

Module 2 : Why Learn About Animal Behaviour?

- A generalised reason for learning animal behaviour
- Six in-depth reasons to learn about animal behaviour
- You will discover the possibility of re-domesticating animals
- Is pet fashion really appropriate?

All animals, even humans have certain behaviours, mannerisms and emotions that create individual personalities and identities. Learning about animal behaviour ensures you recognise the mannerisms, emotion and traits you observe in your pet.

This module will cover the following:

- General and in-depth reasons for learning about animal behaviour
- The possibility of re-domesticating animals
- The appropriateness of pet fashion
- The selection of pets

2.1 Generalised



Understanding your pet or the pets you train is easier when you learn about animal behaviour.

Animals have certain instincts, ways of learning, and methods of teaching offspring that you can understand and adapt to have a better relationship with your pet. Like humans, all animals have individual personalities. No two cats, dogs, rabbits, snakes, birds or other pets are exactly alike. Consider twins for a moment. Even twins have different personalities, heights, appearances, likes and dislikes. To have a better relationship with any animal you work with or live with, you need to determine the personality, mannerisms, emotions and behaviour of that animal, in order to train them and enjoy spending time with them.

There are various components to animal behaviour.

Animal play - is a type of animal behaviour. Play mode is where you can see some entertaining aspects of your pet's life. There is also learning mode, where your pet is observing, imitating, associating, imprinting and assessing their cultural group. Evolution states that there are certain innate behaviours an animal has adopted as they have evolved. These traits are often about the survival of the species, including hunting, hiding and procreating.

Training against the instincts of your pet will be difficult; however, if you observe and understand these traits, it will be easier to work towards the final goal. Learning mode (Module 1) - is about associative learning, imprinting, cultural learning, and teaching in a method your pet can understand. It all relates to animal behaviour.

Once you understand the natural instincts and traits your pet has, you can focus on the elements you want to keep and help a young pet learn various skills. For example, you could have an issue with your cat getting on the kitchen worktops, or your dog eating shoes or digging in the rubbish to tear it apart. You do not want this behaviour to remain, but unless you observe, study prior animal adaptations and figure out how your pet will learn best, you will not be able to curb this natural behaviour.

A cat can be taught to wait by their food bowl, eat from a certain location and not steal from their fellow cats. A dog can be trained to be a companion or a service animal, but the first step is to learn about animal behaviour. Observational learning - is where the animal learns to observe and then imitate. Intelligent animal species observe and learn. Insight learning - encourages the animal to solve a problem.

For example, you can place a piece of food inside a cage and leave the door lightly unlocked. The dog or cat will try to open the door with their noses or paws and get at the food. Habituation and sensitisation are the simplest learned behaviours that involve changing a habit when it doesn't give

any benefits. This is a highly adaptive behaviour as it changes with reward perception. Sensitisation learning makes the animal react more strongly to repeated stimuli.

2.2 Domestication

Approximately 12,000 years ago the world saw the first dog, a trained companion that was no longer exhibiting all the traits of wolves.

How did this domestication begin? Why choose the wolf? What about the domestication of various animals in more recent years?

Chimps, monkeys, parrots, cockatiels, panthers, tigers, elephants, and many other animals have been domesticated.

Some animals are easier to domesticate or adapt to the human way of life than others.

Exotic pet owners who have raised panther cubs find that a mature panther is not as easy to take care of as a true house cat. It is because panthers are not as adaptable to the human world. There are many reserves and refuges for such unwanted pets that people tried to domesticate. Yet, many have tried domestication because it has worked for several eras from the first dog to the cat 3,000 years ago.

Domestication is all about symbiosis. Will the animal receive something it needs from the human, in order to make an alliance work? If there is a possibility of a symbiotic relationship, what traits are necessary to make a good match?

Inarguably not all wolves could have been domesticated. Wolves are still running in the wild and enjoying freedom, but there were a few that had traits desirable to humans that made it possible to eventually breed a new species.

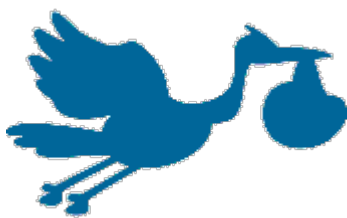
Although ethology and the early concept of animal psychology began with Aristotle, the premise came about over 12,000 years ago. During the Stone Age, it was recognised that animal behaviour could create a complementary relationship between wolves and humans. For example, a little child finding a toad, turtle or another animal in nature, and bringing it home, has the desire to keep that animal as a pet. The child will try to feed the animal, take care of it, and make it happy enough to live in a new, contained environment.

Due to the early studies of animal species, with books and online data, anyone can research how to take care of a certain type of animal. The data usually includes natural instincts, habitat, food needs,

breeding and trainability. From these guides, a new pet owner can determine how easy it will be to help their new pet learn proper behaviour in their new domesticated environment.

