

The Whole Dog Journal™



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A monthly guide to natural dog care and training

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF – Nancy Kerns
TRAINING EDITOR – Pat Miller
PUBLISHER – Timothy H. Cole
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR – Greg King

EDITORIAL OFFICE

E-MAIL: WDJEditor@gmail.com
ADDRESS: 1655 Robinson Street
Oroville, CA 95965

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

PHONE: (800) 829-9165
INTERNET: whole-dog-journal.com/cs
U.S. MAIL: PO Box 8535
Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535
CANADA: Box 7820 STN Main
London, Ontario N5Y 5W1

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Jocelyn Donnellon, (203) 857-3100

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Emotional Rescue

A blessing for those who help save lives.

BY NANCY KERNS

Allow me to take a moment to thank anyone and everyone who participates in or supports the rescue movement. I had an experience recently with some rescue folks whose efforts on behalf of a dog I am trying to help brought me quite literally to tears. I'm amazed at their commitment on behalf of a dog they haven't even met yet, on the word of some stranger who says it's a nice dog who deserves some extra help. It's astonishing.

Though I've long been aware of the rescue movement, I've had a mostly arms-length relationship with rescue people; all of my volunteer efforts over the past decade have been with shelters. Of course, shelters and rescues sometimes work together, and I've reached out to breed rescues a few times when there was a purebred in the shelter where I volunteer who needed some extraordinary help. For example, some Shar-pei people helped us place some abused Shar-pei who needed special care. And a local Dachshund rescue group once took on a heartworm-positive weiner dog that we volunteers had all fallen in love with, despite the fact that he was also a little bitey.

I've also had some ugly experiences with bad rescue people – faux rescuers, actually. Most notable was the woman who ran a small dog “rescue” but whose dogs, my shelter's officers kept hearing, were in terrible shape. Our officers had contacted her numerous times, but she was hostile and basically told them that if they ever wanted to see her “rescue facility,” they were going to need a warrant. It took far too long to get a judge to sign a search warrant, but when the officers finally succeeded, they were aghast at what they found: over 100 emaciated small dogs, almost all of them in very bad shape with internal and external parasites and infections. Many of them had wounds from fighting (for food). There were pregnant females and others with nursing litters; a couple of

the litters were sick with what proved to be distemper. (As a result of the ubiquitous plea bargain, the “rescue” owner eventually paid a fine and is on probation – not harsh enough punishment for the suffering she caused.)

Then there are people like this: There is a big, handsome hound in our shelter right now. Buddy is young and untrained and full of energy. He needs exercise and training, and I and some of the other volunteers have been working with him – but mostly he needs to get out of the shelter. He's been there for two months already, and he's so frustrated with his confinement that he goes bananas when people walk by to look at him, jumping, baying, and generally looking like a nutcase. If a volunteer or staff member is nearby, we always rush over to show anyone who might be interested that he's really a good boy, he can sit quietly if you ask him to (and have some treats handy). We haven't been able to convince anyone yet.

Desperate, I recently put out the word to some hound rescue people. And within a few days, I received word that several people are coordinating transportation for Buddy to an experienced hound foster home some hundreds of miles away. I received a text from one woman I spoke to telling me not to worry, “This boy will be saved by someone in our rescue.” I could not be more grateful, more happy for Buddy, or more amazed at the kindness and generosity of rescue people. *Thank you.*

NK

Raccoon Attack!

Quick action may have saved my dog's life. What happens next?

BY MARY STRAUS

One of my worst dog-owner nightmares recently came true. Or I should say, almost came true. A raccoon attacked my dog, injuring her, but I was able to save her life by fighting off the raccoon myself! As bad as that experience was, I never imagined the problems I would have to deal with that have emerged *since* our initial suburban wildlife encounter.

My dog Ella is a Norwich Terrier, weighing just 11 pounds. I worried when I got a smaller dog that she would be more vulnerable to attack, whether from another dog, or from one of the critters (raccoons, opossums) that frequent my area because I live near a creek. While I rarely spot them, I know they're around.

We went out to the backyard around 10:00 Saturday night, so Ella could go pee one last time before bed. I usually wait at the door, but this time, for whatever reason, I walked out with her. We were both on the grass when Ella started barking at something I couldn't see on the fence. I figured it was one of the neighborhood cats – until it suddenly charged down the fence and in a flash attacked Ella, despite my being no more than two feet away and screaming at it to try to drive it away.

Ella tried to run for the house (she's not a fighter, despite being a terrier) and they were on the deck in an instant, with the raccoon trying to attack her underside. I knew that if I didn't do something, the raccoon, which was two or three times her size, would almost certainly kill my dog. My first thought was to pick Ella up, but I was afraid the raccoon would just keep attacking, and would then get me as well. In desperation, I went for the raccoon instead.

I grabbed its tail and pulled back and up, lifting it off the ground. It had hold of Ella's head at that point and didn't want to let go, but I kept pulling and it finally released her, or she managed

to pull away. She was able to run into the house, while I spun around twice in a circle, swinging the raccoon by its tail. I launched it as far from me as I could (maybe six feet). When it landed, it turned right back toward me, despite the fact that I was screaming at it like a banshee. After what seemed like a *long* moment, it finally turned away and left.

I hurried into the house to find Ella with blood on her face and favoring one of her front legs. I drove her to the emergency vet immediately, and it turned out she had several puncture wounds on her muzzle and front legs, but nothing worse. They sedated her, cleaned the wounds, gave her pain medication and antibiotics, and sent us home with more of the same.

She was very sore Sunday morning, hardly able to put weight on her right front leg, and her wounds had already stopped draining, which was not good; the vet wanted them to stay open so that any infection would drain out rather than create an abscess, in which case a drain would have to be put in. I applied warm compresses for 10 minutes four times that day, following the vet's instructions. By evening, Ella was walking more normally, and obviously feeling much better.

Author Mary Straus saved her Norwich Terrier, Ella, from a raccoon attack. Now she's dealing with Ella's anxiety about being in the backyard, the raccoon's continued presence, and a quarantine.

EMOTIONAL WOUNDS

Ella's physical improvement was fast; her wounds were nearly completely healed within a few days. It will take much longer, however, for the emotional scars to heal. She is now afraid to go into the backyard. Worse, she is showing signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including hypervigilance (constantly on the alert) and hyperreactivity (overreaction to movement and sounds coming from the direction of the backyard).

On Tuesday night, three days after the attack, Ella also began showing signs of anxiety disorder, including panting, pacing, trembling, trying to hide, and being unable to relax. This started in the evening while we were in my bedroom, which looks out into the backyard through a sliding glass door. I closed the blinds so that she wouldn't be able to see out, but her behavior did not change. I took her for a short walk (about half a mile) in the hopes that the exercise and getting away from the house would calm her down. She was fine on the walk, but her anxious behavior resumed as soon as we returned home.

There's a difference between anxiety and fear. Fear is related to something concrete. It is logical and it can be addressed with behavior modification, such as desensitization and counter-conditioning. It may take some time, but fear will diminish if properly handled.

Anxiety is different. It is a diffuse emotion, not specific to anything in



particular, but more an all-over feeling of anxiousness, as though something terrible may happen at any moment. It's heartbreaking to watch a dog who is truly anxious, as nothing you do helps. I know; my last dog, Piglet, developed generalized anxiety disorder, which destroyed her quality of life in her later years. I was able to keep her anxiety under control with the use of a lot of medication, but she was never again the confident dog she was before she developed the disorder.

Piglet's anxiety started with a noise phobia that kept escalating, but I didn't take it seriously enough until it was too late. I tried medication (buspirone) at one point, but when it didn't seem to help, I quickly gave up. I later learned that my vet had not prescribed a high enough dose, which is a common problem.

On Wednesday morning, I called my vet. I wanted to start Ella right away on a long-acting drug, which can take several weeks to become fully effective, as well as getting a quick-acting drug to use on an as-needed basis. The vet prescribed fluoxetine (Prozac), a long-acting antidepressant that also helps with anxiety; and clonidine, a short-acting drug that can be used when quick relief is needed.

Nicholas Dodman, BVMS, DACVB, Program Director of the Animal Behavior Department of Clinical Sciences at Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, is one of this country's leading veterinary behaviorists. I learned at a seminar of his that Dr. Dodman prefers using clonidine over alprazolam (Xanax) for immediate anxiety relief, as clonidine doesn't carry the risk of paradoxical reaction that alprazolam does. If the medications prescribed by my vet don't work well, I will contact Tuft's PETFAX Behavior Consultation service for further advice.

I started Ella on both medications right away. Together they had a minor sedating effect – she walked rather than trotted – but otherwise, she acted like herself, with no further signs of anxiety. I continue to give fluoxetine daily, which is not causing any sedation, and will keep her on that drug until she returns to normal and is no longer afraid to go into the backyard or reactive to sights and sounds coming from the yard in the evening and at night. I will use the clonidine only as needed while waiting for the fluoxetine to take full effect, or if something happens to increase her anxiety.

OVERREACTING?

Some of you may be rolling your eyes at this point, thinking you would never be so quick to drug your dog. I know, because I used to be one of those people. If I could do one thing over, I wish I could go back in time and start Piglet on medication before it was too late, before she developed the generalized anxiety disorder from which she never recovered. I will never make that mistake again.

When in doubt, particularly when anxiety is getting worse rather than better, I encourage everyone to use anti-anxiety medications sooner rather than later. Worst case, your dog doesn't really need them and you'll be able to wean her off quickly, but in some cases, it may change or even save your dog's life. These medications are not dangerous and they don't make your dog act "drugged." They simply help dogs to overcome irrational anxiety, which they may not be able to do on their own.

Medications are not meant to replace behavior modification. Studies have shown that anxiety issues improve more quickly when anti-anxiety drugs are combined with behavior modification than when either method is used alone.

