



Photo courtesy M Crick

YOUR DOG'S MENTAL HEALTH

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Mental health is an accepted issue amongst human society but how often do owners of pets or kennels actually consider the mental health of their dog - for mental health is likely to explain many of the behavioural issues we as owners find hard to live with.

When I started reviewing this area of potential interest it was inadvertent. I had been asked to review a series of training books, and about the same time found some excellent sources of discounted new books and picked up three other titles. Dog psychology and behaviour didn't really interest me, I have a kennel of fifteen to twenty Clumbers with no major issues, they all come when called, all jump up in delight to see me, and are generally bonnie souls. Only two areas of interest really. One girl I found far too bossy, her dam is a doll to live with, but her granddam was a bit bossy too so I tended to think it was a genetic issue. The other issue is that I can take out really happy and bold pups to the show world, but as they progress through adolescence there seemed to be a possibility that several would end up as less than enthusiastic about the jaunt around the show ring yet were so desperate for the car trip.

And of course I recall discussing with one of Australia's leading dog trainers, Lea Cogley, some years ago that many of the issues people talk about just didn't manifest themselves in my kennels, she replied, "but Jan you expect a minimum standard of behaviour and don't make a song and dance about getting it" - wise words, yet until now I had no idea of the truth of them!

Training books continue to surprise me with the fact owner's dogs can't even be put on a lead and taken for a walk, really basic stuff to me, so I often just don't even think to open training book covers.

ANIMAL CRACKERS

Let me take you straight to the point, I have now read
Monks of New Skete HOW TO BE YOUR DOG'S BEST FRIEND 1st edition
Jan Fennell THE DOG LISTENER
Stephen Budiansky THE TRUTH ABOUT DOGS
Kaye Hargraeves TRAINING WITH A FRIENDLY FACE and three other volumes by her in the same series or vein

and watched two of Karen Prior's Clicker Training videos and one about Linda Tellington's Ttouch programme, and browsed through Ian Dunbar DOG BEHAVIOR

it is a small selection and there are many, many other 'classic' titles out there, but I have read and reviewed all these titles recently.

Undisputedly, Jan Fennell has brought harmony and new life to a pretty well behaved bunch of Clumbers. And the most remarkable thing is that her techniques bring instant results. Instant. And it isn't hard work. And guess what, we all know the techniques and we all used to try to do it.

Fennell's technique involves taking the leadership of the pack back to yourself, she uses the alpha principle, but without the bullying that seems to be apparent in so many dog training books. In fact, over the years I have been completely put off the concept of Alpha Leadership, because of the way the books in the past have presented the concept to me. These earlier texts left me with the impression that the only way to take the alpha position in a pack was by aggressive bullying, throwing the dog to ground on his back and bellowing down his throat, see Monks of New Skete HOW TO BE YOUR DOG'S BEST FRIEND 1st edition, later editions they have toned down this technique. The concept irritated and alienated me, never worked instantly, so I avoided the technique. I remember reading recently, a behaviourist from the 1960s, and I am sorry I can't remember his name, who pointed out that a leader in the pack, led by example, not by bullying.

So having told you a little of where I am heading let me drag you through my experiences.

I picked up Budiansky with glee, but I must admit I had him confused with another author with a similar name who had written one or two really interesting articles a decade or so earlier. First thing I noticed, that left me just a little apprehensive, was that he has written and published books about cat, horse, lion behaviour as well as dog behaviour, hmmm. Essentially he spends many, many pages pointing out that while the domesticated dog we know is derived from the wolf, he has also evolved and left much wolf-ness behind yet retaining a hard core of wolf needs and responses. It was a fascinating and interesting book, until page 211 where he tackles the show dog world and breeding, there Budiansky's lack of knowledge on the subjects was obvious and with such a lack of knowledge here how can I now trust what he writes in the first 210 pages. That said there are some really interesting and fascinating ideas to glean from those first 210 pages. (Page numbers refer to the Stepehn Budiansky *The Truth About Dogs* UK's Phoenix Paperback 4th impression 2003 ISBN 0 75381 322 X)

Page 77 Dogs that run to their owner's side and growl menacingly at an intruder are inevitably seen to be "protecting" the owner. But that is not what wolves are doing in such circumstances; they are rather seeking the protection, or at least the reassurance, that comes from proximity to a more dominant member of the pack.

