

# **The Animal Behaviour Consultants of Southern Africa (®™)**



## **OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2011 NEWSLETTER**

### **From The Editor**

A warm welcome to all new & existing members of the ABC. More interesting articles in this issue as well as the usual news and views.

Introducing a new feature - A classified section at the end of each issue. Please give me a shout if you would like to place an advertisement. The cost is R50 and all funds received for advertising in the newsletter are to go to the Dog & Donkey Foundation who undertake sterilization and veterinary care in the poorest of the poorest areas. They recently conducted a spay day in Wattville (Benoni) and regularly have successful programs in the Eastern Cape. You can contact me on [louthomp@mweb.co.za](mailto:louthomp@mweb.co.za) or (011) 969-6103 or 082-890-0905

### **ABC News**

Exciting news! Pet owners can now claim for behaviour consultations from Medinate pet medical aid. There will be a "ceiling" amount on the claim. Any behaviorist who wishes to claim for a behavior visit will now have to go through the ABC for verification of qualifications / experience etc. This will apply to any professional behaviorists including Accredited ABC Consultants.

### **Upcoming Event and Feedback on Recent Events**

#### **THE ABC OF SA IS PRESENTING A TALK ON "SEPARATION ANXIETY IN CHILDREN"**

Presented by Dr Tamarin Epstein.

The comparisons between human children & canine separation anxiety is also going to be discussed. This will be presented by Dr Melvyn Greenberg

**DATE:** 27th October 2011  
**VENUE:** SA Guide Dogs  
**COST:** Members R75 Non-members R100  
Please book in advance in order to assist with catering.  
**CONTACT:** Paula Jordi - [paula.jordi@gmail.com](mailto:paula.jordi@gmail.com)

#### **ABC Members giving talks in the near future:.....**

**ROUGE STEEL EVENTS MANAGEMENT** is presenting the first in a series of fundraising talks for charity presented by Shannon McKay (Shannon is an Accredited Animal Behaviour Consultants) on .....

#### **DOG BEHAVIOUR FOR DUMMIES / UNDERSTANDING YOUR DOG**

**DATE:** Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2011  
**VENUE:** Branford Manner, 106 Hyperion Drive  
Northriding

**COST:** R350 per person. This includes refreshments and a light brunch. R20 per attendee will be donated to the charity of the speaker's choice. Shannon has also very generously donated her fee towards the same charity.

**CONTACT:** For bookings contact 078 908 8908

### **DOMINANT AGGRESSION**

Louise Thompson is to present a talk in the near future for the same group fund-raiser. Louise will be talking on the "Dominance Theory - Dominant Aggression / Fact or Fiction? & "Is Dominance Such a Big Deal?" I will be sending out a news flash as soon as dates for both these talks are finalized. Louise will also be donating her fee to the Dog and Donkey Foundation who do such wonderful work sterilizing & providing veterinary care in the squatter camp areas.

## **Facebook Group News**

Thanks to all our members and friends who are contributing to some lively discussions on our page. It is really beginning to take off in a big way, with 190 (on the 13 Oct 2011) members so far, and rising! Come & join in the fun on our Facebook group / discussion page! Our updated page group is now very user friendly and conducting a discussion is now quick and easy. Please note that articles appearing on the Facebook group page do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ABC of SA but are the opinions of the said authors – but SUCH fun to discuss! Feel free to post a topical or behavioural issue that you would like to discuss.

## **The Fine Art of Observation**

by Suzanne Clothier

Understanding, analysing and resolving behaviour or performance problems requires a good deal of detective work. As the famous Sherlock Holmes knew, no detail, however small, is insignificant. The more acutely you are able to observe the dog, the more accurate your analysis will be. Acute observation and attention to detail is the hallmark not only of great detectives, but of great trainers.

One of my most bemusing moments as a trainer came when I was working with a dog who had bitten several people. As I worked the dog over a variety of obstacles, his owner commented several times, "I can't believe he hasn't bitten you yet!" I never could decide if she was simply amazed or just disappointed. I wasn't bitten because I watched the dog for even the smallest sign that he was beginning to feel threatened. With this dog, subtle changes in his breathing pattern, a compression of the lips and a constriction of the pupils gave me the only clues I needed.

At that point, with no further clues and without pushing until I saw more dramatic signs, it was a simple matter to shift our activity to something less threatening and allow the dog to calm down. Ignoring these clear but subtle signs would have undoubtedly caused the behaviour to escalate until perhaps we had a full blown aggressive episode ending in a bite. (This dog has gone on to become a wonderful companion who easily earned his CGC certificate, and a photo of him in Santa's lap at a "Photo With Santa" fund raiser remains my favourite of him.)