I have already begun working with Ella using treats and playing games to get her more comfortable near the backyard, and even occasionally going into the yard during the day, usually from a different direction (through the garage or gate rather than through the door where she was attacked). Ella and I recently began a Nose Work class, so I have her hunting for treats near the sliding glass door inside the house. (See "Sniff This – You'll Feel Better," WDJ April 2013, for more information on nose work.)

I debated skipping class on Monday, two days after the attack, but since she was moving well by then, I decided to take her, and it was the best decision I could have made. While a bit hesitant at first, she quickly got into the game and I saw her relax and start to show some of her personality again for the first time since the attack.

Since evening is when the raccoons are most likely to be out, and when she is more fearful, we do our behavior modification work during the day. I allow her to choose what she's willing to do, giving her praise, encouragement, and food rewards for willingness to venture near and into "the scary place," but never forcing her or even trying to coax her beyond her

comfort level. This will be a long process that will take patience, but trying to rush things is only likely to make it worse, so we'll take our time.

I was in touch with WDJ editor Nancy Kerns in the days after the raccoon attack, during which time, coincidentally, she was discussing an article with trainer and writer Nicole Wilde, the author of *Help for your Fearful Dog: A Step-by-Step Guide to Helping Your Dog Conquer His Fears* (Phantom Publishing, 2006). Nancy happened to mention what I was going through to Nicole, who very kindly responded with some advice for me.

Wilde suggested, "If there's a dog your dog loves to play with, inviting that dog over to play in the yard could help more than anything." She also recommended gradually feeding Ella closer to the backyard, petting Ella (or doing whatever Ella likes best) outside the door leading to the backyard, and playing games or feeding treats just outside the backyard (on the outside of the gate, not inside the house) and then gradually going in that way rather than going out through the house.

Wilde also suggested giving Ella alpha-casozepine, a component of milk that binds to the same receptors in the brain as valium and other diazepamenes. Alpha-casozepine is marketed as De-Stress from Biotics Research in Canada and Zylkene in the UK. Alpha-casozepine is also called Lactium, which can be found in a variety of supplements.

RIDDING THE RACCOON

Here's another thing I didn't anticipate: Having to keep dealing with the raccoon. It has returned each night since the attack. I called my local Animal Control Monday morning, and they suggested I contact my county's Vector Control office, which I did. An agent came out Tuesday, along with my local animal control officer, to assess the situation.

The two men told me that the culprit was probably a female raccoon with babies in a den under my deck. They were unwilling to try to trap her, though. If she proved to be a nursing mother, they would either have to let her go (transforming her into a trap-smart raccoon who would never be caught again), or kill her (causing the babies to die a lingering death and then decompose under my deck). As much as I wanted the raccoon gone, these were not good options.

They suggested instead that I try to drive the raccoon away by playing loud

music (they said big band music is best!) from 8 in the morning to 6 at night, so that she'd be unable to sleep and would move the babies somewhere else.

The agents also found what they called a "latrine" – a big pile of scat – on the side of my house. At their suggestion, I cleaned up all the scat, then poured both bleach and Pinesol over the entire area, in hopes this would smell bad to the raccoon. I also sprinkled cayenne pepper around the area, hoping that a snoutful of pepper would make the area even less enticing to a raccoon.

The county agent told me that if these steps did not work, he would come back and pour male raccoon urine around the opening under my deck, to further incentivize the female to move her young. Once I am certain there are no raccoons under there, I will hire a professional company with experience dealing with raccoons to seal off the opening so that no other animal can move in.

I asked the agents if they had any suggestions for fighting off a raccoon, should it happen again, but all they could tell me was to call 911, which of course would have taken too long. I'm sure it was dangerous for me to grab the raccoon, and I was incredibly lucky that things turned out as well as they did. I didn't get injured at all, so there was no need for me to get post-exposure rabies shots.

In the meantime, I have installed brighter lighting outside, and carry a

weapon of some kind with me each time I go outside with Ella. My favorite is a mop with a flat head that I feel I might be able to use to pin the raccoon down, if needed. I also ordered an airhorn – if it will scare off a bear, maybe it will work for a raccoon as well. The downside is that it would also frighten my dog.

RABIES

Ella was current on her rabies vaccination, thank goodness. Laws regarding possible rabies exposure vary from state to state, and local agencies are given a lot of leeway in enforcing these laws.

In California, where I live, if a dog is involved in an encounter with another animal whose rabies status is unknown, and that dog does not have a current rabies vaccination, the dog would either be euthanized (!) or would have to be quarantined on the owner's property for six months. The vector control officer told me that California law requires dogs with current rabies vaccinations to be quarantined for 30 days. All dogs except those who have been vaccinated in the last 30 days are also given a rabies booster within 48 hours of a bite from an animal infected with rabies or whose status is unknown.



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RESOURCES

❖ PETFAX BEHAVIOR CONSULTATION

Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine
(508) 887-4640, tufts.edu/vet/petfax

❖ CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL

cdc.gov/rabies. See also cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00041987.htm

❖ DE-STRESS

Biotics Research Canada, (800) 840-1676, bioticscan.com

❖ WOMEN'S ANTI-STRESS FORMULA (LACTIUM)

Swanson Health products, (800) 824-4491, swansonvitamins.com
Lactium, (800) 526-0609, lactiumusa.com
(Warning: A similar product called Nature's Plus Animal Parade Warm Milk contains xylitol, which is dangerous for dogs. Do not use this product.)

❖ ZYLKÉNE

ORSCO Veterinary Laboratory, distributed by Vetoquinol Canada. (800) 363-1700, vetoquinol.ca (includes dosage information for dogs)

A friend (also in California) contacted her county animal control director, to find out whether this varies county by county, and was told that a 30-day quarantine was the minimum requirement, and they would increase that to six months if the attack was severe. Their argument was that no vaccine is 100 percent reliable, although the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) conducted a nationwide study of rabies among dogs and cats in 1988 and found "no documented vaccine failures occurred among dogs or cats that had received two vaccinations."

I've heard of dogs being confiscated by local authorities after a run-in with a wild animal who were euthanized immediately due to a slightly overdue rabies booster. I've also heard from people who were told that their dogs would have to be quarantined in an animal control facility, at great cost to the owner (and great stress to the dog), rather than on the owner's property, as the law generally permits. Be very careful about allowing anyone to take your dog; if possible, stay with your dog at all times while contacting a lawyer or someone else who can help if the authorities insist on taking your dog into custody.

While raccoons are the most frequently reported rabies carriers in the U.S., and the primary vector for the disease on the east coast, raccoons on the west coast almost never carry rabies. In California, bats are the most common source of rabies, with a handful coming from skunks and the occasional fox.

PROGRESS

As of this writing (Saturday, one week after the attack), Ella is doing well, but I still see the raccoon nightly. She is no longer using the "latrine" since I cleaned it up, but I continue to check it daily. I just started playing the radio under my deck today, so I'm hoping that maybe she'll move out in the next couple of days. If she is still around after I am certain there are no babies, I will have her trapped and killed; in California, it's illegal to relocate raccoons, as they will most likely either become someone else's problem (and now impossible to trap), or will starve in a new environment. I would strongly prefer to "live and let live," but not at the risk of my dog's life. 🐾

Mary Straus is the owner of DogAware.com. She and her Norwich Terrier, Ella, live in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Parched, Part II

Here are some more top-quality “complete and balanced” freeze-dried dog foods.

BY NANCY KERNS

I said in last month’s article on freeze-dried and dehydrated diets (“Dry It, You’ll Like It”) that I hadn’t discussed dehydrated diets for quite some time in WDJ, and that I was surprised by the increase in the number of companies that now offer these products. What I didn’t realize at the time was that *many* of the companies that I am familiar with as makers of frozen raw diets now offer those products in a freeze-dried form. I learned this when, after I finished that last issue, I took a trip and toured a number of manufacturing facilities where raw frozen diets are produced (in preparation for an article that will appear in the August issue). Turns out, *every* frozen raw dog food manufacturer I visited also makes freeze-dried diets.

And why not? In almost every case, the formulas that the companies freeze-dry are exactly the same as their raw frozen foods; they just freeze-dry the food instead of freezing it.

Freeze-drying is a simple, but energy-intensive process; it’s costly. But freeze-dried foods have a longer shelf life than their frozen counterparts, are light and compact (making shipping much more affordable than shipping frozen foods). And, oddly, some dogs who don’t like raw diets snap up freeze-dried foods like they are treats.

In fact, that’s exactly how some pet owners utilize these “complete and balanced” diets – as treats, rather than

as a sole diet, due to their relatively high price. I have to say, though, after seeing these products made in a variety of facilities, that the manufacturing process of these diets is very close to the process used in making a home-prepared raw diet, with fresh, wholesome, and very lightly processed ingredients – well worth the cost.

The companies and products described in the table (below and on the facing page) are ones I should have included in last month’s article. I toured the production facilities for three Wisconsin-based companies (indicated in the table, right), and discuss this at greater length in “Frozen In Place.”



Freeze-drying is energy-intensive, but the process preserves food beautifully. Most dogs find freeze-dried foods that contain raw or cooked meat irresistible. The products also have an extremely long shelf life without the use of preservatives.

CORRECTION

Due to an editing error, there was one nonsensical sentence in last month’s article. It should have read, “Dehydration alters the cellular structure of meats, fruits, and vegetables much more than freeze-drying.” The appearance and taste of foods are less affected by freeze-drying than by dehydration, largely because higher temperatures are used to dehydrate foods; they are actually lightly cooked by the heat of drying. 🐾

Nancy Kerns is Editor of WDJ.

