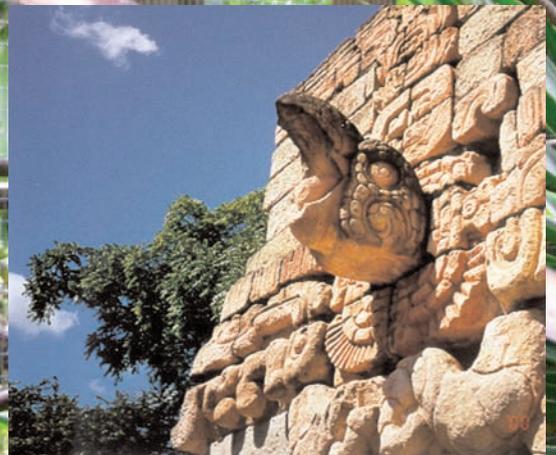


JAGUAR MON



Two macaws: At left is a magnificent scarlet macaw in captivity in Honduras. Above is a macaw sculpture on a wall of the main ballcourt at the site of the ancient Mayan city of Copán (in present-day Honduras).

KINGS & KEY BROTHERS



ADOPTING STRAYS IS NOT A NEW PRACTICE.

Imagine a world in which pets must work and even be sacrificed. Imagine in that same world mythical animals becoming part of the family, if only for a little while. That was the world of the ancient Maya—a Central American people famed for their art; their mastery of astronomy, mathematics, and agriculture; and the cities and temples they built between 600 B.C. and A.D. 1500. These ancient people, whose descendants live today in the countries of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras, shared their homes and cities with a variety of real and mythical beasts. Some were domesticated household pets, but most were wild neighbors occasionally “adopted” into the family.

FUN-LOVING BROTHERS

As a zooarchaeologist (someone interested in the ancient relationships between people and the animals with which they



Right: The vase panel depicts a black jaguar as a scribe, writing in a bark-paper book. This Maya cylinder vase is now in Guatemala’s Popol Vuh Museum. At top is a captive male jaguar snarling. Inset: A reconstruction of a Maya vase drawing that shows a spider monkey playing with cacao pods.

lived), I study animal remains from archaeological sites. However, for clues about Maya animals, I must also study ancient Maya artwork and historical texts as well as modern Maya activities and legends and even animal biology.

The modern Maya keep many animals as pets, with the domestic dog the most common. Most others, however, are wild visitors—deer, spider monkeys, squirrels, coatis (a relative of the raccoon), and birds such as parrots, macaws, and toucans.



According to historical texts, the early Maya raised dogs and deer for food and as companions.

They also raised birds such as the macaw for their plumes.

Artwork from the Classic period (about A.D. 250 to 1200.) depicts dogs and deer being held by women, perhaps as pets.

Also depicted are animals with leashes, suggesting they were kept as captives, and perhaps also as pets.

Legend has it that the spider and howler monkeys were the tricky but artistic older brothers of the “hero twins,” a pair described in the Maya creation myth.

Modern Maya consider them the fun-loving brothers of humankind. While the Maya often depicted monkeys in their artwork, monkey bones are rarely found in the archaeological

Mayan artisans carefully crafted this flute in the shape of a Maya noble riding a deer. The flute on page 19 (bottom) was shaped to resemble a Maya woman with a dog carried as a baby on her back.

Insets: At top is a modern-day paca in captivity. Below is a figurine of a paca eating a seed or a cacao pod that was molded by a Maya artisan.



record, perhaps because they were protected as siblings in the past.

Bones of squirrels, coatis, and deer are often found in the archaeological record, but since we usually find these in garbage dumps, we tend to interpret them as food remains.

SHRIMP CHOCOLATE

When we find animal bones in such archaeological deposits as burials, caves, and caches, we think of them as having special meanings. But were they pets? It is still unclear. Usually, these animals were included as foods for the gods; sacrifices to accompany the dead; symbols of such events as birth, death, and accession to the throne; or memorials to family and particular locations. For example, many Maya rulers were named after jaguars, the kings of the jungle, and jaguar bones are often

found in burials. In my work, onsite at Copán in Honduras, I have studied vessels full of shrimp casings and tiny fish bones. But I would not interpret that as evidence of shrimp or fish as pets. Instead, these aquatic creatures were served with chocolate as the final ritual meal of the first queen of the Copán dynasty and probably symbolized fertility and rebirth.

'DOGGY DAYCARE'?

There are, however, some archaeological collections that reveal information about ancient Maya pets. For example, I recently studied the animal bones from the highland site of Kaminaljuyu (KJ) in Guatemala. In every deposit, from burials of the rich to lowly garbage pits, I found an enormous number of dog bones. Was this the first “doggy daycare”? No, but the finds are interesting in light of the role dogs played in early Maya society.

