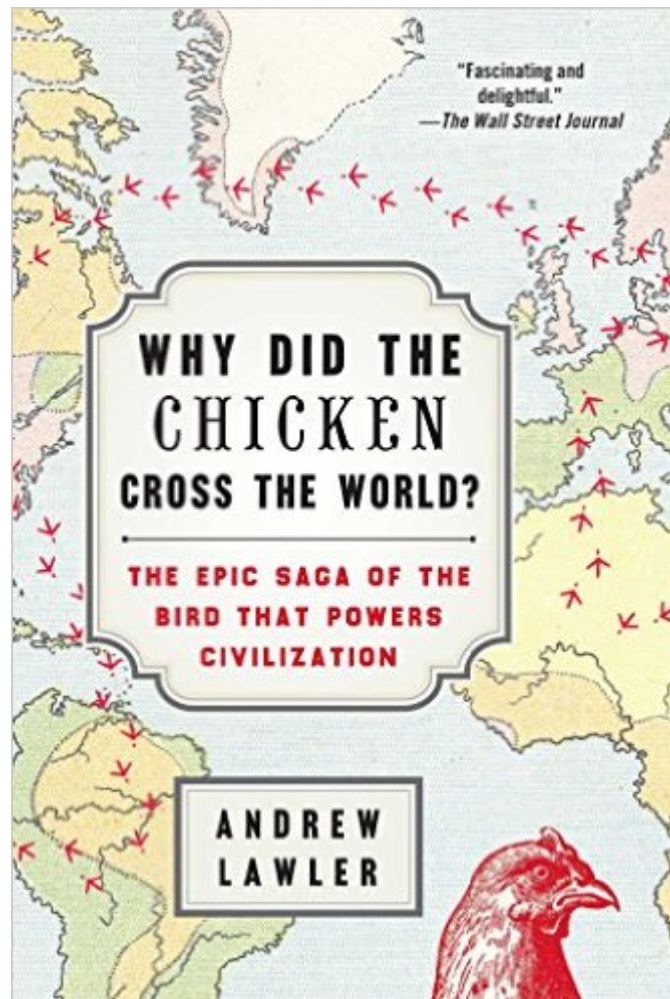


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Why Did The Chicken Cross The World?: The Epic Saga Of The Bird That Powers Civilization



Synopsis

Veteran journalist Andrew Lawler delivers a "fascinating and delightful" globetrotting tour (Wall Street Journal) with the animal that has been most crucial to the spread of civilization "the chicken. In a masterful combination of historical sleuthing and journalistic adventure, veteran reporter Andrew Lawler "opens a window on civilization, evolution, capitalism, and ethics" (New York) with a fascinating account of the most successful of all cross-species relationships "the partnership between human and chicken. This "splendid book full of obsessive travel and research in history" (Kirkus Reviews) explores how people through the ages embraced the chicken as a messenger of the gods, an all-purpose medicine, an emblem of resurrection, a powerful sex symbol, a gambling aid, a handy research tool, an inspiration for bravery, the epitome of evil, and, of course, the star of the world's most famous joke. Queen Victoria was obsessed with the chicken. Socrates' last words embraced it. Charles Darwin and Louis Pasteur used it for scientific breakthroughs. Religious leaders of all stripes have praised it. Now neuroscientists are uncovering signs of a deep intelligence that offers insights into human behavior. Trekking from the jungles of southeast Asia through the Middle East and beyond, Lawler discovers the secrets behind the fowl's transformation from a shy, wild bird into an animal of astonishing versatility, capable of serving our species' changing needs more than the horse, cow, or dog. The natural history of the chicken, and its role in entertainment, food history, and food politics, as well as the debate raging over animal welfare, comes to light in this "witty, conversational" (Booklist) volume.

