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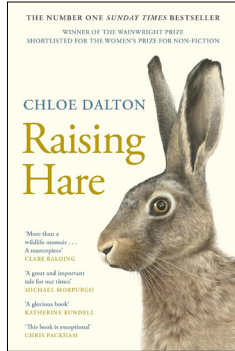
Raising Hare: the Heart-Warming True Story of an Unlikely Friendship

By Chloe Dalton. Illustrations by Denise Nestor. 2025. Canongate Books. 313 pages, 36.95 CAD, Hardcover, 24.95 CAD, Paper.

First published in hardcover in 2024, this book about the author's experience raising European Brown Hare (*Lepus europaeus*)¹ became an instant sensation. Prize-winning and bestselling, it has been translated into 36 languages. The delightful illustrations beautifully match the calmness of the text.

Chloe Dalton is a foreign policy specialist who was a political advisor to the United Kingdom government, dealing at the highest levels with some of the most challenging and vicious problems facing certain human populations. In the book, the COVID-19 pandemic forces her to retreat from the adrenaline rush of global crisis management to the English countryside. There, on a frigid February day, she finds a newborn baby hare (a leveret) near her house, possibly dropped by a dog. Dalton realizes that it will not survive without her intervention, and so, with conflicted feelings, she takes the tiny leveret home. In contrast to rabbits, hares are born fully haired with eyes open and are able to run very soon after birth. A leveret's nest is just a slight depression in the ground in a secluded spot, such as a grassy area. The mother usually visits it once or twice daily for nursing, and for the rest of the day the baby hare remains hidden and unmoving.

This book is about raising the hare to adulthood and what happens during and after this time. It has many layers, but at its core is the hare. Profoundly observant, gentle, and empathetic, *Raising Hare* is full of surprising and extraordinary insights into these animals. Dalton writes superbly about her developing understanding based on careful and objective observation supplemented by reading the relatively scant literature on European Hares. For example, she describes the fur of the leveret while nursing it and then explains how a hare's



cross-hatched, multi-coloured pelt provides it with a disguise that shifts with the seasons and camouflages it from numerous predators. *Raising Hare* also has many sweet moments, such as when the grown hare appears with three leverets of her own that she rears in Dalton's garden. Even later, she gives birth to and rears two leverets in the house.

Apart from its profound reflections on the modern world and our relation to the natural world, the book is a significant scientific contribution to understanding the behaviour of hares that will be appreciated by field naturalists and biologists, although it is aimed mostly at nature lovers. Dalton consistently works to ensure that the hare she rescues retains its wildness; she never names it, instead calling it 'hare', and she allows it to freely enter, roam around, and leave her house. She rises at dawn, doesn't use artificial lighting, and starts going to bed at nightfall. She rears the hare in a way that ensures it will go back to the wild, an approach learned from her mother who used to rescue and rear young wild birds and mammals before releasing them. Dalton is also very careful to avoid anthropomorphising the hare.

Apart from the charm of the hare and the author's unique relationship with it, much of the book is about Dalton's unexpected personal transformation through rearing the hare during and after the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The inquisitiveness, intelligence, playfulness, sociability, dignity, sense of well-being, and calm of the hare helps Dalton, soothing years of vigilance and stress. This gives her a new attentiveness to nature, a rediscovery of attachment to place, an unexpected shift in her convictions and priorities, and the experience of living in the moment. She learns to see beauty and value in the ordinary, as well as patience and a sensation of wonder with which to cherish the days.

Raising Hare will likely become another classic of nature writing. It is a universally relevant book that raises profound questions about our relationship to nature, how we treat animals, and who we are as a species. Dalton discusses how the modern agricultural landscape is putting hares and so many other species under immense pressure and how this might be somewhat mitigated.

Thanks to the efforts of many people, hunting wild animals with dogs is now illegal in the United Kingdom. As a young child there, I was taken hare

¹The three native Canadian hare species are Arctic Hare (*Lepus arcticus*), Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*), and White-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendii*). European Brown Hare was introduced as a game animal in southern Ontario.

hunting (beagling) with a pack of hounds and vividly remember the scream of the hare as the huntsman strangled the exhausted animal with a whip before it was torn to pieces by the dogs. I was then

“blooded” with one of its paws. How I wish my parents could have read this magnificent book.

JOHN F. PRESCOTT
Ottawa, ON, Canada

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