Dogs live and act in a world of exquisitely subtle signals in their interactions with each other. Our observations and communications in our interactions with them must seem unbelievably coarse at times to these sophisticates of non-verbal communication. Turned around the other way, we would perceive such inattentiveness to our subtle signals as rude, uncaring or perhaps simply stupid.

Fortunately for us, dogs bring to the human-dog relationship their wonderful powers of observation, allowing them to be highly aware of our posture, breathing, muscular tensions, and facial expressions, often reacting to changes of which we are not aware.

Training or behaviour problems often result from the dog's response to signals we unknowingly have sent. Unfortunately, the dog is often blamed rather than the handler. Our responsibility as handlers and trainers is to attempt to be as skilled in our observations and non-verbal communications with our dogs as they are in their interactions with us. Our reliance on verbal communication is perhaps one of the biggest stumbling block in the training process.

As a rule, any concept that cannot be fully explained in a non-verbal way is a concept that a dog will be unable to grasp. Learning to become skilled as an observer requires that you practice these skills. As the artist Frederick Franck said in *The Art of Seeing*, "We often look, but we rarely see." Information gathered through careful observation is crucial. Without such information, you cannot make any informed decisions on the dog's behalf.

A sad example is the Sheltie presented to me at an Integrated Approach seminar. The handler's complaint was that no matter what technique they used, the dog was "lazy" and continued to sit crooked. For over a year, she and her instructor had used increasing amounts of compulsion to force the dog to sit straight.

A quick observation showed that the dog moved with his entire body bent slightly to the right, and his tail did not hang straight but over his right hock. Naturally, when he sat, he was unable to sit straight - he couldn't even walk in a straight line.

I found it shocking that not once did the handler or the instructor take the time to really look at the dog - the answer was there all along. The dog was doing his very best, but had a real, physical limitation that prevented him from achieving the goal set for him by his handler.

Take the time to observe your dog carefully and often. Like us, dogs change, have off days, injure themselves and get confused. If you are observant about your dog's capabilities and limitations, you can make informed decisions.

Assumptions about a dog's understanding or capabilities, unless confirmed by careful observation of the dog himself, can lead to training problems, undermine or destroy your relationship with the dog, and in some cases, are tantamount to cruelty.

## Is Your Dog Getting Stupider?

by Fringilla Viverr

Discovery News

Dogs are now so dependent upon people that they fail certain basic intelligence tests that wolves and wild dogs ace, according to new research.

The findings provide evidence that humans, through domestication of canines, have caused dogs to lose their non-social problem-solving skills. The loss in skills appears to be "hardwired" genetically into dogs, helping to explain why homeless dogs struggle to survive. "Often feral dogs survive by taking advantage of human leftovers or domestic livestock," lead author Bradley Philip Smith told Discovery News, adding that the "leftovers" could be things like garbage scrounged from dumps or the occasional food handouts.

"It would take a lot of generations of successful dogs to start fostering any such cognitive abilities required for survival in the wild," Smith, a researcher in the School of Psychology at the University of South Australia, added. For the study, accepted for publication in the journal *Animal Behavior*, he and colleague Carla Litchfield put domesticated dogs and dingoes through a problem-solving test known as "the detour task."

"Dingoes are also domesticated dogs, but through many generations, they have adapted to life in the Australian outback. As a result, dingoes have evolved more "wild" features and instincts that distinguish them from other dogs. The detour task assesses spatial problem-solving abilities because it requires the animal subjects to travel around a transparent barrier to obtain a reward, which in this case was a bowl of food. The barrier here was a V-shaped fence with detour doors that either swung inward or outward.

The food bowl was placed inside or just outside the intersection point of the "V" barrier, while each subject on the opposing side of the barrier. The test runs were all conducted at the Dingo Discovery Center in Victoria, Australia. All of the dingoes found the food reward in about 20 seconds, taking proper advantage of the detour doors whenever possible. Domesticated dogs, on the other hand, looked puzzled and confused. They pawed at the fence, dug at it, and even barked, likely out of frustration and to call for help.

Prior research determined that wolves, like dingoes, ace this test. "Wolves will outperform dogs on any problem-solving tasks that are non-social," Smith said. "Dogs are great at social tasks -- communicating with humans, using humans as tools, learning from humans via observation -- whereas wolves are much better at general problem solving." He said few cognitive studies have been performed on wolves and other wild canids, but the handful that have been done suggest wolves are better than domesticated dogs at working independently and at using tools, such as ropes.

Rob Appleby, a researcher in the Wildlife-Human Ecology and Behavior Research Lab at Griffith University, told Discovery News that he agrees with the conclusions and found the latest evidence to be "compelling. (The new study) suggests that there may be cognitive differences between wild and domestic canids in terms of how each might approach solving such a problem," he said, "potentially relating to their differing evolutionary histories."

## Should pet owners be jailed if their dogs kill?

A News24.com survey revealed the following statistics!