Page 172 ... the seeming protectiveness of a dog toward his master in face of a territorial intruder; his is really the action of a coward seeking reassurance by sticking close to the dominant member of the pack (ie us) when encountering a fearful stimulus. This is another example of facilitated aggression: the dog feels emboldened by the demeanour of a more dominant member of the pack to display an aggressiveness he might otherwise not dare. When a dog runs close to his master in the face of an external intrusion, he usually acts exactly like a puppy that will dash outward on a quick foray, bark furiously at something, and then dash back to the safety and comfort of the nest and littermates. No one would suggest that puppy was "protecting" his littermates under this circumstance. [my comment, ow I think a few would, particularly guard dog breeders, but in any case the dashing puppy has warned the littermates of potential danger] Many owners deliberately or unwittingly reinforce such behavior, either by deliberately encouraging what they see as a useful guard dog behavior or, just as effectively, by unwittingly petting and trying to "reassure" the dog that "it's just the mailman." Dogs take the nice tone of voice as reinforcing praise for their barking, snarling, and leaping on the door.

Page 93 The Bar Harbor researchers found that there were substantial breed differences in the propensity to bark and in the number of barks emitted per session, and that both of these traits were clearly inherited, though probably independently.

Page 108 (on eye sight) ... they can focus on close objects only if they are no nearer than a foot or two. Anything closer than that will unavoidably be a blur. That may explain why dogs generally try to sniff or touch objects at close range: they simply cannot see them very well. [And my comment, with that hesitation often seen on approaching a new object once they are within a foot or two] ... A study of about two hundred dogs by veterinarian Christopher J. Murphy and his colleagues found the average canine refractive error to be pretty close to normal (within a quarter of a diopter off perfect, an amount that would not provoke any person to get glasses). Several breeds of sporting dogs, such as Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Labrador Retrievers, Cocker Spaniels, and Springer Spaniels, were on average a bit far sighted. But two-thirds of Rottweilers and half of German Shepherds and Miniature Schnauzers in this study were significantly myopic, by more than 1.5 diopters.

Page 180 Reading the literature on all of the canine behavioral problems dogs can develop can make one rather paranoid about raising a puppy at all ... The good news is that most of these potential ills in dogs are self-correcting, at least in dogs owned by people possessed of a minimal amount of self-respect and a refusal to be pushed around, taken advantage of, and have their minute-by-minute schedule set a member of another species.

Page 193 Although practitioners of judgement-neutral therapy have an ideological and economic interest in maintaining that their clients are not to blame for their dogs' behavioral problems, solid scientific evidence from several studies shows that in a significant portion of cases the owner's personality really is the problem. In fact, some studies suggest that owners of problem dogs are definitely more likely to be neurotic or anxiety-ridden than owners of normal dogs, and were so before the dog entered the picture. [My comment, ok the author has extensive bibliographic references but none linked here to support these claims, actually his next paragraph goes on to ridicule Roger Mugford - an author and practitioner of great standing but I haven't read his material, there is some reference to this style of research on p196-7]

page 195 Many owners of problem dogs don't realize that a dog that jumps up and put his paws or head on your shoulder is not hugging you with an affectionate embrace; he is asserting his dominance, and owners who do take it as a sign of affection have just lost a dominance encounter. [my comment, a 'hairy issue' as the same behaviourists will no doubt point out the submissive behaviour of the pup snuggling into the lower lip of mum]

Page 199, some destructive dogs are just plain bored. Dogs need a certain amount of social interaction, running, chewing, digging, and other dog like things each day, and if they do not get the chance to exercise these basic instincts in a natural way they will create ways to exercise them in an unnatural way.

Page 202 ... they have simply found that being scared pays. They may begin by whining at thunder. When the owner responds by comforting and reassuring the dog with petting and a soft tone of voice, the dog starts to escalate his fearful response to trembling or other more dramatic acts. Dogs that learned to become afraid of thunder may then start to show the same fears to rain, and cloudy days, then even to changes in barometric pressure. The best prevention is to simply ignore the dog when it exhibits signs of fear towards noises. The only cure once this problem pattern is established is a prolonged course of the desensitization in which a recording of thunder is played starting at very low volume and gradually increased, with the dog praised and rewarded at each stage when it reacts without fear to the sound. (People who have used this technique emphasize that it is important to first run a test to make sure the dog views the recordings as the real thing – that is, it is necessary to play the recording at a high volume and see if the dog reacts the way he does to an actual thunderstorm.) Hunting dogs that are afraid of gunshots have been successfully treated in a similar fashion, by firing a starter pistol that is first muffled inside a series of nested cardboard boxes, and then removing one box at a time, every couple of days to make the sound gradually louder. But multiple training sessions a day are acquired, and the success rate is not terribly great once fearful are well established. Hunting dogs are best habituated to gunshots from puppyhood, when it is easier to establish good lifetime habits.