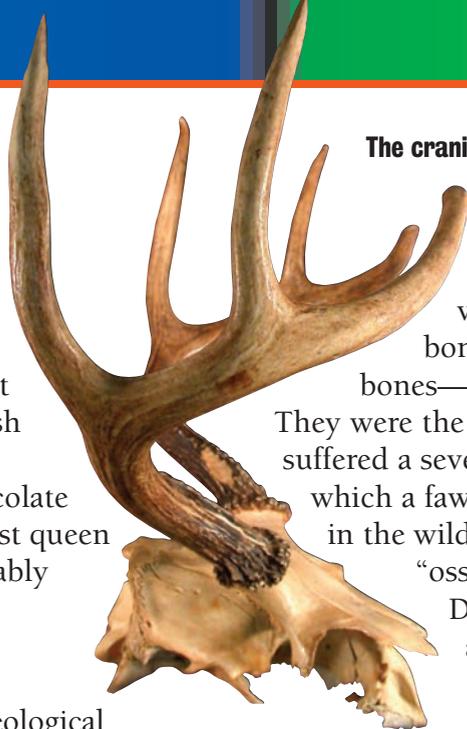
Dogs were the only domestic animal owned by the ancient Maya (at least until about A.D. 1000, when the domestic turkey was introduced from Mexico). Dogs hunted alongside their owners, protecting families from unwanted wild pests, and presumably keeping Maya children entertained. But dogs were also important figures in myth and legend, often represented as the guardians of the dead, making their transition from life to death.

Yet even the dog was included on the Maya dinner menu. The KJ Maya families probably did not eat their hunting companions and family pets. Most likely, “dinner dogs” were raised specifically for that purpose, to be eaten on feast days, or buried with the kings because of their symbolic importance.

A 'DEER' PET?

And what about the wild animals adopted as pets? In 1991, excavators at the Guatemalan site of Dos Pilas opened the burial of a young

The cranium of a male white-tailed deer



child and were surprised to find, among the beautiful vessels and jade, nonhuman bones. I identified them as deer bones—and they told an interesting tale. They were the bones of a young deer that had suffered a severe broken leg, an injury from which a fawn would not normally recover in the wild. But this deer's leg break had “ossified” or healed. Most likely, a Dos Pilas family had taken it in and cared for it, at least until its injury healed. Its burial with

the young child suggests it might have been a family pet.

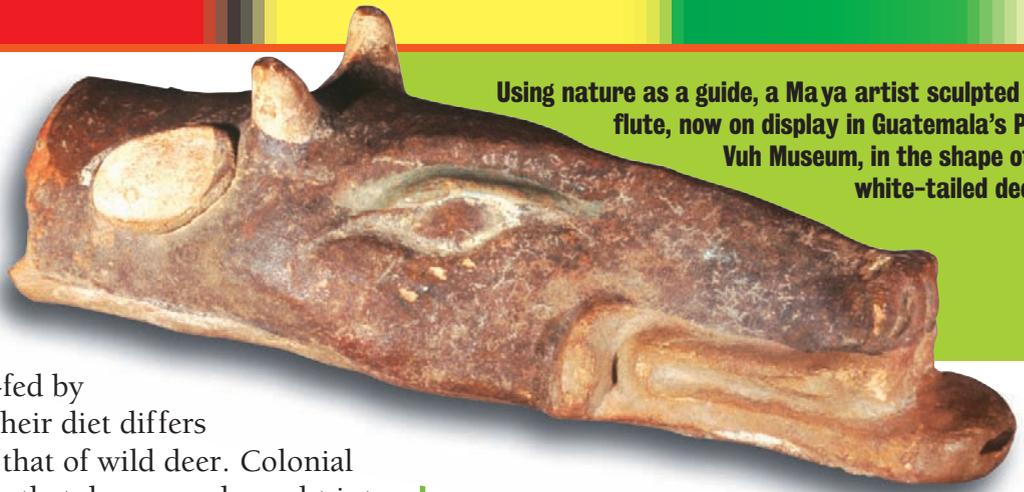
In fact, there is much evidence that the ancient Maya often brought wild deer into the household and raised them

Maya woman

Dog baby



into adulthood. Chemical analysis of deer bones suggests that some were hand-fed by the Maya, since their diet differs completely from that of wild deer. Colonial documents tell us that deer were brought into households and fed corn, and that young fawns were even breast-fed by the women of the family. Today, some people still capture and feed young deer, saying that they



Using nature as a guide, a Maya artist sculpted this flute, now on display in Guatemala's Popol Vuh Museum, in the shape of a white-tailed deer.

become tame enough to stay nearby even when they are grown. Of course, like many a Maya dog, such tamed deer probably still meet the same eventual fate—dinner.



Dr. Dig says:

Today, in the Itzaj Maya village of San José, Guatemala, the people keep the skulls of favorite pet dogs. The belief is that their silent "barking" will protect the family and frighten away dangerous wild animals.

Kitty F. Emery is the curator of environmental archaeology at the Florida Museum of Natural History. She uses ancient animal and plant remains recovered from archaeological sites in Central America to understand how the ancient Maya used (and sometimes abused) their natural world.

Who's Who?

There once were three archaeologists named Mark, Angelo, and Spencer. Here's what we know about them:

-  Mark *never* lies
-  Angelo *always* lies
-  Spencer *sometimes* lies

Based on their statements at right, see if you can figure out which one's which.