COMPANY	DESCRIPTION	HIGHLIGHTED PRODUCT
<p>Fresh Is Best * Milwaukee, WI (414) 961-5433 freshisbest.com</p> 	<p>Fresh Is Best (formerly Companion Naturals) sources its ingredients locally (in Wisconsin), and has its products mixed in a human food facility; the product is then transferred to the company’s own facility nearby. The “complete and balanced” diet (by the AAFCO nutritional levels standard) is freeze-dried and packaged at the company’s own location (and can be purchased and shipped directly from that location). Three varieties are available: beef, chicken, and turkey (each containing raw muscle and organ meats from just that species, along with vegetables, fruit, healthy food supplements, and a vitamin/mineral-mix). As stated above, available directly from the company, and in select independent pet supply stores.</p>	<p>Fresh Is Best’s Freeze Dried Turkey Dog Food contains turkey, turkey gizzards, turkey hearts, turkey liver, turnip greens, collard greens, kale, carrots, celery, kelp, bone meal, apple cider vinegar, dried whey, and a vitamin/mineral supplement.</p> <p>40% protein, 22% fat, 4% fiber, 6% moisture. 5,069 kcal/kg; 144 kcal/oz</p>

* Red company name indicates “Nancy Kerns was here.”

COMPANY	DESCRIPTION	HIGHLIGHTED PRODUCT
<p>Nature's Menu East Troy, WI (262) 642-9400 naturesmenu.com</p> <p>Nature's Menu</p>	<p>Nature's Menu makes its frozen raw diets in its own manufacturing facility. It currently sends the raw mixed diet to a nearby facility for freeze-drying, but will freeze-dry its own products by the end of the year. All of Nature's Menu's dehydrated products are "complete and balanced" as per AAFCO's "nutritional levels" standards. Four varieties for dogs are offered: beef, organic chicken, turkey, and lamb. Available directly from the company and in select independent pet supply stores.</p>	<p>Nature's Menu's Beef Formula contains beef, beef liver, beef heart, beef kidney, and a vitamin/mineral supplement.</p> <p>50% protein, 40% fat, 1% fiber, 3% moisture. (Caloric information not available.)</p>
<p>Paw Naturaw Lake Mills, WI (866) 729-4738 pawnaturaw.com</p>  <p>PAW NATURAW distinct by instinct</p>	<p>Paw Naturaw offers a wide variety of raw "complete and balanced" (as per the AAFCO nutritional guidelines) diets for dogs. One freeze-dried diet is offered, an organic beef variety that comes in a "medallion" form. The company also offers an array of <i>dehydrated</i> diets, either called "entrees" (containing 70% or more meat) or "recipes" (containing 40% or more meat). The dehydrated diets are powdery, resembling shredded dried meat. Most of the raw meats used are organic (beef, bison, chicken, turkey); the elk and lamb are "natural" (essentially meaning only that they are not organic). Only a few minerals and vitamins are added to "complete" the diets (as opposed to a conventional vitamin/mineral premix). The company discloses the percentage of types of ingredients in its foods; for example, the dehydrated beef entree described at right contains 64.5% beef; 27% organic fruits and vegetables; 7.5% beef organs (livers, kidneys & hearts); and 1.5% vitamin, mineral, & organic oil supplements. Paw Naturaw products can be purchased directly from the company, in select independent pet supply stores, and from some online retailers.</p>	<p>Paw Naturaw's Beef Entree contains organic beef, organic beef liver, organic cucumber, organic broccoli, organic carrot, organic kale, organic beet, organic flaxseed, organic green snap beans, organic bok choy, organic parsnip, organic safflower oil, tricalcium phosphate, organic beef hearts, organic blueberries, organic wheat grass, organic beef kidneys, organic parsley, organic cranberry, organic lecithin, sea salt, zinc proteinate, vitamin E supplement, copper proteinate, manganese proteinate, calcium iodate, and vitamin D3 supplement.</p> <p>38% protein, 32% fat, 1% fiber, 6% moisture. (Caloric information not available.)</p>
<p>Primal Pet Foods San Francisco, CA (866) 566-4652 primalpetfoods.com</p> 	<p>According to Primal Pet Products, all of the ingredients used in its products are USDA-inspected and -passed "human quality." The products are mixed and freeze-dried in a facility that makes human foods. All muscle and organ meats used in the formulas are raw; products containing poultry are subjected to "high pressure processing" in the same facility before freeze-drying to ensure zero pathogens (such as <i>Salmonella</i>). All formulas are "complete and balanced" (by the AAFCO nutritional levels standard). Primal does not use a conventional vitamin/mineral premix, but uses as many food sources of vitamins as possible. Five varieties are available in freeze-dried "nugget" form: beef, chicken, duck, lamb, and turkey & sardine. A complete nutrient analysis is available for each product on the company's website; we love this! The approximate ratio of animal protein to other ingredients in the foods is also listed for each product. For example, according to Primal's website, the duck variety described (at right) is comprised of 78% duck, 20% produce, and 2% supplements. Available in select independent pet supply stores and from some online retailers.</p>	<p>Primal's Freeze Dried Duck contains duck, duck necks, duck wings, organic kale, duck hearts, duck gizzards, organic carrots, organic yams, duck livers, organic broccoli, organic apples, blueberries, cranberries, organic pumpkin seeds, organic sunflower seeds, minerals (zinc sulfate, copper carbonate, sodium selenite), organic parsley, organic apple cider vinegar, salmon oil, organic coconut oil, organic quinoa sprout powder, dried organic kelp, alfalfa, natural vitamin E, mixed tocopherols.</p> <p>42% protein, 30% fat, 5% fiber, 3% moisture 155 kcal/oz</p>
<p>Vital Essentials Green Bay, WI (800) 743-0322 vitalessentialsraw.com</p>	<p>Vital Essentials is one of the few companies we've seen that formulates its diets to be "complete and balanced" (as per the AAFCO nutrient guidelines) without the use of a vitamin/mineral premix, adding only two vitamin sources (herring oil for vitamin D and d-alpha tocopherol for vitamin E) to complete the formula. All the formulas are made with locally sourced ingredients and manufactured, start to finish, at Vital Essentials' own facility. Eleven freeze-dried canine diets are available: single-species formulas are beef, beef & veggies, chicken, duck, fish, rabbit, salmon, turkey, and wild boar; a beef & chicken and a beef, chicken, & veggies formula are also available. Vital Essentials Raw is offered in two forms (nibbles and mini patties). A "toppers" product (essentially the shavings or crumbles from the production of the other two forms) is also available for use as an appetizing and nutritious topping for your dog's regular diet. Available in select independent pet supply stores, natural food stores, and veterinary clinics.</p>	<p>Vital Essentials Turkey Formula contains ground turkey with bone, turkey heart, turkey liver, herring oil (natural source of vitamin D), d-alpha tocopherol (natural vitamin E).</p> <p>38% protein, 29% fat, 1.6% fiber, 7% moisture 190 kcal/oz</p> 



PAW PRODUCT REVIEW PAW

Harness Power

Fit, form, and function are all important when choosing a harness for your dog.

BY LISA RODIER

Harnesses for our canine companions come in a wide variety of colors, shapes, and sizes. But did you know that many are made for a particular purpose? Have a dog you want to pull you on your skis? Got it. Have a puller – and you'd like a respite? Covered. Have a little dog? The possibilities are endless. Despite that fact, many of us walk into our local big box pet store and pull a harness off the rack without even considering the harness' fit and function. With just a little more awareness, you can be sure that the harness you select for your dog is the right one.

Harnesses were originally created for the purpose of pulling – i.e., sleds, carts, freight, tracking, etc. Despite the fact that some harnesses can actually encourage a dog to pull due to the harness' design and good old opposition reflex, a harness is a piece of equipment many of us, today, have in our dog equipment toolbox. Harnesses can be used for:

- ✓ An alternative to a collar
- ✓ To facilitate pulling activities
- ✓ Canine sports
- ✓ Little dogs (who might need to be picked up quickly)
- ✓ Assisting a dog with mobility
- ✓ Automobile restraint systems
- ✓ Working (service, police, etc.)

A basic harness has neck, chest, and belly straps. Optimally, the neck piece should fit high and snug, and the dog's front limbs should be unrestricted. Shown above is the fleece Walkeez harness.

While some harnesses can cross over or serve more than one purpose, most should be considered single purpose. For example, you wouldn't attach a dog seat belt to a front clip/no pull harness. The following are a few broad categories into which many harnesses fall, although the list is not exhaustive.

TRADITIONAL HARNESSES

If you're looking for an alternative to a collar due to your dog's anatomy, medical condition, or you just don't like the idea of a collar on your dog's neck, your best bet is a simple harness that has the leash attachment on the back of the harness. Typically these harnesses have the following connected pieces: a neck piece that fits around the dog's neck, almost like a collar; a piece that runs under the dog's chest (in some models this is mesh, fabric, or lightly padded); and a piece around the belly. This type of harness is a good choice if your dog walks nicely on leash or you are committed to teaching him to do so, or if your dog is small.

For an everyday harness, comfort

and proper fit are important. Look for a harness that doesn't restrict the dog's movement in any way – including his front legs and shoulders – and that has padding if/where needed. The material and stitching should be durable enough for daily use. Straps and clips should not dig into or chafe the dog's skin.

How does the harness go on? Does your dog have to step into it? Is she physically able and willing to do so? Or does it slip over her head? Also, pay attention to the security of its fit; dogs who are really determined or creative can quickly learn to back out of some harnesses. For example, sled dogs use a neck line that attaches from their collar to the centerline of their pulling harnesses to prevent this, while other types of harnesses come with a girth strap (strap around the belly).

According to Christine Zink, DVM, PhD, DACVP, DACVSMR, a well-fitted, traditional style harness that allows free limb movement “...transfers the point of stress to the dog's sternum, which then transfers pressure throughout the sternum, ribs, and to the vertebrae, all of which makes a very solid structure to support the dog's weight if it does pull, while still allowing the dog's front legs to move freely.”

Some examples of good traditional harnesses include the Sure-Fit, Walkeez, and Urban Trails. While pet supply chain stores might have what you need, generally, you can find a better selection from independent pet supply stores and online specialty retailers.

