

Thanks to George Wuerthner.

Holmes Rolston

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Subject:what we have known: domestication makes animals stupid (humans?)

Date:Tue, 6 Oct 2015 19:57:51 -0700

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Dogs lazy or perhaps dumb compared to their ancestor wolves, Oregon State University study finds

Waiting for human help is easy way out for dogs,
researcher suggests



An Oregon State University study reveals the persistence of wolves when compared to dogs. (Monique Udell/Oregon State University).

BY DIANE DIETZ

The Register-Guard

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When you call your dog your “fur baby,” you’re making a statement that’s deeper and truer than you may have realized.

That’s the upshot of a study conducted by Oregon State University assistant professor Monique Udell and published recently in a Royal Society journal called *Biology Letters*.

VIDEO

A wolf works to get a treat out of a food storage container. Udell conducted an experiment with 10 wolves, 10 pet dogs and 10 shelter dogs.

She gave each canine a sausage in a closed Tupperware bowl with a rope attached that — when pulled — would pop off the lid.

Each animal had two minutes to open the bowl.

Most of the wolves got with it, yanking on the rope until, within seconds, they opened the lid and gobbled up the treat.

Most of the dogs — distant cousins to the wolf — sniffed around the puzzle and then turned to the nearest human for help.

“Dogs don’t even tend to use that full two minutes,” Udell said. “There wasn’t a lot of trying to get food out of the box.”

When dogs parted from wolves on the evolutionary tree, about 27,000 years ago, they became domesticated.

“They are biologically, in many ways, very juvenile,” Udell said. “We see them like our babies and we treat them like our babies, so that’s how they end up acting.”

Dogs in America, especially, can be child-like and dependent. Pet owners often guide their dogs’ every response, from relieving themselves to obtaining food, Udell said.

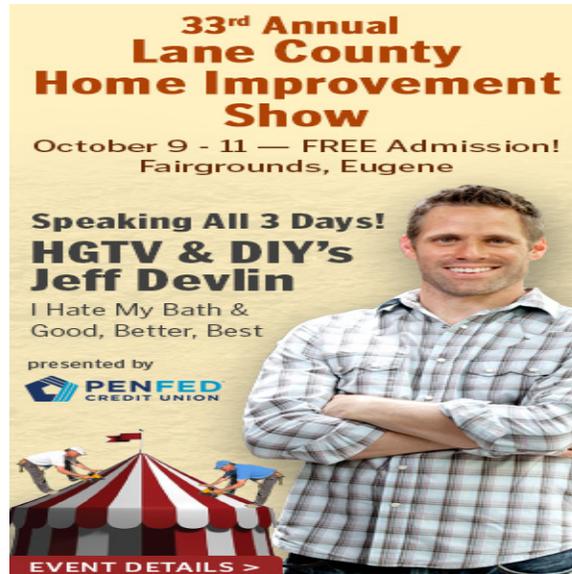
“We constantly refresh their memory about how they’re not supposed to get into things — especially without permission or encouragement from us first,” she said.

Some scientists say turning dogs into our “fur babies” has left them incapable of fending for themselves.

“I will go so far as to say that we teach our dogs to be stupid,” Clive Wynne, director of the Canine Science Collaboratory at Arizona State University, said in a New York Times story about Udell’s study.

Wolves, by contrast, think for themselves. Eight out of 10 solved Udell’s food puzzle right away, and the others persisted until they opened the containers.

Only two of the pet dogs — a standard poodle and a pit bull — ever got the containers open.



Four of the shelter dogs solved the puzzle, but only after they were encouraged to try by their caretakers.

Udell never got to the experimental phase of trying to encourage the wolves because every one of them solved the puzzle on their own.

“When they encounter a problem that can be solved independently, they will,” Udell said. “They’re more mature and more adult-like in that way.”

Sometimes the wolves’ self-reliance gets them in the news.

Earlier this month two wolves — OR-21 and her mate — were found dead in Wallowa County after they had helped themselves, a couple of months ago, to a meal of calf.

The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife is investigating the incident because the wolves were in an area where they are supposed to be protected.

“Wolves need to survive and seek out food on their own,” Udell said. “It’s necessary, right? It’s not like it can be avoided because nobody is going to provide for them. They have to maintain that behavior.”

The researcher doesn’t see her canine subjects as lacking in intelligence when they sit and wait for a human to solve their puzzles.

“I don’t think it’s necessarily a bad strategy at all, especially for pet dogs who want to be successful with us,” she said. “They really need us for their survival and success.”

The most successful individuals may not be the smart and diligent but, instead, the smart and lazy who find the most efficient way to get a job done — and, in the case of a dog, that means forming a productive social connection with a dog-loving human.

Wolves, on the other hand, tend to solve problems independently, but can also solve them socially — with human help — if that’s the best way to get what they want, Udell said.

Domesticated dogs, because of how they’ve been bred or socialized, have a smaller bag of tricks.

“If you give them an independent problem and they still choose the social response, you start to wonder — wait a minute — are they choosing the social response because that’s the best response, or are they just always choosing the social response,” Udell said. “That seems to be the case; by and large, they always choose the social response.”

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