Page 236 A lot of the problems with dogs these days, after all, has ultimately to do with the unrealistic expectations we have about them. It is not just that we are disappointed when dogs don't act as we imagine they should; but our unrealistic expectations actually induce many of the odd and troubling behavioral problems that dogs are plagued with in contemporary human society. This is an ill that, at least in principle, is far more easily corrected than are defective genes, or inbred populations, or abnormal hormone levels. All it takes is a matter of understanding and acceptance, after all - not of trying to remake reality in conformity to a preconceived romantic ideal. We are happier when we see dogs for what they are, and dogs are happier, too.

Anyway in essence Budiansky wasn't about dog training per se, more an overview of dog history, evolution, etc, but he is an overwhelming proponent of the alpha concept and wolf instinct, despite constantly stating the domestic dog has evolved from the wolf of the wild.

I read, well selectively chose chapters of the Monks of New Skete at about this time, and I see their newer editions have been rewritten with a change of technique in many cases, so my reaction to them may be dogmatic in light of their new editions. The edition I read was very much physical dominance - not something I am happy to practice on a spaniel, and I would suspect potentially too confronting for a macho "he" dog of the bigger and muscular breeds. However I did try the chuck under the chin and eye contact on my bossy girl when she blighted her reputation at a show by flying out at a dog showing the classic 'dominance' signals of strutting and bearing and invasion of our personal space, the effect was half hearted, well no more than quarter hearted and not long lasting and not the magic wand. The under chin chuck has gone from

my repertoire. And I am afraid I have no interest in reading the Monks' new writings.

CLICKER TRAINING

OK, the buzz word has been clicker training for some little time now, so I borrowed a couple of Prior videos, not really expecting to get much from them. In fact I don't think I tried anything. The concept of clicker training involves a 'training' aid, the clicker, and the examples in the video didn't really relate to my lifestyle or interests and getting the click timed well still involved food reward, and I'll give my thoughts on food rewards in the section where I discuss Hargreaves where I also touch on the basics of clicker training.

TELLINGTON TOUCH

The Tellington video I got solely with the 'shy' puppies in mind, but come to think of it I haven't used the circular motion massage on the pups at a show, but on 1-2 year olds that have developed that adolescent introduced ring awareness. It works, and the dogs love it and relax fairly well and is certainly a technique to have up your sleeve in the longterm. Tellington's leading correction techniques for un-supergluing a dog from your legs, I can see working but are human intensive and I feel maybe rely too much on aids. Anyway I still feel the video at least is a must see.

AUSTRALIA'S AUNTY KAYE

I progressed to Kaye Hargreaves who writes of positive reinforcement training techniques and these books were directed to the dog at home rather than the trial dog. Yes, the techniques work, but I must be honest I found them hard work. Hargreaves uses a combination of clicker training and food reward - I don't want to use food reward - when I am out and about I won't necessarily have food in my pocket, and anyway my pockets aren't big enough for food rewards for 20 dogs - I know I have been there and tried that in the past. My rewards are a kind voice and varying degrees of a great and jolly rubdown, and because my dogs exercise (and live in) groups I need the control of individuals within a group and of course the group overall. So I experimented following Hargreaves 'shaping' concept. The shaping concept is based on clicker training, that is to tease, lure or just wait for the moment the right (what you want) behaviour to occur, then reward with a click (having pre-trained your dog that a 'click' means that's right and VERY soon I'll give you a food (or other) reward), and so build up to the overall result required. For example from the stand to the drop via the calm down, sit, and drop mechanism. The clicker training has been shown to be very useful for distance exercises, you can give immediate feedback even with your dog on the other side of the oval when the dog does what you asked or expected. So the challenge I took up was free standing for the show ring, and yes it worked, and yes I could

do it one on one with an individual dog in a group exercise period, and yes it worked for dogs that jiggled on the grooming table; but honestly I found it exhausting to be constantly not physically guiding a head or whatever and also sprouting out 'yes' each time the dog chose to move the head (or whatever) towards the position, or the position, I wanted. In any case, I still had individually 'trained' dogs and no great improvement in Miss Bossyboots. I've tended to let the Hargreave ideas drop.