■ BEST FOR:

- ✓ Walking and running on leash, particularly if your dog doesn't pull
- ✓ Some dog sports (i.e., tracking, nose work)
- ✓ Dogs whose anatomy or a medical condition mandate the use of a harness
- ✓ Collar alternative
- ✓ Small dogs

■ SHOULD NOT BE USED FOR:

- ✗ Dogs who pull on leash (if your goal is that the dog not pull)
- ✗ Pulling tasks

Note: If you use a harness in lieu of a collar, be sure you have an ID tag attached. Tags that lay flat, such as the Adjustable Collar Tag by Boomerang, work well on harnesses.

PULLING HARNESSSES

Harnesses that are designed for the job of pulling need to fit perfectly, be comfortable for the dog, and include padding, particularly in the neck area. Care must be taken that undue pressure is not put on sensitive parts of the dog's body that could chafe over time, nor in areas that would restrict her movement. Material considerations are important, depending on the activity and whether the harness will get wet frequently.

Pulling harnesses come in two basic styles: those with a fitted neck (siwash) and those with a breast band. Nordkyn Outfitters specializes in pulling harnesses, including custom gear; all of its harnesses have fitted necks. According to company owner Jane Riffle, who has been making harnesses since 1983, “The breast band harnesses (straps running horizontally across the chest) are easier to fit but are quite restrictive since they usually cross about the point of the dog's shoulder.”

Nordkyn's website notes that getting the correct size of harness is critical, as is neck design and padding. The neck should fit snugly around the dog's shoulders, distributing the weight evenly. If it's too large, the harness will slip, rub,

or interfere with movement; too small, and it will cut, bruise, or choke. Padding keeps webbing from cutting or chafing the dog, and provides some cushion to prevent bruising.

Riffle adds that the weight of the load the dog is expected to pull, and at what speed and distance, are equally important factors in pulling harness selection. Across the board, though, “the harness should allow the dog to lower his head, throw his shoulders into the harness, and drive with his rear.” While some models might have a clip on the back of the harness, most have side clips to which the load is attached via traces. Harnesses for pulling are best sourced from a company that specializes in this type of equipment.

■ BEST FOR:

- ✓ Sports involving the pulling of weight such as mushing, skijoring, carting, and freight pull
- ✓ Activities such as nose work and tracking (certain models)

■ SHOULD NOT BE USED FOR:

- ✗ Walking, particularly for dogs who pull on leash
- ✗ Other sports that don't require the dog to pull in some fashion
- ✗ As a collar alternative



A pulling harness (like this Nordkyn Freight Harness) has a heavily padded neck and chest and allows for free shoulder movement. This style is not a good “walking” harness since a dog could learn to back out of it. PHOTO COURTESY NORDKYN OUTFITTERS

THE NO-PULL DEBATE

Recently, WDJ received a letter from Christine Zink, DVM, PhD, DACVP, DACVSMR, who was concerned about the photo in WDJ (on the cover, no less!) of a jogger whose dog, running alongside, was wearing a front-clip-type harness. A sports medicine guru and canine athlete enthusiast, Dr. Zink (and others) posit that no-pull harnesses are detrimental to a dog's structure and gait – and are especially inappropriate for canine athletes.

In a limited gait analysis study, Dr. Zink observed that dogs wearing no-pull, front clip harnesses bore less weight on their front legs than they normally would – even when the harness wasn't attached to a leash! In addition, the dogs bore less weight on the leg that was on the far side of where the person walked, even when there was no leash attached; when the dog had a leash attached, it was more significant. This suggests to her that the dog was reacting to the presence of the harness against the leg by pushing harder against it. In all cases, the gait of the front limbs was altered whenever the harness was on.

Dr. Zink explains that these harnesses sit on top of the biceps and supraspinatus tendons, two of the most commonly injured structures in dogs' forelimbs, particularly in canine athletes. She asserts that, just by logic, one has to assume that the pressure this kind of harness exerts on the dog's forelimbs in an activity where the dog is supposed to be extending her forelimbs (i.e., running, walking), is not a good idea.

"I do not believe that there is a harness on the market that is nonrestrictive and that also helps the dog not to pull," says Dr. Zink. "There are however some very nice, well constructed, nonrestrictive harnesses on the market. However, those should not be considered as a method to teach a dog not to pull. In my opinion the real way to get a dog to stop pulling is to *train* it."

Taking another position altogether are the thousands of dog trainers and behaviorists who contend that no-pull harnesses save lives, because by giving handlers a mechanical advantage over the dog, they help people who have been unable to train their dogs (for whatever reasons) to walk politely, to walk their dogs anyway.

Whole Dog Journal Training Editor Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, comments, "I am a dog trainer/behavior professional with a very specialized concern about helping dogs be well-mannered companions to their humans. I agree that the way to get a dog to stop pulling is to train it. No-pull harnesses provide, in my experience, the least harmful way to give many owners the window of opportunity to reinforce –and thereby train – polite leash walking. An owner can't train a dog to walk on leash if she is getting dragged off her feet. I will continue to use front-clip harnesses and recommend them to clients, at least until someone comes up with an even safer non-aversive alternative."

Like so many of our equipment choices, there are cases for and against using a front-clip or other no-pull harness. Each of us must consider the benefits and risks, and make an educated decision based on what is best for us and our own dogs.



Some no-pull harnesses should not be used for vigorous exercise.



Some trainers prefer puppies to wear a harness when learning to walk on leash, so they don't injure their necks if they suddenly frisk and hit the end of the leash hard.

NO-PULL HARNESSES

As the name implies, no-pull harnesses are designed to reduce the dog's ability to pull on-leash. In many models, the leash attachment clips to the front of the harness (dog's chest area), while others use a back clip. Some designs accomplish a cessation of pulling by causing discomfort or pain to the dog, while others (such as the Easy Walk) do so by giving a mechanical/leverage advantage to the owner. We prefer the latter type.

Additional features on some models (such as the Halti Dog Harness) include rings on both the chest and back sections. This allows the handler to clip the leash onto the back to use the harness in a more traditional style (although the harness strap still crosses the dog's chest and is therefore restrictive), or to use a double clip leash on the front and back of the harness simultaneously.

It's critical to carefully size and fit no-pull harnesses. We see great benefit in using no-pull harnesses while teaching dogs how to walk politely on-leash, but encourage owners to set a goal of weaning their dogs off no-pull harnesses. Because all of these harnesses restrict the dog's movement in some way, it is imperative that they be removed for vigorous exercise (such as jogging or while at the dog park). Consider getting assistance from a qualified positive dog trainer regarding selection, fitting, and proper usage.

■ BEST FOR:

- ✓ Training your dog not to pull
- ✓ Handlers who require extra control (small handler with a large dog, children, seniors, etc.)

■ SHOULD NOT BE USED FOR:

- ✗ Restraining a dog in a vehicle
- ✗ Use during play
- ✗ Running or vigorous exercise
- ✗ Pulling tasks
- ✗ K9 sports/activities

ASSISTIVE HARNESSES

These harnesses, like pulling harnesses, are meant to do a job, so proper fit and comfort are key considerations. An assistive harness should not impede the dog's



LEFT: A harness with a sturdy handle, such as Ruffwear's Web Master Harness, can be used for sports, to lift a little dog quickly (or help a large one over trail obstacles), or for a mobility impaired dog.

RIGHT: A harness used with a seat belt must be both comfortable and strong.



movement in any way. Typically meant for lifting the dog (by a person), the harness should have a wide coverage area for doing so, to avoid putting undue pressure on a small area of the dog's body. Handles should be firmly attached and appropriately placed and padded so as to allow the handler to safely assist the dog.

For dogs with mobility issues, the harness and its clips should be well padded. RuffWear's Web Master and Doubleback harnesses can do double duty as harnesses for active dogs and small dogs, as well as for dogs who are mobility impaired, while the Help 'Em Up harness is an example of a two-handled harness designed for dogs requiring physical assistance.

Note: Just because a harness has a handle, as some sport harnesses do, does not mean that it is appropriate for lifting. If your dog has serious mobility issues, we recommend that you seek the

assistance of a rehabilitation veterinarian or a professional certified in canine rehabilitation to assist with the selection, measurement and fitting of a harness. (See the March and August 2011 issues of WDJ for more on assistive equipment.)

■ **BEST FOR:**

- ✓ Dogs with mobility impairments
- ✓ Geriatric dogs
- ✓ Lifting dogs
- ✓ Restraining dogs in vehicles (depending on the harness model)

- ✓ Walking, running, hiking, and some K9 sports

■ **SHOULD NOT BE USED FOR:**

- ✗ Dog-dog play
- ✗ Pulling tasks

CAR RESTRAINT HARNESSES

Recent press about results from canine automotive restraint crashworthiness testing performed by the Center for Pet Safety showed that four harnesses tested failed (actually, one harness did not fail but the seat belt length was too long, allowing the dog "dummy" to hit the back of the front seat).

Despite the negative results, a case can still be made that it's safer for a dog to ride restrained via a harness and dog "seat belt" than to ride free, if only to reduce the distraction that dogs can be to drivers. While standards for dog automotive restraints need to be set, it's nonetheless important for an automotive dog restraint harness to be well padded, particularly in the chest area; comfortable; and to have a proper fit. Measure and choose wisely.

■ **BEST FOR:**

- ✓ Restraining dog in a vehicle

■ **SHOULD NOT BE USED FOR:**

- ✗ Pulling tasks
- ✗ Dog sports
- ✗ Every day use

PURPOSE-DRIVEN DESIGN

Whatever the purpose for which you'll be using a harness, it's important to consider fit, function, comfort, and durability. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for sizing and fitting the harness and select a harness that's appropriate for your dog's activity. Whatever you do, don't choose a harness only because the hot pink paisley print matches your favorite shorts! 🐾

Lisa Rodier is a freelance writer from Georgia, who shares her home with her husband and a young male Bouvier des Flandres.

