

## BOOK REVIEW BY HARFIYAH HALEEM

### ANIMALS IN ISLAMIC TRADITION AND MUSLIM CULTURES

By Richard C. Foltz, Oneworld Books, Oxford 2006 ISBN 1 85168 398 4 p/b  
192pp £12.99

Harvard professor Richard C. Foltz humbly prefaces his book with the statement - 'This is a book I had hoped someone else would write.' He admits that he does not have an Islamic *ijaza*, and that an American Ph.D. doesn't carry much weight in traditional Muslim circles when it comes to religious questions - 'nor perhaps should it.'

However, when he attempted to interest Muslim scholars in the subject he found 'all of these brilliant minds are too preoccupied with the many crises currently facing the human animal alone to focus very much on other species or our relations with them.' Consequently he says he will be 'pleasantly surprised' if Muslims find his book useful.

Foltz's book encapsulates, in a very brief and handy volume, most of the available information about animals in Islam. It encompasses Qur'an, Hadith, *fiqh* (Islamic law), philosophy, science, literature, art, contemporary scholars, websites, Islamic vegetarianism, and has a chapter on dogs.

The author's attitude is generally open-minded and respectful, pointing out some aspects in which Islam surpasses other traditions in caring for animals, e.g. that animals have souls (p.6). However, he does not shy away from criticism of some backward-looking scholars, and deviations in practice from the enlightened teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet (pbuh). He is quick to point out where 'species-ism' makes Muslims, like others, feel superior to animals and treat them as mere property or tools.

Unfortunately, in addition to the fair criticism, a trace of Islamophobic propaganda can occasionally be detected where unreferenced stereotypes of Muslim bloodthirstiness surface (pp.121, 124-5).

Foltz neatly summarises Islamic law on animals, saying that Muslims should 'kill animals only to satisfy hunger or to protect themselves from danger', because 'if observed, this would result in much better treatment of animals ... in Muslim societies and elsewhere.'

His conclusion reads like an environmentalist sermon urging us all to restrain our greed and procreation and contribute to the effort to save the planet. The way we live now is beyond carelessness and verges on insanity he declares. This has to change, he warns, because 'if current trends continue, we will not'.