of provisions but rather they were obligated to gather or hunt for those edible items necessary for their immediate survival. When meat was on the menu it customarily arrived in the form of already dead carcasses. We can distinguish that early man was not merely a gatherer of nature's bounty but a formidable scavenger as well. With the advancement of their Stone Age skills, the concept of hunting animals for food entered their lives, adding yet another means of obtaining valuable provisions.

Due to the supply and demand principle most of the gathering and foraging groups remained relatively small. There simply were not adequate quantities of dead animals to be found or a vast quantity of vegetables to be gathered, which would support larger numbers of beings. With this being the case, groups of foragers and gatherers were generally limited to approximately 50 people.

A result of early man's progression from gatherer to hunter is revealed by gradual decrease in the size of their teeth. Research completed states that one possible explanation for this transformation in teeth size is that the teeth were no longer a crucial tool due to the development of cooking the meat. This newly founded procedure makes the meat more tender and allowed for easily eating. We also find mentioned that there are less than 30,000 people who still practice the art of foraging. From a survivalist point of view foraging is still a practical means of attaining food under emergency conditions. I have personally attended several demonstrations based upon the skills needed for

effective foraging, and I am always willing to attend more. Rumors among the preppers is that in the event of a possible break down of our infrastructure older time-tested means of obtaining food will be a valuable asset to those who know the basics of it.

We were reminded that foraging societies generally display some sort of division of labor which is usually based upon the sex of its members. The men are expected to hunt, while the women gather what foods they can. At the time this arrangement was viewed as more practical than other measures. Arguments for this sort of planning range from hunting being the more dangerous of the two tasks, to the females caring for the offspring. I would like to play the role of the devil's advocate in this case, and propose a theory that I once wrote about on gender roles entitled "Role Designation in Survival Situations."

In the above-mentioned article, I essentially stated that preconceived general roles would have to take a back seat when an actual emergency situation arises. In essence, I philosophized that both men and women would do similar tasks, and would hold equal positions in their newly established society. It is my belief that early societies developed similar policies as well. I do not think it was just the man who had responsively for hunting, or the women was responsible for raising the children, and gathering food, but rather a combined effort between both sexes. Life in survival situation is not always black and white, male or female, but a collaboration of the two.

As the climate began to change, and populations increased, it made food producing a more effective means of supporting the larger group of people. However, the foremost thing which had to be undertaken in order for our early ancestors to be able to domesticate plants, and animals was to establish a permanent home. They had to forsake their nomadic way of life, and settle down to one specific location. Even after becoming established in this one location, the process of producing food would take them a considerable number of years. As has been so aptly states in some circles, no one picked up seeds and became farmers instantly. The knowledge, and skills that was gained by the foragers proved very beneficial in the initial stages of farming. The foragers were familiar with the various living things within their local group environment. They were adept in the life cycles of their local plants consciously that the plants originated from the small seeds they saw as they gathered the ripe produce. They detected that some of the animals around them were capable of human intervention, and could easily be manipulated. Experimentation eventually led to familiarity among the plants, and animals.

We find that the first animal to be domesticated was likely the common dog. Researchers have uncovered evidence that these descendants from the wolves possess the same genetic amenities as our modern dogs. From the dog, people eventually gained control over various wild herds of animals, taming them for either food, or services. Evidence suggests that as far back as 18,000 years ago early man domesticated wild sheep and goats, 7,000 years ago saw the birth of the domestic pig, while the cattle appeared on the domestic list as far back as 6,000 years ago. We could go on and on with the arrivals of the various breeds of animals, but I think the reader gets the idea.

It appears that the first plant to be domesticated appeared in Asia 11,000 years ago. This was none other than a member of the wheat family. It expanded to include other grains such as barley, millet, and sorghum. There are suggestions that peas and legumes were also grown during this time frame. Rice appeared on the scene around 7,000 years ago, as did maize around the same time. It is now a known fact that those societies which possess the necessary skills to grow plants could readily feed large numbers of people, often times producing surplus food that could be used for trading purposes.

The steps necessary to domesticate any animal, or a specific plant is extremely time consuming. The species must be local in nature to the person attempting to domesticate it, and it must be adequately observed for a considerable period of time. These events do not take place in only a few weeks. At one home where I resided, I would go outside every day, and feed and talk to some wild cats. They were very scared at first, and viewed me with extreme caution. Every day I would place food slightly closer to myself slowly drawing the small kittens nearer to me. Eventually after a period of time I was able to actually touch the felines, but they were still cautious of me. In time they became tame enough to pet them like any normal domestic cat. The same process would need to be performed by the early man as he attempted to domesticate his chosen animals. Alternately, the animal could be captured as a baby, and raised by the man. This is the procedure employed to tame baby parrots after they are born. The breeder would handle them on a continual basis showing them that they had no need for fear from man.

Plant domestication is another matter. It is not necessary to gain the trust of plants like one would an animal, however a complete familiarity with the species of plant would be necessary. Being somewhat of an amateur botanist, I like to play around with raising plants. At one point in my life I had hoped to develop a pure black rose, since there is no such thing in nature. Unfortunately, other desires took my time up, and my dream was left by the wayside. The idea did however, result in a learning situation as I learned more, and more about roses. In general, I quickly discovered just how long of a time was involved in growing these beautiful plants from seeds. Each generation of rose would need to be screened for a specific trait, and raised for its seeds. This process would take place over, and over, until such time as the selected trait was breeding true in the seeds.

To determine what kind of knowledge would be required in order to be successful at breeding animals, and plants it would be particularly important to discern as much about the particular species which is being domesticated as can be possible. What sort of weather conditions do they favor? What foods are they drawn too? How do they live in the wild? These are questions that the breeder must demand answers for before even attempting to obtain an animal, or plant for domestication. Some form of record keeping would need to be created to check progress being made as well as a form of calendar to follow the cycles from generation after generation. With plants you must know how the temperature would affect them, are they cold, or hot weather plants, and how much rainfall will they require. Lastly, one would need to know if the plant could in fact be grown at your

location. I once read some literature where many of the plants which grown wild in the rainforest will fail to grow in most other climates.

As survivalists, or preppers, it isn't a wild stretch of the imagination to place ourselves in the life of early man. Who knows at some point in time we just may find our situations to be similar? We all do what we must to survive, and provide for our families.