

Black's Veterinary Dictionary, 22nd edition. Edited by Edward Boden and Anthony Andrews. Bloomsbury, 2015
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Black's Veterinary Dictionary, first published in 1928, is aimed at anyone with an interest in animal care and medicine. Co-edited by two distinguished authors, it is a large book of nearly a thousand pages. Entries are arranged alphabetically in standard dictionary form and easy to find. The text is well-written, in a clear typescript and in language accessible to readers with no veterinary training. It is illustrated occasionally with line diagrams, tables, graphs, and black and white photographs.

A practical approach is adopted, outlining signs and symptoms of common and less common diseases along with methods of diagnosis and treatment. Many animals and birds, farmed or kept as companion animals, are covered. The 22nd edition, published in hardback, is a significant update on the previous edition, published in 2005, reflecting advances in animal care; newly identified diseases such as Alabama Rot, Avian hepatitis E, and Schmollenberg virus; resurgence of conditions such as TB; and the increased risk of importing exotic diseases following relaxation of travel regulations. Novel entries relate to the increasing number of exotic animals kept as pets, and to the expanding range of species being farmed. Entries on popular breeds of dog and cat and inherited diseases have been expanded. Farm animal species, their husbandry and diseases, seem to be particularly well-covered, perhaps reflecting the background of one of the editors.

No dictionary can ever be exhaustive but I was disappointed to find only two small lines on 'epigenetics' and no reference at all to 'microbiome' both current medical buzzwords. 'Food allergy' warrants a few lines but 'food intolerance' is not mentioned. As a dermatologist, I was also surprised at the omission of terms such as 'follicular cast' and 'epidermal collarette'. On the other side of the coin, over 10 pages are given over to existing acts of legislation affecting the UK, arranged alphabetically under 'law'.

Black's Veterinary Dictionary has been a bestseller for over 80 years, but in today's world of Google, Wikipedia and Pubmed, one might question the usefulness and relevance of such a general reference book, particularly as some information will already have become obsolete before hitting the reader's retina. However, £36 is not exorbitant and book enthusiasts will appreciate the aesthetic pleasure of handling a sturdy, hardback, thumbing through real pages, not having to connect to the internet, and having this attractive, useful and informative reference tome on their bookshelf.