PURCHASE INFORMATION FOR PRODUCTS MENTIONED

- ❖ **BOOMERANG ADJUSTABLE COLLAR TAG** boomerangtags.com; no phone
- ❖ **EASY WALK (NO-PULL) HARNESS** petsafe.net; (866) 738-4379
- ❖ **HALTI (NO-PULL) HARNESS** companyofanimals.us; (203) 345-1234
- ❖ **HELP 'EM UP (ASSISTIVE) HARNESS** helpemup.com; (720) 237-6852
- ❖ **NORDKYN FREIGHT (PULLING) HARNESS** nordkyn.com; (253) 847-4128
- ❖ **RUFFWEAR (ASSISTIVE) HARNESSES** ruffwear.com; (888) 783-3932
- ❖ **SURE-FIT (TRADITIONAL) HARNESS** petsafe.net; (866) 738-4379
- ❖ **URBAN TRAILS (TRADITIONAL) HARNESS** alpineoutfitters.net; (360) 659-3800
- ❖ **WALKEEZ (TRADITIONAL) HARNESS** walkeezharness.com; (604) 614 2756

HARNESSES FOR SERVICE / WORKING DOGS, AND OTHER SPECIALTIES

Since the activity that a dog is expected to do (i.e., seeing eye, balance work, search & rescue, police work, sports such as flyball) would dictate the type of harness the dog needs, we'll consider this category beyond the scope of this piece. Just remember that the fit and comfort of the harness is paramount for any dog, and especially important for a dog who must wear it for many hours each day.

Transformation: Predator to Pal

How to teach your dog to get along in a multi-species household.

BY PAT MILLER, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA

It's fairly common for dogs to be placed for adoption with a caveat that there should be "no cats," "no small animals," or "no livestock" in their new homes. These warnings are usually based on observations of the dog while he spent time in a shelter or rescue, or on the dog's history in his most recent home. While they are meant to prevent a tragedy, especially in the home of a well-meaning but not very experienced owner, the warnings can scare away committed owners who are willing and capable of addressing the dog's predatory leanings. Here's the story of one very determined couple who helped their new dog get past her cat-chasing past and go on to share her hearth with a pair of kitties.

Ken and Sue Johnson love German Shepherd Dogs and are very aware of the pet overpopulation problem. So it made sense, when their senior Shepherd died of old age, to adopt their next canine companion from a rescue group. They contacted a German Shepherd rescue, and adopted five-year-old black-and-tan Sara.

The rescue staff informed them that Sara, seized in a neglect case, had lived with cats in her previous home, so they felt confident taking her home to meet their senior cat. Much to their dismay, they discovered that while Sara may have lived with cats before, it probably wasn't a harmonious relationship. When we met for our first behavior modification session they said, "We had a cat when we first brought Sara home. She chased the cat upstairs where he stayed for the next two months until he passed away."

This peaceful scene would have been quite impossible to stage six months ago. Thanks to some very committed owners, two cats and the formerly predatory dog are living together in harmony.

The Johnsons *love* cats, and were aching to adopt a bonded pair, to fill the void left by their last cat's passing. Wisely, however, they didn't want to subject two new cats to constant harassment by an aroused dog dedicated to terrorizing the felines. They asked if I could help Sara learn to get along with cats. I said we could try, and they signed up for a series of private behavior modification

consults. The Johnsons were committed to keeping Sara whether we succeeded or not. They really wanted cats in their home, but were prepared to remain cat-less if we couldn't make it work.

IMPORTANT PARTICIPANT

We have three cats in the Miller household. Although they live with our own four dogs, I knew that Blue and Viva wouldn't take kindly to participating in behavior modification sessions with a rowdy German Shepherd. Barney, however, is unflappable, and thus was drafted to be our "neutral cat."

On the day of the Johnson's first scheduled session in mid-December of 2012, I brought Barney out to the training center and placed him in a covered exercise pen, with a blanket over the top so he couldn't leap out. We wanted him confined for his own safety, as well as to minimize his movement to help keep Sara's arousal level low. I put an open carrier inside so Barney had a place to hide if he felt threatened by Sara. The stage was set and we waited for the Johnsons to arrive.

CROSS-SPECIES RELATIONSHIPS

While canines and felines are notorious for "fighting like cats and dogs," they are not the only potential "mixed-family" challenge. Dogs who are not well socialized to other species can pose a threat to many other companion animals, from small rodents to rabbits, fish, birds, ferrets, pigs, goats, sheep, horses, and everything in between.



It's obvious that Barney (the "tuxedo cat" on the right) has the perfect nonplussed personality for "training" dogs. Viva (left) is another one of Pat Miller's cats – and the beneficiary of successful CC&D procedure with one of the Millers' dogs years ago.

My modification protocol of choice for introducing a dog to a new species is classical conditioning: giving the dog a positive association with the new creature, while at the same time managing (with a leash, crate, baby gate, closed door, etc.) so said dog never learns the joy of chasing said (insert your species of choice here) in your home. Because classical and operant conditioning work together, at the same time your dog is creating a healthy association with your new furred, finned, or feathered family member (Cockatiels make pieces of delicious chicken appear!) he is also learning a new behavior (If I sit by my human's side when the cockatiel is present I can make her feed me pieces of chicken!).

If you're proactive with your introductions – and if your dog didn't come to you with a lot of practice at chasing other animals – you can often create harmony in your household in a short time with reasonable effort.

If, however, you have a dog like Sara who already has an unhealthy predator/prey or other predatory association with other species, you'll have to work hard to counter-condition (change) and desensitize her association and related behavior. Counter-conditioning is a "subset" of classical conditioning.

Classical conditioning is my preferred choice for many protocols because it is relatively easy to do well - easier for most of my clients, in my experience, than other options such as BAT and CAT (see "Other Modification Protocol Options," next page), and because I have had great success using it in a wide variety of behavior modification programs. I've seen it work well for everything from nail trimming and touch sensitivity, fear of cars and dog reactivity, resource guarding and fear-related aggression, to my own Scottish Terrier's desire to maul Viva, the eight-week-old kitten we brought into our home 11 years ago.

COUNTER CONDITIONING SARA – SESSION 1

The Johnsons arrived for their scheduled appointment, and after a brief discussion about the plan, we set to work. We



initially introduced Sara to Barney-in-the-pen at a distance of 40 feet. I find that to be a good average threshold distance for most of my clients' dogs in the presence of their arousal-causing stimuli. Not Sara! When she saw a cat 40 feet away she went immediately "over threshold" – ignoring food (venison instead of chicken, due to Sara's food allergies), whining and aroused, trying to drag Susan toward the pen.

We backed up to 60 feet and tried again. At this increased distance Sara was able to begin working, and quickly made the association between the sight of Barney and receiving venison treats. Before long, she would look at Barney and quickly look back to Ken for her treat. This swift development of a conditioned emotional response (CER) gave us hope for success, despite her initial intense reaction to the sight of the cat in the pen. By the end of the session, Sara was able to be within 25 feet of Barney's pen, with a relaxed, soft body language and expression.

Since the Johnsons didn't have access to an accommodating Barney-style cat at home, I sent them off for two weeks to practice counter-conditioning Sara using the squirrels in her neighborhood – another source of high arousal for the dog.

SESSION 2

Improvement at the next session was slow but obvious. We started this session at a distance of 50 feet and ended 20 feet away from Barney in his pen. In fact, for the most part, Sara was far more interested in Ken and her venison than she was in Barney. We incorporated Leslie McDevitt's "Look At That" (LAT) exercise so we could operantly cue Sara to look at Barney in order to get treats and continue strengthening the association between see-cat-and-receive-venison.

We added in "relax" sessions, moving 60 feet away from Barney and asking Sara to lie quietly at Ken and Susan's feet. We continued to feed venison if she looked at Barney, but also reinforced her just for settling and relaxing. We wanted her to understand she could just "hang" in the vicinity of a cat without always expecting action. Susan reported that Sara was becoming much less aroused when she saw squirrels on their walks. I suggested the Johnson's purchase a realistic-looking stuffed cat so they could practice CC&D with Sara in their home, in addition to their work with squirrels.

Sara had also been diagnosed with hypothyroidism and was on medication for this condition. The adjustment to her thyroid levels was doubtless contributing to her behavioral improvement.

SESSIONS 3-5

In the third session, we were able to consistently close the distance to 25 feet, getting good CERs, using the LAT cue to get Sara to look at Barney when needed, and interspersing “relax” periods in between the CC&D work. This session we taught Sara an operant “Find it!” exercise, so we would have a tool to refocus her if she appeared close to threshold.

Sara continued to show marked improvement in the next two sessions. We closed the distance to two feet, with Ken sitting on the floor between the dog and cat and petting them both. As proof that Sara was becoming non-threatening, Barney moved freely around his pen and even reached through the wires toward Ken. This sparked a little interest from Sara, but didn't send her over threshold.

As he was sitting on the floor between Sara and Barney, Ken looked at me and said quietly, “I never thought we would be able to do this.” His heartfelt comment brought tears to my eyes.

Time for a serious discussion about where to proceed from here. I had begun reaching out to all my trainer contacts,

looking for a bonded pair of cats in need of a home, and who grew up with dogs so they wouldn't be put off by a dog who might become over-excited by their presence. We scheduled our next session at the Johnson home; Barney would be going on a field trip so Sara could practice her newly found calm skills in the presence of a cat in her own home.

SESSIONS 6-10

We did five sessions with Barney at the Johnsons' home. Sara was, indeed, aroused at the first introduction to a cat in her own home. The Johnsons' house is significantly smaller than our training center, and we had only about 20 feet maximum distance to put between the cat and dog where they could both still see each other. We set up Barney's pen near the front door, by the stairs, and brought Sara in from the backyard.

Sara heard Barney meow before she saw him, and was instantly excited, whining and pulling toward the sound. Ken fed her until she calmed, and we moved her into view of Barney. With continued CC&D it took about 20 minutes for her

to settle on her bed. We started implementing the Karen Overall Protocol for Relaxation – a procedure that teaches a dog to remain calm while the owner very gradually moves away from the dog. We didn't want Sara to have to be right next to Ken and Susan the entire time cats were in the house. We also practiced “relax,” encouraging Sara to lie calmly on her side with her head down.