Another example is an abused animal. Anyone who has knowledge of animal psychology and the heart and desire to take care of that animal, can bring it home and help it to live a good life. A feral dog could be re-domesticated when it receives the love it needs from a human hand.

2.3 Breeding



How are two animals compatible for breeding?

How do breeders know what animals to bring together in order to breed them? How does natural cross-breeding of species in the wild occur? There have been records of two dissimilar species breeding and producing a new species. Often, the species are linked closely enough genetically but still result in a different species. Outliers even occur in nature.

The main focus in animal behaviour is not to examine these outliers, but to understand how you can start a breeding programme or breed two animals to have offspring that you will keep.

Compatibility

You have certain traits you look for in a mate as a human being. Your pets will do the same. It is in the pet's natural instincts to breed, but that does not mean there is not a set of desired traits. Lions form a pride with one male lion. This male is the strongest, capable of fighting off other male lions and protecting their pride. All females in that pride mate with him and not others. It is the instinct of choosing the fittest mate.

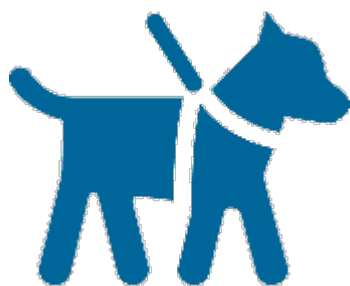
Choosing Traits

For breeding to occur you will need two pets that are compatible. You also want to make certain they have the desired traits. Like earlier humans who bred wolves, you are going to breed certain traits based on why you want the pet. A show dog or cat is bred to be pure of any impurities, possess the correct temperament and have a perfect appearance.

Breeding is partly about the appearance of your pet, but emotions and personality have more to do with animal psychology.

By observing the two animals you intend to mate, you can determine if the appropriate traits are present. Once mating occurs, it is up to genetics to create the results you see in a litter of puppies, kittens, or other animals. Unless you have the resources for genetic mapping for breeding, you will have to use animal psychology together with the appearance of the animals.

2.4 Therapeutic Value



The therapeutic benefit of having a pet can never be overstated.

Interacting with pets is known to be therapeutic in several ways:

- It reinforces empathy and provides motivation
- Pet interactions reduce anxiety by having a calming effect
- Animals make us happier, less bored and less prone to loneliness
- Pets are known to decrease depression

Choosing Therapeutic Benefits

Here are a few of the most common therapeutic benefits we have animals for:

- Companionship
- Assisting with a disability
- Assisting with PTSD
- Assisting with ADHD
- Epilepsy

Animals can assist with a wide array of disabilities. Individuals who are blind or deaf have found many advantages to having a pet. However, in the last decade, there has been a substantial rise in the use of animals as a form of therapy. Now there are dogs and cats trained to live in assisted living facilities with long-term care patients with dementia, cancer, Alzheimer's and other very debilitating diseases.

Individuals with epilepsy who have enlisted the help of therapy dogs are able to live fuller lives. Furthermore, certain breeds of dogs have been trained to detect chemical changes in their owners and are able to warn of an oncoming attack, such as an epileptic seizure.

Some studies have found that animals can also detect when their human companion is ill. To benefit from this type of therapeutic value, the owner has to be able to read the change in their animal's behaviour.

Assessing an Animal for Therapeutic Traits

Not all animals are able to function as therapy animals. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect all animals to be able to learn this type of behaviour. This means that through animal behaviour studies you can learn to distinguish which pets are going to be able to provide a therapeutic benefit.

Instincts are the first area to examine. What is the animal's natural instinct? Is your pet more apt to sit with you? If you are upset or worried, does your pet notice and stay close trying to help you feel better? Is your pet's instinct to continue playing or is their behaviour consistent no matter what your mood?

A pet that makes a good therapy pet is one that sees the nuances of change within you and reacts in a therapeutic manner.

Training and learning capabilities are two other areas to observe and assess.

Is your pet capable of learning new things with ease? Do they show an aptitude for certain therapeutic needs? Has training of new concepts gone well?

Therapy pets undergo initial pet training, such as sit commands, and then obtain further training to become therapy pets. Assessing their ability during early training and the skills they display as young animals, assures you of their skills and abilities to train for therapeutic purposes. A cat that enjoys a walk does not necessarily like car rides, therefore, it is about choosing a pet based on more than one personality characteristic.

A highly strung cat that is in constant play mode may enjoy the exercise of a walk, but going on a car ride and sitting as a companion to anyone, whether it is their owner or another human, may not be possible. It is important to assess certain personality traits of a pet. A pet that is not easily panicked often remains calm no matter what is happening, and approaching all humans with love is a good example of desired therapy traits. A pet that is very anxious is easily scared or is unlikely 'to cuddle' when the owner is worried, will most likely not make a good therapy pet, as it will not adapt to the training required.