23% (3,080) voted:

**Yes, they should be held accountable**

12% (1,549) voted:

**No, they can't be blamed for the animal's actions**

65% (8,671) voted:

**Depends on circumstances....**

**What is your vote????**

## To Tug or Not to Tug – That is the Question.

By Mellissa Franks

Somewhere, 30 years ago, someone got the idea that tug-of-war games created aggressive behaviors in dogs. Since most behavior problems back then were attributed to "dominance," and professionals didn't have the understanding of aggression that they do today, it stands to reason that they believed any game in which the goal was to gain possession of a toy from a human would cause the dog to "become dominant". There was also a time when it was believed that birthmarks were the sign of witches.

Fortunately for dogs (and women with birthmarks), we are out of the dark ages. We now have a greater understanding of the causes of aggressive behaviors than ever before. And tug-of-war is not one of them. In fact, tug of war is an excellent reward in dog training. Top canine competitors use tug as a reward in their training. If you watch closely, you will see many agility dogs get rewarded with a game of tug at the end of their run.

In 2002, a study was done to determine whether or not playing tug increased the incidence of aggressive or "dominant" behaviors. The researchers concluded that tug games had no negative effects on the relationship between the dog and human. Tug-of-war is a fantabulous training and behavior exercise for teaching impulse control to your dog. Over-arousal can turn into aggression (one example is leash-reactivity), so a dog that can learn self-control during times of high arousal, such as a game of tug-of-war, is a dog that is able to calm down quickly. It is important for all dogs, large and small, to learn proper impulse-control.

Tug of war rules include:

- Tug is not played with a dog that has exhibited possessive behaviors over toys or is a resource guarder
- Control the game, control the dog:
- The human always starts the game.
- The human always ends the game.
- If the game becomes too exited - the game stops! It can be started again after a "cooling off" period of a minute or two.

- The dog should only take the toy on a command of "Take it", "Tug it," "Get it," or other command other than "Okay"
- Dog must not take or re-take the toy without command.
- The dog must learn "Out", "Drop" or "Give" on command.
- If the human says "Out", "Drop" or "Give" and the dog does not comply, the human drops the toy and walks away from the dog.
- If the dog's teeth put any pressure on the human during the game, the human says "Ow!", drops the toy and walks away.

**The human never chases the dog to get the toy back. "WAIT!"** you're saying. "If you drop the toy and walk away, the dog wins!" What does the dog win? **A toy that you no longer want.**

Take this test: If your dog is minding his own business, chewing on one of his toys and you walk across the room, pick up another toy that he had no interest in and start making exciting sounds and playing with the toy. Your dog will probably run across the room, abandoning the old toy and start dancing with anticipation for the fun, exciting toy you have in your hand. The dog wants what you want. If you don't want it anymore, it quickly loses value. By dropping the toy and walking away, you are depriving the dog of the continued game of tug, which is much more fun than a limp toy that no one wants anymore.

Most of the time, the dog will either follow you, presenting the toy for further play, or will quickly lose interest in the toy. Without your cooperation, the dog cannot tug alone!

## Cat Year Conversion

Converting between cat years and human years isn't as simple as using a factor of 7 (as some people erroneously think with dogs, and sometimes cats).

The main reason is that cats mature quickly in the first couple of years of life. To convert cat age to an equivalent human age, an accepted method is to add 15 years for the first year of life. Then add 10 years for the second year of life. After that, add 4 years for every cat year.

This means that by year two, a cat has matured to about the same as a 25 year old human. So it isn't terribly complex, but you would have to do some figuring on paper or in your head. That's where this cat years calculator comes in handy.

1-month-old kitten = 6-month-old human baby  
 3-month-old kitten = 4-year-old child  
 6-month-old kitten = 10 human years old  
 8-month-old kitten = 15-year-old human  
 1-year-old cat has reached adulthood, the equivalent of 18 human years  
 2 human years = 24 cat years  
 4 human years = 35 cat years  
 6 human years = 42 cat years  
 8 human years = 50 cat years  
 10 human years = 60 cat years  
 12 human years = 70 cat years  
 14 human years = 80 cat years  
 16 human years = 84 cat years

A few interesting facts: the longest-living cat was 34 years old according to some sources. The Siamese and the Manx breeds are the longest-living cats on average. It has also been proven that keeping your cat indoors typically doubles its lifespan!

# Resource Guarding.

By Deborah Flick

Resource guarding, biting, and on-leash reactivity to other dogs are typical offenses that pepper the rap-sheet of so-called “red-zone” dogs, dogs that allegedly are attempting to dominate people or other dogs with displays of aggression.