Session 10 was in mid-April, four months after we started working with Sara. She was now able to remain quite calm with Barney moving around freely in the pen. At this session we again had Ken sitting on the floor between dog and cat, and decided to risk going one step further and allow Sara to sniff Barney.

Sara greeted Barney calmly and

A calm, dog-savvy cat is a critical partner in this process. The more reactive the cat is, the harder it will be for the dog to succeed.



PHOTO © JAGODKA | DREAMSTIME.COM

OTHER MODIFICATION PROTOCOL OPTIONS

In addition to counter-conditioning, there are other well-developed protocols available to help modify canine behavior. We've written about the Constructional Aggression Treatment (CAT) at length (“Build Better Behavior,” May 2008; and “Revisiting CAT,” December 2009). CAT, developed by Kellie Snider and Dr. Jesus Rosales Ruiz at the University of North Texas, uses operant conditioning and shaping (dog does deliberate behavior to operate on his environment) to convince a dog that his old behavior, in this case acting aroused, no longer works to give him access to the stimulus (kitty). In the presence of an arousal-causing stimulus, the smallest sign of relaxation now brings the cat (or other animal) closer – until the dog learns that acting calm (and becoming calm as a result) is a better behavior strategy if he wants to interact with the kitty.

BAT is similar to CAT in some ways, but focuses on having the dog move toward the desirable stimulus (kitty) rather than having the kitty move away from the dog. Developed by Grisha Stewart, CPDT-KA, CPT, it uses desensitization together with a functional reward for calm behavior. You begin at a distance where your dog can see the arousal-causing stimulus (cat) without reacting to it. When your dog offers any form of calm body language you move toward the kitty as the functional reward.

BAT defines “functional reward,” as “what your dog wants to happen in that moment.” In the case of a feline-aroused dog

like Sara, what the dog wants is for the kitty to be closer. Therefore, a good functional reward for a dog's calm behavior can be to move toward the kitty. Similar to CAT, it teaches your dog that calm behavior gives him access to the kitty, and your dog will learn to be calm in the presence of felines. When he learns to *act* calm he *becomes* calm, and no longer experiences the arousal that prompts him to chase the cat.

LAT stands for “Look At That” – a protocol developed by Leslie McDevitt, CPDT-KA, CDBC, author of *Control Unleashed*, at her training center outside Philadelphia. In LAT, the key is to keep your dog below threshold (i.e., quiet and calm) while teaching him to look at an arousing stimulus, then rewarding him for looking at it. To train LAT, click and reward your dog the second he looks at the kitty as long as your dog doesn't react adversely. If your dog is too close to threshold with a kitty (or other arousing stimulus) at any distance, start with a neutral target like a yogurt lid or other item your dog has no association with and again click as soon as he looks at it. When your dog offers a quick glance toward the target, name it “Look!” Your dog will quickly learn to look at the thing that triggers his arousal when you give the “Look!” cue, and turn back to you for a reward. If your dog does not turn quickly, he's probably too close to threshold or over threshold. Increase the distance between you and the cat and try again. Gradually decrease distance as your dog learns to do the “Look!” game with things that are arousing to him. Look – he's getting calmer!

politely, but to our surprise and dismay, Barney reacted with a loud hiss, and swatted Sara on the nose. Happily, Sara took the reprimand calmly, without any sign of arousal. She had just graduated from get-along-with-cat-school – with honors. Ken, Susan, and I looked at each other, delighted and amazed. “She’s as ready as she’ll ever be,” I said. Ken nodded.

I had located a trainer with a pair of cats who sounded like they met our needs perfectly. “I’ll call her,” Ken said.

ARRIVAL OF THE CATS

Ken and Susan met with my acquaintance and the two long-haired black cat brothers, Ralphie and Randy, and brought the cats home. We had agreed that the cats would stay safely stashed in a bedroom until our next session, when I could help with the introduction.

A week later I arrived for the big moment. Ken and Susan had been letting the cats roam the house whenever Sara was in the back yard, so she was familiar with their scent, and the cats made plenty of noise as they romped together in their bedroom, so she had heard them playing. We placed Ralph and Randy in the exercise pen that the Johnsons had purchased, and we brought Sara in.

Sara was curious but calm, and began offering CERs in less than three minutes. She easily went and laid down on her bed on cue, and didn’t become aroused when Ralph and Randy started to wrestle on their cat tree. After a thirty-minute session of CERs and relaxation, we invited Randy and Ralph back upstairs to their bedroom and breathed a collective sigh of relief. All was going according to plan.

I had one prepaid session left with the Johnsons. The plan was for them to continue controlled interaction daily between Sara and the cats for a couple of weeks – more concentrated now that they had their own cooperative cats to work with. However, changes in my schedule interfered, and it was a full month before I could come back for our final session at the end of May. I called the day before to confirm our appointment.

“How are things going?” I asked Susan when she answered the phone.

The Johnsons are extraordinary owners. In addition to their efforts with the cat project, they have been working hard to resolve Sara’s thyroid and allergy issues.

“We have an integrated household!” she exclaimed happily.

Although the plan had been to not allow free interaction until I was there to assist, Ralphie, the bolder of the cat brothers, had other plans. Several days before my scheduled visit he made a break for the bedroom door when Susan went in to feed him, and dashed down the stairs to the living room where Sara was resting. It was a non-event. All the Johnson’s hard work had paid off in spades. When I arrived for our final session all we had to do was sit and smile as we watched Sara, Ralphie, and Randy amicably sharing their living space.

OTHER SPECIES

The same CC&D technique that worked for Sara, Ralphie, and Randy can work equally well for conditioning your dog to get along with other species. A lot of our clients’ dogs are startled to meet horses for the first time they come to our property, and react to these monster-

sized (to them) aliens by barking or even lunging at them. After a few “horses-make-chicken-happen” associations, most dogs behave appropriately around the horses, seeing them as a source of chicken rather than as threat or prey. I’ve even successfully counter conditioned a dog who had an unhealthy intensity about fish in an aquarium to live peacefully with his aquatic family members.

The Johnsons were successful in integrating cats into their home with the previously cat-reactive Sara for several reasons. Attention to these same factors will increase your likelihood of success regardless of what other species you might want to introduce into your household:

■ SHORT-TERM MANAGEMENT –

The Johnsons managed Sara’s environment so she wasn’t regularly reinforced for chasing cats or other small animals. Behaviors that are reinforced repeat and increase. It is well-nigh impossible to



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modify an unwanted behavior if the dog is allowed to repeatedly practice the behavior and be reinforced for it.

Whether fish, feline, fowl, ferret, or other small companion animal, keeping your new family members safely isolated from your dog when not under your direct supervision is key to success – unless and until you are 100 percent sure your dog will do them no harm. With large animals such as livestock, management for safety goes both ways. Just as your dog can injure or even kill a horse or cow, he can also be badly injured or killed by them. Manage, manage, manage, until you are confident that things will go well.

■ LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT –

It's too soon to know if Sara will ever be able to be trusted home alone with Ralphy and Randy. The signs are promising, and as long as all continues to go well, the Johnsons may soon start a program of gradual departures – for just a couple of minutes at first, and then adding a few minutes at time. If Sara at any time shows any indication of a return to her prior aroused behavior around the cats, then management will be long term, with dog and cats never left alone together when their humans aren't home to intervene if needed. You will need to make the same judgment for your own multi-species household.

■ COMMITMENT –

The Johnsons were serious about their goal of adopting cats into their family, and were willing to commit their time, energy, and other resources into making it happen. I have many clients who are seriously committed to implementing the modification protocols we create, and I was still impressed by the Johnsons' investment in helping Sara learn to accept cats in her home. It may not take as much time and energy if your dog is less intense about other animals than Sara, but you still need to be prepared to do what it takes to make it work.

■ REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS –

The Johnsons knew they would need to find behaviorally compatible cats. They were willing to wait until they could find the right cats, and until Sara was ready for cats to come into the home. Cats who were likely to be stressed by an intense dog would not have been a wise choice, nor would it have been smart (or fair) to

rush things and introduce cats too soon in the process. Ken and Susan knew they were taking on a major project, and were prepared to give up their dream of adopting cats if we weren't successful in our behavior modification program.

■ **PRIOR HISTORY** – The Johnsons were flying a little blind on this one. Although Sara reportedly had lived in harmony with cats in a prior home, her behavior didn't support that statement. In fact, it appeared more likely that she hadn't. Predatory behavior alone isn't an automatic deal-breaker; the Miller dogs have killed groundhogs here on our farm, and still live quite peaceably with our three house cats.

However, if your dog has a strong reinforcement history for extremely inappropriate behavior toward other species – if he has successfully killed cats, or other domestic animals, it may be a huge challenge to bring potential prey into your home – and perhaps unfair to the potential victims. Think long and hard about how well you can manage your environment, and how committed you are to doing the work to modify the behavior. One management slip could be fatal.

GOOD NEWS

The good news is that many dogs can and do live peacefully with other species. It happens day in and day out, all over the world. With a little luck your dog has no prior unhealthy association with the "other" of your choice, and you can plan to do a minimal classical conditioning program to get your housemates off together on the right paw, wing, or fin. If you end up with a dog like Sara, you may need to find a good, positive reinforcement-based behavior professional to help you. There's a good chance you can make things work. Choose carefully, manage well, make the commitment, and be realistic.

Here's to your happily blended multi-species household! 🐾

Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, is WDJ's Training Editor. She lives in Fairplay, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center, where she offers dog training classes and courses for trainers. Pat is also author of many books on positive training, including her newest, Do Over Dogs: Give Your Dog a Second Chance at a First-Class Life. See page 24 for more information.

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Artificial Needs

Taking advantage of federal legislation to help the disabled, service-dog imposters abound.