DUNBAR

One of my interests has been the development of puppies, when they first hear, when they first yawn, when they first bark, when they first wag their tail and so on. Most books, and certainly least of all 'breeding' books cover this fascinating area, so I was rather delighted to see Dunbar touched on the research of others. He of course covers mature dog behaviour and it is this region I am afraid he 'lost' me for what he writes of in places is so not what I know and experience myself. Turning to the tail (of interest for Australia is in the midst of a move to ban tail docking and I don't fancy the non-show bred macho breeds being left undocked), Dunbar wrote

Tail. The main difference between the tail position of dogs and wolves is that a dog has a naturally curly tail, and the straight tail positions commonly seen in wolves are much rarer in domestic dogs. Some breeds of dogs have their tails docked as part of breed requirements, such as the Doberman Pinscher. Others have permanently coiled tails, such as the Spitz and Samoyed.

Well it seems tail set and carriage have the same 'visual' effect with Dunbar, I know of plenty of dogs with 'straight' tails 'high set' not an uncommon appearance amongst wolves on the documentaries either, and anyway most spitz breeds can uncoil and relax their tails, and quite frankly the gentle wave to the dog's tail carried relaxed surely isn't that different to the wolves, at least the wolves of the documentaries. I think also Dunbar's rather shallow description of the bitch ready to mate left me a bit cool, he wrote

The tail is deviated to one side, so as to expose the vulvar region, and periodically it may flap from side to side like a metronome.

What a tame quiet bitch, my girls hork their tails up and wave down in an arc to the side and if the male is 'mucking around' she may twitch it over to the other, up, back over, and so on, certainly not in a lacksadaisical or metronome (regular movement) and vertical and cast across her own rump also occur.

AHHH...

That said there are excellent pictures of mating and nursing and 'schoolyard' dog communication. However I wasn't inspired to read Dunbar on training, may be I've missed something of great import, but at least I have found a truly interesting and USEFUL book in Fennell!

I'd bought Fennell on pure spec, based on the concept Monty Roberts, although a little overblown in handling unhandled horse and getting them under saddle within the hour, hey each one I've seen has a head collar on it before he started, they

aren't as unhandled as all that these wonder converts. I was delighted to see Fennell had been involved in the show world with English Springers and she also had a number of dogs living with her, this was more my style, and I must admit she writes in a very easy to read fashion, unlike someone I met reading the book at the same time, I did manage to get some sleep each night by putting the book down.

The first five chapters were disappointing for me wanting instant input, yes Fennell describes how she has evolved in training and some of the episodes in her life that led her in this path, but heck lady, will you get to the point! She relates some of her own formal behaviourism studies and broaches wolf heritage albeit most of her observations are on documentaries and captive wolf communities. From chapter six we really get into it, and hey alpha doesn't need to mean being a bully, aggressive or physically dominating - it is just leadership by example, by establishing your personal space, you setting the programme, and you giving all the love an individual can need in a calmer and more civilised atmosphere!

Chapter six is "the" chapter, the following seventeen tend to deal with specific issues, see there are lots of way losing pack leader position to your dog which your dog can express this loss of 'leadership' in 'bad' ways, from problems eating, chewing, dog confrontations, noise phobias, over-protectiveness and so much more.

Revolution - and by Joe it works! And just about instantly and with little reinforcement, mind you a distraction (like a young nephew or a maimed arm can lead to challenges and reversions).

And the daft thing about all this is that I at least already knew or instinctively knew so much of this protocol. And so does my four year old nephew. Yet as adults we seem to spend so much time trying to wean the youngsters off their natural responses so that we just don't see what we are doing is wrong.

So now I have a BETTER kennel of happy, bonnie souls, that don't jump all over me, and are free of torment. Whereas I started with "a kennel of fifteen to twenty Clumber with no major issues, they all come when called, all jump up in delight to see me, are generally bonnie souls"

OK, so I suggest you get yourself a copy of Jan Fennell's THE DOG LISTENER, since then I have also read the smaller books* of Patricia McConnell (USA) with great relief, although her magnus opus THE OTHER END OF THE LEASH? was rather heavy going and not as rewarding. I have also managed to pick up, as an end of line, the book Kim Hazelet recommends Patricia Gail Burnham's PLAYTRAINING YOUR DOG, but haven't read it as yet (see "Clumbers" Sept 04). =

* Feeling Outnumbered? How to Manage and Enjoy Your Multi-Dog Household; How to Be the Leader of the Pack and Have Your Dog Love You For It; Puppy Primer =