

BARKING DOGS HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

The emotion conveyed by a dog's bark often seems obvious to its human companions, but new research shows just how clear the message can be -- at least, to other dogs.

The study presents the first concrete evidence that dogs can perceive the difference between barks arising from different situations.

While dog barking is hardly on par with human language in its complexity, experts now think it's clear that dogs are conveying their feelings to humans and other dogs.

Dogs "express basic emotions, and we have not yet found signs for more complex meanings, like 'this is the postman,' 'this is the bill collector,' 'this is the neighbor,' etc.," said co-author Peter Pongracz, who is a professor of animal behavior at Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest, Hungary.

"We might call this functionally referential communication, as we are able to tell what kind of situation could elicit a particular kind of barking," he added.

Prior research conducted by Pongracz's team found that people could indeed distinguish between different types of barks. For decades, however, dog experts were stumped as to how to prove dogs could do the same thing.

For the new study, which has been accepted for publication in the journal Applied Animal Behavior Science, Pongracz and his team found a way to do just that.

The researchers first recruited pet dogs of various breeds from training schools, to serve as listeners. Next, the scientists made recordings of Hungarian Mudi dogs barking during two different situations. One set of recordings was made when a stranger entered the property where a given dog lived. The second set was made when the dogs were tethered to a tree and left alone.

Two types of mechanical noise -- an electric drill and a refrigerator -- served as control sounds.

The scientists next outfitted each of the listening dogs with a heart rate monitor. While the sound of all dog barks caused a listening dog's heart rate to jump, hearing a certain type of bark consistently over time stabilized the heart rate.

Even though they could get used to the distress barks, the listening dogs always showed a jump in heart rate when the researchers switched from one type of recorded bark to the other. This evidence for a change in attentiveness shows that not all barks sound the same to other dogs.

The researchers also think it's likely that the dogs understand the different contexts producing the barks they hear.

Previously, other researchers thought domesticated dogs barked primarily for our benefit, since neither adult wolves nor feral dogs bark.

"We think barking existed in the ancestor of the dogs, but the present form of variability and abundance of barking is the product of domestication in dogs," Pongracz explained, adding that domesticated dogs must have later "learned how to use barking amongst each other" as a form of communication to go along with others -- such as visual and scent cues.

Anna Taylor, a researcher in the Department of Psychology at the University of Sussex who also studies dogs, told Discovery News that the new study "gives a convincing demonstration that dogs do indeed perceive acoustic differences between barks recorded in different contexts."

Taylor hopes the findings will inspire future studies to determine how this bark-deciphering ability in dogs affects their behavior.

JENNIFER VIEGAS, Discovery News

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From The Land

To Russia With Love...



In February this year I was fortunate to go to Russia to represent Australia in Sled dog racing. The main kennel I stayed in was "North Hope", Neja, a privately funded orphanage for boys. The boys age from 8 years old to 16 from then on they are off to the Russian army. They have 20 dogs a mix of Malamutes and Siberians. These children are from abusive families, so the boys have issues with trust and love. The dogs help the boys deal with their issues which was wonderful to see. The boys sled race and skijor and I found out when I was over there they also show the dogs. My time at the kennel was to attend a 150km sled race with a team of Siberians that they had, the race was raising funds for the boys. I spent 3 weeks with the boys and during that time through an interpreter they told me that they showed the malamutes and Siberians and asked if I could assist in show training and grooming. It has been many years since I showed; my mothers kennel name was Chuckchi, which is a name of a Siberian tribe of nomads. She had a mix of Siberians and Malamutes and in her later years her focus was the Malamutes. So I found a number of similarities between their kennel mix and what I had grown up with. I explained to them that I was a bit rusty but would give it a go.



Every day at 8.00pm for 10mins per dog Anton (16 year old boy) practiced with me to gait, stack and bait the dogs to bring out their best. Anton learnt quickly and was very eager to do better considering in the dog yard at times was -20c. I have also heard it gets down to -40; I'm pleased I did not have those temperatures when I was there. Every day with no whinging the boys did the kennels before school at seven, then after school was skijoring and sled training, then feeding and playing with the dogs. They have magnificent dogs that are well looked after. They are fortunate all dog food is donated by the big food companies like royal canin, eukenuba, but when I asked for their grooming equipment they had **one slicker brush and one nice choker chain and lead**. So on my "To Do" list when I got home was to collect some grooming equipment and send it over. I have not shown from many years and I am not sure what the latest grooming equipment entails. However I am collecting donations in the way of show equipment to assist these beautiful boys. Postage has been organised.



I am also trying to raise funds to also bring one 14 year old boy Misha to Australia for Racing and to teach him kennel management and basic dog first aid as vets are very expensive and limited. I would also love to bring Anton out to experience the dog showing in Australia but I think which I am trying to confirm he is off to the Russian army next year and the younger boys of eight years old is too young to travel on their own to Australia.

I had a fantastic time in Russia, even though the orphanage had very little they are so generous with free accommodation and food in my time there that I know every little bit of help is appreciated. They are also welcoming if somebody from Australia would like to go over and share their knowledge. These dogs have shown the boys how to trust and love again...



If you can help

email: schuski@optusnet.com.au

ph: 03 5422 1840

On their website is a donation link if you would like to donate. The money given covers the essentials food, clothing, school books ect.

English website : <http://hope.kotkischevo.ru/english-page/>

Di Baker - Schuski Sleddog teams