BY DENISE FLAIM

An immaculately groomed Australian Shepherd sitting at his owner's feet in an airplane's bulkhead row. A yappy Multi-Poo in a shopping-cart seat at Target. A furiously wagging Lab-mix in line at the bank. If all three of these fictional Fidos were wearing vests that read "Service Dog," you wouldn't give them a second thought. Or would you?

On the scale of "how low can you go," passing your dog off as a service animal so you can bring him to public places where dogs are otherwise banned has to be close to rock bottom. Yet fake service dogs are *everywhere* out there: Chain-

store managers complain about having to clean up after them in their shopping carts and aisles. Websites cater to them, selling official-looking vests and identification badges. And fellow fanciers are alternately embarrassed and enraged

when the faux disabled book their dogs onto airplanes so they can hop to the next dog show or agility trial.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 43 million Americans identify themselves as having some sort of disability. But only a fraction use service dogs. One advocacy organization (servicedogcentral.org) estimates that the number of task-trained service dogs is 100,000 to 200,000 – significantly less than 1 percent of the nation's population of people with disabilities.

But loopholes in federal law make it very easy for posers to proliferate. Indeed, fake service dogs are so ubiquitous – or at least the awareness of them is – that they've crept into the popular culture. In September 2011, actress and stand-up comedian Natasha Leggero raised some hackles on NBC's "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno" when she deadpanned about putting a vest on her dog to impersonate a service dog. Leggero told the late-night host, "Sometimes I pretend like I have epilepsy," so she can get into restaurants with her dog.

That presumably was a joke, but the fakers *are* out there. "I've seen them. I've met them," says veteran Lon Hodge of suburban Chicago, whose service dog Gander, a 3-year-old Labradoodle, helps him deal with autoimmune arthritis as well as post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. "When you've been around service dogs like I've been, it's really easy to spot a dog that's just being a good dog, as opposed to one that's been trained as a service dog."

When Hodge has asked people point-blank about whether their dog is really a service dog, all have freely admitted that they weren't, he says. "People seem strangely proud of the fact that they've scammed themselves into a motel without paying the extra \$30 pet fee, or they got their dog in to a movie theater."

DEFINING TERMS

Language is important, and no less here, where there are distinctions between "therapy dogs," "service dogs" and "emotional-support dogs." Though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, each means a different thing.

"Therapy dogs" are those who provide affection and comfort to people in a variety of settings, including

Gander the Labradoodle is a service dog, trained by Freedom Service Dogs of America. Gander helps his owner, Lon Hodge, a a disabled veteran with PTSD and autoimmune mobility issues. As someone who depends on his dog to help him get through each day, Hodge says it's obvious to him when someone is trying to pass off their dog as a service dog.



hospitals, retirement and nursing homes, hospices and schools. They may be called in to help people cope with the aftermath of traumatic events, such as natural disasters or tragedies, like this year's devastating tornados in Moore, Oklahoma, or the Sandy Hook school shooting in Newton, Connecticut. And they may find themselves on call for relatively low-trauma but nonetheless stressful occasions, like final-exam week at college campuses.

A variety of organizations certify therapy dogs, including the Delta Society and Therapy Dogs International. While their tests vary, their main objective is the same: to make sure the dogs are calm, friendly, and under control in a variety of environments, some of them overwhelming or stressful. But other than knowing some basic obedience commands, therapy dogs do not need to be trained to be anything other than polite pooches who are happy to dispense and accept affection.

While a therapy dog may have an avocation, a service dog has a definite vocation: service or assistance dogs are specifically trained to help a person with a disability in some aspect of his or her everyday life. Unlike therapy dogs, they are specifically and vigorously protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. In other words, under federal law, a hospital has the right to refuse to allow *therapy* dogs to call on patients, but it cannot prevent entry to a visitor accompanied by a service dog.

Ironically, service-dog imposters can only exist because of that landmark legislation, which prohibits persons with disabilities from being required to answer questions about the nature of their disability. While this provides privacy and dignity for the individual, who has a right to navigate through her day without answering intrusive questions about why she needs the dog at her side (or in her purse), it is a double-edged sword, allowing opportunists all the wriggle room they need to let their pet dogs impersonate service animals.

EMOTIONAL RESCUE

Until several years, just about any animal could be labeled a service animal, and interpretation of the federal law was getting pretty creative. In one California case, a woman managed to get her building's no-pet clause waived when she produced a doctor's note that said

breeding hamsters helped her deal with her infertility and inability to express her maternal instinct. Cats, parrots, iguanas, monkeys – all could be considered bona-fide service animals under the law.

In March 2011, the U.S. Justice Department revised its regulations for implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act. The definition of “service animal” was narrowed to mean just dogs – specifically, those that are “individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability.” Those tasks might include guiding a person who is blind, alerting a diabetic about a plummeting blood-sugar level, or pulling a wheelchair. (One other species also got a green light, albeit with more restrictions: Miniature horses, which, like dogs, can

Loopholes in federal law make it very easy for posers to proliferate; today, fake service dogs are ubiquitous.

be trained and housebroken, can also be used as service animals under the law.)

Service dogs also help people with emotional or mental disabilities, but, again, they must be trained for the job: They aren't just comforting their handlers, but are actually providing ways for them to cope. For example, a service dog can be taught to calm a person with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by positioning himself to create a sort of furry safety barrier during an anxiety attack, or a service dog might remind a person with mental illness that it is time to take a prescription medication.

In other words, a service dog doesn't just make you feel better and lower your anxiety; in order to live up to that title, a dog must actually be trained to do something that alleviates your emotional distress.

The Justice Department revisions specifically mention animals that are used for emotional support, noting that they do not qualify as service animals under the Americans with Disabilities Act if their “sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support.”

That's not to say, however, that emotional-support animals are never afforded special recognition. Some states and municipalities have laws that are different from the federal law, and that require business establishments to provide access even to emotional-support dogs. In addition, the federal Air Carrier Access Act has a wide-ranging definition of assistance animals, and it includes emotional-support animals. The handler must present a doctor's letter that says the animal is needed to help deal with a specific mental or physical illness that “substantially limits one or more major life activities.”

In the general public, however, confusion still abounds. Earlier this year, actress Kristin Chenoweth tweeted about her emotional-support dog, Madeline, being barred from an American Airlines flight when a gate agent said she didn't have the right paperwork. Saying she was “bullied and embarrassed,” the actress reportedly burst into tears, and the airline later issued an apology and a refund of her \$125 cabin pet charge.

Celebrity-news show TMZ reported on Chenoweth's “trip from hell” and described Madeline as a “service dog” – and was quickly corrected by the actress via Twitter, who said she was an emotional-support dog. At least she knew the distinction.

GEARED UP

Dress for success, the saying goes. The same applies when someone is trying to masquerade his or her dog as a legitimate service dog. Web sites that cater to the service-dog community sell all types of vests in a rainbow of colors, embroidered with words like “Service Dog,” “Full Access,” “Working Dog/Do Not Pet.” Though many of the sites warn that fraudulent use of the products they sell is not permitted, they don't – and probably can't – ask for any proof to weed out the lying from the legitimate.

Judith Kujawa of Brighton, Michigan, uses her service dog Syd, a Rhodesian Ridgeback, to help with her mobility, which was impaired after an accident. Syd helps her climb stairs, and walking with him gives her balance – and confidence. He always wears his vest when the two go into places of business, restaurants, and stores.

“I was extremely surprised that ordering Syd's vest, as well as the service dog patch, was so easy, that it was so readily

available online,” Kujawa says, adding that the ease of acquiring a vest probably makes it more likely people will cheat.

Like Kujawa, many service-dog handlers opt to have their dog wear the special vests, especially if they have a disability that is not visually identifiable or immediately apparent.

Renée Le Verrier of Newburyport, Massachusetts, has a 2-year-old Great Dane, Sir Thomas, who helps her with mobility issues resulting from Parkinson’s disease. “He’s my furry four-legged cane,” she says. “He’s not going anywhere – whichever way I’m about to topple, he’s there.”

Wearing a vest is an important part of taking Sir Thomas out in public. “When I go to the airport or am in a restaurant, I absolutely have his vest and kerchief on,” Le Verrier says. “It screams ‘service dog.’”

And sometimes, turning up the volume is a necessity. Thomas’ vest telegraphs his role to people who are curious about the giant breed and what Le Verrier is doing with him. “It’s almost comical sometimes. They’ll say, ‘Is he a hearing dog?’ and they don’t realize they’re asking me,” she explains. “Sometimes they don’t even see me – they just think, ‘Oh, it’s a Great Dane – how exciting!’”

Sometimes, it isn’t obvious that Le Verrier has a disability; the vest helps thwart questions. “I might look fine,” she says, “but in an hour I might not be.”

While bona-fide service dogs like Sir Thomas often wear vests, the same is usually not true for identification cards, badges, shields, and other accessories that are sold online. “The ADA mandates that this dog and owner have full access to all public places. It is the *LAW*,” reads one laminated card that is sold online. Emblazoned with the words “FULL ACCESS REQUIRED,” it sells for \$21.99.

Another moneymaker for these websites is enrollment in a registry for service dogs. The companies do not test the dogs, or offer any assurances about the validity of the information they are recording: They just assign a number and issue a card. The certification is wholly unnecessary: The Americans with Disabilities Act does not require handler or dog to have or present identification. And Le Verrier thinks doing so, even under the most benign circumstances, is a bad idea.

“If someone asks you for papers, and you comply, it might make it more helpful for the person who’s asking,” she says.

“But think about the precedent you’re setting for everyone else.”

For her part, Kujawa carries along business cards that she distributes to anyone who needs a little education. The cards explain “what and where a service dog can go,” she says. “Which is anyplace I can go!”

LESS IS MORE

Outrage over fake service dogs is a natural response. But some advocates for the disabled point out that legislating morality is not only futile, but may have serious repercussions for the very community it is trying to protect.