## **Difficult, Aggressive Dogs Need Strong Training. (Really?)**

John Visconti shares his story about rehabilitating and training Pepper, a dog with all of the above afflictions, and more. All too often the offenses of resource guarding, biting, and dog-dog aggression are viewed through the lens of “dominance.”

This perspective typically leads dog handlers to take an adversarial stance toward the dog they are ostensibly trying to help. A contest of wills, masquerading as rehabilitation and training, ensues. Just take a spin through cyberspace and you’ll readily find videos of dog handler’s trying to “shock” dogs out of food guarding, and claiming to cure another dog’s reactivity to dogs by “strangling” him until he collapses. Unfortunately, this sort of aggressive dog handling (I refuse to call it either rehabilitation or training.) that relies on aversive punishments is practiced by many handlers. Most of us can find them in our very own communities.

Thankfully, there is another way. In fact, within the domain of positive dog rehabilitation and training, there are many ways to treat resource guarding, biting when touched, and dog-dog aggression. Join John as he uses smarts, compassion, and science-based methods to help Pepper feel more comfortable in her own skin, and learn skills for navigating her world.

Pepper is now a Relaxed and joyful Dog. Surprisingly, especially since Pepper had bitten me at the shelter over a pig’s ear, and given the fact that I’ve always assumed guarding to be a fixed action pattern, her guarding issues vanished within a week or so. She wasn’t a food bowl or location guarder. She was an object guarder. So we worked on trades of low value items for higher value ones. Once confident, I began to ask other people to do so as well. Today, she’ll gladly give up even the most treasured objects to anyone.

## Body Touch Sensitivity

For Pepper body touch reactivity was so severe that I couldn’t touch her hindquarters and neither could her veterinarians. The shelter veterinarian as well as my veterinarian both insisted that she wear a muzzle for examinations. In fact, her initial shelter examination report states “Dog would not allow examination of hind quarters.” Desensitizing Pepper to touch was the plan I would touch, reward. Touch closer to the charged area, reward again. I made sure not to proceed in a direct line to the trigger zone but instead, I’d move an inch closer, reward, then two inches back, reward, then two inches forward, reward This was the “cha cha” method of desensitizing. She was too smart not to know what I was up to if I approached the “danger” zone in a direct line pattern. On the rare occasions where she swung her head toward my hand, I reflexively responded with a joking tone “don’t be silly” but did not use a punishment tone – just a casual matter of fact voice...

Muzzle wearing at the vet’s is now officially a thing of the past. During a visit to the veterinarian a year later, he drew blood twice, and did a full body exam including emptying anal glands.

My veterinarian marveled at how much she had changed and as a result has referred training customers to me. Imagine that. Pepper is so well behaved that she gets me referrals.

## On-leash Reactivity to Other Dogs

Pepper’s on-leash reactivity toward other dogs was solved with basic, foundational skills.

As I mentioned earlier, her reactivity was very strong. Soon after I adopted her, she responded so violently to seeing another dog that was approximately 150 feet away, or more, that the force of her lunge into my leg completely tore the cartilage in my knee, which required surgery.

Before we took to the streets we worked on a “watch” cue. I wanted to have a management tool in place. From “watch” she learned “heads up.” “Head’s up” is nothing more than a moving “watch” cue.

While she performed her watch cue perfectly, the problem was, it left us stuck in one spot. So if we encountered another dog while on a walk, as the other owner was saying, "Oh, it's ok, my dog loves other dogs!" we were a sitting target as they approached. So, "heads up" became our way of high tailing it out of Dodge.

For the last part of the process, we spent many weekends in a local PETCO parking lot. At first, we systematically desensitized from the far end of the parking lot. Simply, the second a dog appeared, she received a food reward. After a few weeks of this, we moved to an operant mode. If she saw a dog, I immediately cued "watch" and then rewarded. Today, the sight of another dog is a cue for an auto-watch. I no longer need to ask her to watch me. We have a scorecard on the refrigerator. I keep track of how many dogs we've passed on walks without showing reactivity. We are currently at 37 occurrences!

While at the shelter, one of Pepper's fosters commented "You had better be careful about having people over to your home. Pepper barks wildly and charges. She's telling you, 'I don't want this person in our home and you had better listen to me.' Yeah right!!

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Remember if you want to place a classified advertisement in the ABC Newsletter please contact Louise at [louthomp@mweb.co.za](mailto:louthomp@mweb.co.za) All proceeds go to The NDDF The Dog and Donkey Foundation. This organization conducts sterilization's, and provides veterinary care in the poorest areas from Gauging to Namaqualand! A worthy cause indeed.

**THATS ALL FOR NOW FOLKS.**

**Please do not hesitate to contact me with any news, views ideas or articles.**

**All comments welcome!**

**Cheers for now**

**Lou**

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**PLEASE NOTE:**

The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily express the opinions of the ABC of SA, and should be construed as the opinions of the said authors.