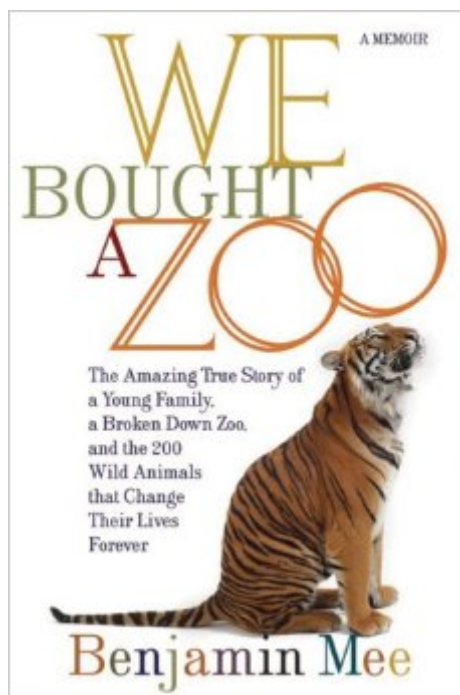


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We Bought A Zoo: The Amazing True Story Of A Young Family, A Broken Down Zoo, And The 200 Wild Animals That Change Their Lives Forever



Synopsis

In the tradition of "Marley & Me" comes an unforgettable memoir about the mysteries of the animal kingdom, the power of family, and the triumph of hope over tragedy in this chronicle of the Mee family's purchase of the Dartmoor Wildlife Park, a dilapidated zoo in the English countryside. Weinstein Books

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Benjamin Mee has finally settled his family in a French barn/house and has settled in to write a book when his father dies and his siblings begin to consider purchasing a zoo. His 76 year old mother supports this idea, but negotiations fall apart and each sibling returns to their lives. Mee and his wife Katherine and son Milo and daughter Ella are busy with daily life when a health problem strikes Katherine and the Mee family is just trying to survive. In the midst of this the zoo becomes available again and after protracted negotiations and countless compromises the family, minus one brother purchase the zoo which they rename Dartmoor Wildlife Park. Life at the zoo is a continuing series of struggles as the family tries to return the park to a financial success. The children and the staff come to respect and love the animals. Of course there are unexpected crisis...escaping cats, sick animals, sick family and the countless health inspections. We Bought a Zoo is a delightful glimpse into what it takes to run a small private zoo and a glimpse of what might be referred to as the eccentricity of the British. I appreciated the honest account of one family's plunge into chasing a dream. While the story sometimes holds the reader at arm's length, it is a heartwarming read.

Rating: 3.5 stars

In "We Bought A Zoo", Benjamin Mee tells the story of how his family came to buy the Dartmoor Zoological Park and the great lengths it took to revitalize the zoo and prepare it for opening day. I think this book is particularly appealing because it is so hard to imagine most people purchasing a zoo or even entertaining the idea of doing so. Hence, the mystery of it all! I was intrigued by the book's topic and I just had to find out what Mee's thought process was and the reasoning behind his family's extraordinary acquisition. From the start, Mee provides an in-depth analysis into the zoo-keeping business and leaves no details unexplored. Some of the information about animal grooming and sterilization seemed a bit excessive to have included and tended to distract from the story. However I do understand that Mee wanted to provide readers all of the facts, even if they seemed trivial, in order to paint the complete picture of what he had to cope with on a daily basis. The most interesting parts about the animals were their interactions with each other and their keepers. I also really liked the scenes that depicted the animal runaways which really gave a glimpse into how stressful and sometimes exciting managing a zoo can be. There are even some beautiful color photos of Mee's family and ones of the noteworthy animals mentioned in the book! While most of the book is dedicated to details of the zoo and Mee's formal responsibilities to the zoo, the parts that talk about his wife Katherine and her illness are really touching. I enjoyed reading about their special relationship and how much Mee took care of her. It was nice to see the Mee's caretaking side because it came in contrast to his required business-like manner while running the zoo. With all the anticipation that had been building up while reading the book, the ending was incredibly satisfying. It is one of those books where the ending can be nothing but expected, and nonetheless I felt an immense sense of relief when reading about the zoo's successful opening. I also felt proud of the Mee family for how much they had all accomplished and how they grew closer as a family, despite the hardships encountered along the way.[...]