Most egregious are those people who take ill-behaved dogs into public and pass them off as service dogs... These tear at the rights of those who have and use service dogs appropriately.

Michelle Spencer, a disabled veteran from Portland, Oregon, points out that stringent measures, such as national certification or registration of service dogs, will create more red tape for those who actually need them. Is trying to ferret out each and every imposter worth the risk of limiting a person with a disability’s legitimate access? As someone who actually has a service dog, she thinks not.

“It reminds me of the legislation put in many years ago in Oregon around driver’s licenses and illegal immigrants,” she explains. “Everyone said, make it mandatory that to get a driver’s license you have to show a birth certificate. Seems pretty simple, right? Well, what happened was it made it harder for citizens to get a driver’s license, and those who couldn’t just drove anyway.”

Spencer also thinks some canine posers are less problematic than others.

“There are those people who take their perfectly well-behaved pets on airplanes

or into restaurants. Unless someone says that the dog isn’t a service dog, no one knows. These are 99 percent of the examples I hear ... ‘I know a breeder who took their show dog to show X,’ or ‘You should have seen the plane full of dogs going to the dog show,’” she says. “Is it wrong? Absolutely. Is there anything I or anyone else can do about it? Usually not.”

More egregious and troublesome, she says, are those people who take ill-behaved dogs into public and pass them off as service dogs. “These are the dogs that pee in the hardware store, bark and lunge at the public, and do things that are quite obviously not appropriate for service dogs,” she says. “These are the folks that tear at the rights of we who have and use service dogs in a completely appropriate manner. They are the ones we are concerned about.”

There are laws that are already on the books that deal with disruptive service dogs, whether they are “legit” or not. Federal law allows businesses to ask two questions: “Is this dog a service dog required because of a disability?” and “What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?”

They cannot require medical documentation for the person or ask about the person’s disability; nor can they require a special identification card or training documentation for the dog. They also cannot ask that the dog demonstrate his ability to do the task for which he has been trained. But, if a dog is out of control and the handler cannot manage the situation, or if the dog is not house-trained, the person with the disability can be asked to leave the premises. And they can also be charged for any damage their dog may have done.

Spencer adds that some states are pursuing legislation to punish “fakers.”

“In Oregon, I and others have been working with the state legislature to make it a class C misdemeanor to say one’s dog is a service dog when it isn’t,” she says. “I suspect, over time, case law will set a precedent, and word will get out, but it is a process.”

IT’S ALL ABOUT ME

Years before her accident, Kujawa remembers taking a flight and meeting a man on board with a Dachshund. “He was traveling to a dog show,” she says, “and he was proud that he managed to take the dog on board, with a borrowed service vest.”

The problem then and now, Kujawa says, is an epidemic of self-entitlement.

“I think that, across the board, people – at least those so inclined – just take advantage of what they can. They just feel entitled to get any assistance possible, be it financial or designating their dog an assistance dog,” she says. “Sadly, most seem to feel that if it’s OK for someone who truly requires a service dog, it’s OK across the board. It is not.”

Hodge adds that most of the dozen or so people he’s met who have admitted to faking their dog’s service status honestly don’t think there are any long-term consequences to their actions. He thinks otherwise. “If their dog bites someone, it’s not just their legal liability,” he explains. “Now I have people who have created a hostile environment. There are a lot of people who are naturally afraid of dogs from the get-go. I’ve had people shriek when they get into Gander’s space. The reason I have a service dog is to avoid the stress.”

Also underlying the fake-service-dog phenomenon is a real lack of understanding of what a service dog does, and the responsibility that partnership places on the handler.

“People say to me, ‘You’re so lucky – you can take your dog everywhere with you,’” Le Verrier says. While she usually responds with a vague, “Yeah, he’s a good boy,” what she really wants to say is: “Have you thought about the reason why he’s with me?”

In addition to being indispensable helpers, service dogs are also a lot of work, Le Verrier reminds. “It’s like having a toddler and a date at the same time.” While Sir Thomas is at her side and attentive – that’s the date part – she has to plan for his needs, tote along his supplies, and make sure he doesn’t get distracted by koochie-cooers.

On some level, the self-absorption that leads people to palm their dogs off as service dogs also extends to the insistent desire to interact with a working dog like Sir Thomas, despite all the requests not to. “People want to pet him, and I’ve come to realize that it’s not really for him – it’s for them,” Le Verrier says. “That helps make it easier to say no when people ask.”

Speaking of saying no, there is another group of individuals who arguably could do more to take a stand on service-dog fakers. They are those who know people who do it, but never speak up.

Renée Le Verrier’s Great Dane, Sir Thomas, helps her with mobility issues resulting from Parkinson’s disease. When people say to her, “You’re so lucky – you get to take your dog everywhere,” she wonders whether they have ever considered why she needs the dog.



“Maybe the problem is really with me, or at least people like me, who let their friends get away with it without saying anything,” says a dog owner who has several friends who are misrepresenting their dogs as service dogs, and who wants to remain anonymous for that reason. “I’m familiar with the ‘They came for the XYZ and I didn’t say anything, and then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me’ argument. And that rings true. But I’m not willing to personally confront or take on those people. It’s not a battle I choose to fight.”

And in most cases, unless you know someone very well – including the intimate details of their physical and emotional status – it’s not a good

idea to assume that their service dog is anything other than what they say it is. After all, giving the benefit of the doubt is an integral part of safeguarding the freedom and dignity that people with disabilities deserve. Stopping those who take advantage of that is important – but not at the expense of those who need service dogs to begin with.

“The issue may be clear,” concludes Michelle Spencer, “but the solution isn’t necessarily so.” 🐾

Denise Flaim of Revodana Ridgebacks in Long Island, New York, shares her home with three Ridgebacks, three 9-year-old children, and a very patient husband.

Tick Paralysis

Five things to do if your dog suddenly seems paralyzed (and one more reason to hate ticks).

BY NANCY KERNS

My friend Chris was awakened by a bump in the night – a noise coming from the living room in the middle of the night. She listened intently for a moment, and, hearing nothing more, fell back asleep. But when she heard a dog’s nails scrabbling wildly on the hardwood floor in her hall a few hours later, she remembered the bump sound and jumped out of bed to investigate.

She found her Bloodhound/Border collie-mix, Indi, thrashing on the floor. At first she thought Indi was having a seizure; the dog’s front paws were madly paddling at the slick floor. Then Chris realized that Indi’s back legs weren’t moving at all.

I would have had heart palpitations, but Chris used to work in a veterinarian’s office, and she instantly suspected tick paralysis. As she comforted and calmed the big dog, she ran her hands all over Indi’s body, feeling for an engorged tick. After a few minutes, she found one in Indi’s armpit; it was swollen to the size of a fat sunflower seed. She removed the tick, taking care to get the entire insect (mouthparts and all), and kept searching. Only when she was satisfied that there were no more ticks on Indi’s body, did she get dressed and prepare to take the dog to the emergency vet clinic.

Tick paralysis is caused by a neurotoxin produced by egg-engorged female ticks, who transmit the toxin from their salivary glands to the dog during feeding. The production (and transmission) of the toxin is greatest when the tick has been attached to and feeding from the dog between five and seven days. Five species of North American ticks produce

the neurotoxin: the blacklegged tick (a.k.a. the deer tick), American dog tick, Rocky Mountain wood tick, the Lone Star tick, and the Gulf Coast tick. Most North American cases occur between April and June, when the ticks are at their peak reproductive activity.

Here are five things to do if your dog suddenly seems paralyzed.

1 CHECK HIM IMMEDIATELY FOR TICKS, AND REMOVE ANY YOU FIND! The sooner you remove the tick, the better the dog’s prognosis. The earliest sign of this condition is often a change in the dog’s ability to bark, caused by laryngeal paralysis. He may also have trouble eating, and may gag, drool, cough, or vomit. The back legs are almost always the first to be affected, but as the paralysis spreads, he may lose coordination of all four legs. Death can occur if the paralysis stops the dog’s breathing. However, the moment the tick is removed, the dog will slowly start to improve.

2 KEEP THE DOG COOL AND CALM, AND TAKE HIM TO YOUR VETERINARIAN. If your dog is having trouble breathing, get him to the vet as quickly as possible so oxygen can be administered. Keeping him calm and cool will reduce his need to pant.

3 DON’T GIVE YOUR DOG WATER (OR FOOD). While you do want your dog to stay cool, and you do want him to be well-hydrated, if his larynx is partially paralyzed, he may not be able to swallow properly and can choke. Taking water or food into his lungs due to the incoordination could trigger further health crises.

4 IF YOU DON’T FIND A TICK, TAKE HIM TO THE VET AS SOON AS POSSIBLE ANYWAY. Your vet may be able to find a tick that you could not, but if no ticks are found, further tests will be needed to determine the cause of his condition.

The vet will probably administer intravenous fluids, to help flush the toxin from your dog’s system. No other treatment is generally needed. Most cases of tick paralysis resolve completely within 24 hours of removing the tick, as long as further complications have not developed (from a lack of oxygen or inhaling water, for example).

5 DO ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO PREVENT FURTHER TICK BITES. If ticks are numerous in your area, make sure your dog is treated with a spot-on tick repellent such as Frontline. According to many anecdotal reports, these preparations are less effective today than they once were – but they are still more effective than nothing, and more effective than any of the homemade sprays made from essential oils that we’ve tried. It may also be wise to avoid trails or areas where ticks are found during the peak season (April to June) for the tick’s production of this toxin.

Indi spent the day receiving fluids under observation at the vet’s office. By the time Chris picked her up in the afternoon, she was able to walk (somewhat woozily) out of the clinic and hop into Chris’ van by herself. By bed time that night, she was completely recovered. 🐾

Indi was quite calm about being carried into the vet’s office on a stretcher. She was probably already feeling much better, an hour or more after the tick was removed.



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❖ WDJ Training Editor Pat Miller is author of numerous books on positive training. Available from dogwise.com or wholedogjournal.com



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