FACT



Dogs can be beneficial additions to the lives of autistic children. Trained dogs can lessen the child's tendency to aggressiveness and give them a sense of independence

Source: drtolesvet.com

2.5 Anthropomorphism



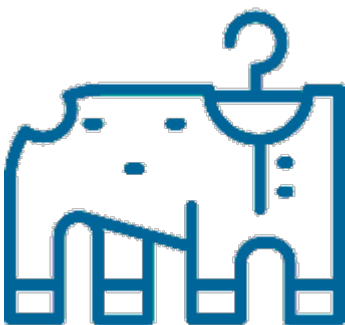
Anthropomorphism is the assignment of human characteristics to animals.

This is extremely common in pet owners, who often try to ascribe human motivations to their pet's behaviour. For example, they may claim their dog feels guilty after doing something wrong, like knocking a bin over to eat its contents. This is simply not the case; the dog just associates the knocked-over bin with the owner's anger, and this is not the same as guilt as a human would experience it.

To understand animal behaviour, it is essential to put aside any notion that they are like humans or have the same thoughts or needs. Anthropomorphism can be harmful, as it stops you from truly understanding animals and treating them in the way that they deserve. That is not to say that you shouldn't try to empathise with animals - simply be mindful that they are a different species.

Animals are animals, and to anthropomorphise them is to do them a disservice. It is far better to learn about the characteristic traits of a species than to try to humanise them. For example, learning how to read a particular animal's body language is crucial to understanding how it is feeling.

2.6 Pet Fashions



Is pet attire really comfortable for animals? In the last couple of decades, it has become a trend

to dress up animals in specially made pet attire. However, do our pets really like it or is it something they have been trained to accept? Let's consider horses for a moment.

The concept of breaking a horse is to show the horse who is the leader, in order to put a bit in their mouth, a harness around their face and ears, and a saddle on their back. A more acceptable method is showing the horse that there is a symbiotic relationship to accepting the harness and saddle, where there are love and respect between human and horse.

Some horses are keener than others to be saddled and trained. Lead training with a dog and cat begins early to ensure the pet understands the weight, feel and control of the lead. If you start too late, the pet may resist moving once the harness or collar is on. By utilising early training, when the pet has yet to learn too much or understand its natural instincts, it is possible to train the acceptance of a harness and pet fashions.

Animal behaviour studies conducted by you will help you determine if your pet will accept pet fashions as something more than training. You will learn to assess their personality, instincts, and likes and dislikes. However, dressing up a pet can sometimes be uncomfortable. It is important to assess the benefit of the item of clothing for the animal, rather than just dressing it up as a fashion statement.

2.7 Choosing a Pet

How are you going to choose a pet?

Have you ever brought home a pet from a shelter or pet shop, only to find that it is hard to train?

Learning about animal psychology and behaviour specific to breed will help when choosing a pet. Not only will this prove to be beneficial for the pet owner, but for the animal itself.

For example, if you already have a 10-year-old dog or cat, the shelter might suggest adopting an older dog or cat, rather than a puppy or a kitten. This can help with acceptance by your current pet. It is very important to take into consideration the current domestic situation as well as the behaviour of specific breeds.

Here are some questions current pet owners can ask:

- Has this pet ever been exposed to another species other than humans?
- How has this pet interacted with others in its species or a different species?
- Is this pet sedate or active?

- How easy was it to train this pet you own?
- Is your pet lonely?

Studying their behaviour will help you determine the answers. For instance, a pet whines, much like a child whines for attention. You might have tried everything from setting up a place they can sleep near you, to playing with them and attending to their needs. If nothing stops this behaviour and they are a single pet, they may be lonely. You cannot be around constantly and you may find your pet shows they miss your absences and any inattention. It may indicate loneliness that could be helped with a companion pet.

Assessing a potential new pet

Most shelters and pet stores allow you to spend time with an animal before taking it home. This is to help determine the relationship between the animal and the potential owner. Sometimes, this brief interaction may not be enough to decipher the compatibility of the pet and the potential owner.

Many shelters will do background checks and various other assessments to determine compatibility before allowing for the adoption of their animals. This not only ensures that the new home is appropriate for the pet but also makes certain that there is compatibility.

Summary

Animal behaviour is about studying the instincts of animals in order to decipher how they learn, play, and teach their offspring or group members. Several reasons exist for learning animal behaviour, including understanding domestication, breeding, therapeutic value, and choosing the best pet for your household.

All of these topics were discussed in detail, as well as having a look at anthropomorphism, pet fashions, and whether animals truly enjoy wearing clothing or if it is something they accept based on training. For pet owners, becoming familiar with animal psychology is crucial in ensuring a happy pet.

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