We Bought A Zoo is subtitled: The Amazing True Story of a Young Family, a Broken Down Zoo, and the 200 Wild Animals That Changed Their Lives Forever. Given that, the story takes a little time to get off the ground. We find the author, a free-lance writer, living in rural southern France with his wife & two children and refinishing two dirt-floor stone barns. When word comes through his sister that a dilapidated zoo in the English countryside is for sale, the author & his extended family takes action to purchase it. This is not an easy endeavor and the business details fill the first quarter of the book. Note also that a BBC film crew got wind of the endeavour and asked to film the process. The thing is, I don't think I'd like Benjamin Mee if I met him in person. He uprooted his family once, by

selling their beloved flat in London to move to his personal idyll in France, and then again, back to England because, after all, HE'D always wanted to own a zoo and now his French dream wasn't what he wanted after all. On both occasions, he overrode his wife Katherine. This was especially appalling to me the second time because Katherine was newly diagnosed with a brain tumour & receiving (excellent) treatment in France. The fact that his (possibly) dying wife wasn't enthused about this new venture didn't faze him a bit. In addition, although Mee has experienced staff and certified professionals advising him, he ignores their advice in serious decisions at least twice that he reports. In both cases, things ended up favorably but, rather than be grateful for twists of fate that may have affected the situations, he boasts and struts. But the story? Animal lovers, once you get past the purchase transaction, there's plenty of goodies for you amidst the details of the continuing financial issues, grim living conditions (for the family), and Katherine's disease and eventual death. Imagine the day staff moved Tammy the tiger without proper restraint precaution, only to have the beast gain consciousness as they moved her. Mee describes the situation as being "beyond fear, to total calm". But the fear lingered when, sometime later, Mee & his brother are startled by a large animal moving behind them while checking some reservoir pipes, & spring to defend their lives - against the neighbor's cow. I believe they were less afraid when one of their younger wolves was running loose through the nearest town. And there is an amusing exposé: what happens "When Porcupines Go Bad". Perhaps the most likable animal in the zoo was Zak, the elderly alpha wolf, who "maintained his grip on the pack now, not with brute force, but through sheer charisma and experience." The account of his surgery to save him from testicular cancer will be a source of angst among male readers and of glee to the women. Mee's account of the peacock - which he evidently disdains - as a dumb, evolutionary mistake, is humorous. It also amuses me that Mee can describe the wonders of these animals and their behaviours and personalities and make attribution every time to the marvel of evolution, to the point, by his own admission, that it "[made] evolution sound (almost) like a religion". That these creatures are so intelligently made, with abilities beyond what are needed for survival, and so varied is surely evidence of a designer, a creator. And since, according to Mee, the peacock (named, so he postulates, for the size of its brain), has that marvelous tail that is so "evolutionarily expensive", it really should be extinct by that theory. The last time I checked on the world's peacock population, that wasn't the case. I would have loved to see more photographs of the animals Mee brings to life in his stories, but the colour pictures included are disappointing. Nearly half are of their project in France, and the ones of the animals include many that are not named in the book, and exclude many that are. I really did learn a tremendous amount, though, about the running of a zoo. It's a highly regulated & examined business - and an

almost unimaginably expensive one to run. The money and the struggle to get it, manage it & plan for making it, are a major part of the book. And, animal lovers with the same dream, please note that, despite the months of Herculean effort by Mee, his family & his staff, the zoo would not have succeeded financially if the BBC (whose film crew had been on location for those many months) had not run the four-part television series Titles "Ben's Zoo" in November of their opening year. That brought more paying visitors and made endless opportunities for additional moneymaking venues such as this book. Without that, the zoo would have closed, broke, after the first summer and the animals would have been disperse. In other words, "Kids, don't try this at home!"Should you read it? Even though I personally dislike the author, he does write well and the book held my attention from beginning to end. There are no bogged down bits - it's all moving forward. If you like animals or are interested in learning about the world of zoos, then by all means - read it & enjoy!

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