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Customer Reviews

This is the best book I have ever read on chickens. That may sound like a joke, but in one form or another, there are many books on chickens. Four stars rather than five because the book really needs a map to show some of the more exotic locations he discusses, and some photos of the birds he discusses. What does that 20,000 seat cock fighting stadium in Manila look like? What does that interesting Vietnamese bird, the Ho chicken breed, look like? This is not a book just in the origin and spread of chickens. It has a wide historical and cultural reach. Some of it is not pleasant reading. For example, he paints the American-style industrial production of chickens as essentially amoral and describes birds crazed and in pain from their genetics and practices such as amputating part of the beak, apparently as sensitive for the chicken as a dog's nose is for a dog. He also has a chapter on cock-fighting, in which a Filipino describes the notion of animals rights as just more neocolonialist claptrap. That is not the kind of message a tree-hugger like me likes to hear. He explores the origin of the bird in the red jungle fowl, and describes how that bird was brought to the USA for research, in perhaps the slowest portion of the text. There is a section on how the chicken accompanied the Pacific islanders across that immensity, and how a study of chicken DNA may throw light on where the Islanders originated. There's detail on the various chicken varieties that were used across the world before the rise of the new industrial chicken, that threatens to wipe out traditional breeds. He considers whether the chicken was domesticated and spread for fighting, rather than food. He has sections on Santoria chicken sacrifices, and describes a rite common to some Jewish sects, called kapparot, not exactly a sacrifice but the birds are killed, anyway. He describes the chicken fancy, the craze for fancy breeds. He describes some Asian chickens presented to young Queen Victoria that later became important in development of meaty breeds. He has most of a chapter on cock fighting in the Philippines, where if he is accurate, it may be the most popular sport. Most telling is the section on the modern industrial process that has produced a chicken that is extremely efficient at adding meat per feed input, birds going to market after only a few miserable weeks of life in horrendous conditions. The increase of chicken consumption is startling, and the relentless search for profit has produced cheap, plentiful, nutritious food, at great cost to the birds, nine billion consumed in the USA alone, each year. He also notes that this highly profitable chicken is widely considered tasteless by people who have eaten other kinds of birds. He describes traveling fairly widely, but most interestingly to Southeast Asia, and encountering breeds such as the Hmong, which he says is all black--blood, bones, meat, organs, feathers. Then there are other details such as the legendary Jewish grandma's contention that chicken soup is good for curing colds--apparently, it does just that. I really enjoyed reading this book. The writing is excellent

throughout, the research is thorough, and it is full of interesting detail. I'm not sure what I will do with that information about the Hmong chicken, but it's entertaining.

I received this book as a gift because of my interest in the topic. Overall, the book is OK, but comes across as superficial in light of the apparent amount of travel and research undertaken by the author. The main positive is that it introduced me to interesting new 'threads' of thought about chickens. The main drawback is the writing lacks cohesion and continuity - I almost stopped reading the book about half way through. As other reviewers have noted, the book reads as a group of disjointed essays. Although subjective, I'm not partial to the writing style - the reader is led down dead end alleys (e.g. what happened when Linnaeus put a wild and domestic bird together?? - p. 131 +) and not necessarily reminded of why we're led there, in light of the title of the book. In a similar vein, the author has trouble staying on topic - there is a lot of irrelevant material padding the first two thirds of the book. The author has a knack for losing the reader in a flurry of names and events that turn out to be meaningless to the point being made. In addition, he has trouble keeping a clear timeline (what happened when, relative to other topics in the book) in places where it would be helpful to the reader. The effectiveness of the book could have been greatly enhanced by a few simple maps showing areas and routes discussed in the text, and a few pictures of select breeds mentioned in the text would have been much appreciated. If you have an interest in chickens, it's worth having on your bookshelf. However, I would not necessarily go looking for other books by this author.

"Fascinating" to use the words of Spock from Star Trek. This book is indeed filled with geeky facts about about chickens but ALSO an interesting foray into humans interconnection with animals. This a MUST READ for anyone who is interested in anthropology and it might also help you win the difficult ending question in your final round of Jeopardy.

Pretty interesting account of a subject that you would think was a dry one. Andrew Lawyer moistens this chicken story by exploring every aspect, from cock fighting to a look at the industrial chicken farms. If you are a fan of history or just interesting facts in general, this book will keep you entertained!

A very comprehensive discussion of chicken biology, evolution, and history. For anyone interested in chickens -- and who wouldn't be? --- this book is full of amazing anecdotes, fascinating facts, and

in-depth discussions.

Interesting book about how a bird in South East Asia called the Red Jungle Fowl became the chicken of today. What I didn't like was that it was very wordy, and that it wasn't always in chronological order. One paragraph could be about American 20th century chicken genetics, and the next could be about chickens in the 1600's in a distant land. I give him lots of credit traveling around the world to give us this amazing story.

Red Jungle Fowl to Rhode Island Red a great read. If you raise, like, or eat chickens you will enjoy this book. If you enjoy history you will enjoy this book. If you think about where your food comes from or what it really is you will value this book. To understand your world you must read why the chicken crossed the world.

The book is rather lengthy, but I give you very good information. It's interesting to see how one animal did have such an impact on humanity over such a given length of time. If you're enthusiastic about this subject, or history in general, you should read this book.

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