



Newsletter



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Hello again

Welcome to my autumn practice newsletter. The summer has passed by in a blur and I can't believe autumn is upon us already - especially when looking out of the window! But I couldn't let the season go by without passing on the latest thinking in management and treatment for firework phobias.

I also wanted to share a fascinating piece of research on how the dog thinks and review an excellent new book for practice staff and clients alike. I hope you find it interesting.

Kind regards

Stephanie

Quote of the week

To err is human
– to forgive,
canine.

Anon.

Would you like your own copy of my newsletter?

If you would like a personal copy of my quarterly behaviour fact sheet, please send me your e mail address and I will send you an electronic copy directly.

What about when the parties are over?

Once the firework season is over owners can be encouraged to desensitise their dogs to the sounds of fireworks to prevent or reduce recurrence next year.

Research suggests the use of sound CDs can significantly reduce fearful behaviour in response to fireworks in the majority of dogs, providing the product is of good quality and client is given guidance. Why not invite clients to register an interest in following a program? They could then be contacted in the New Year to provide CDs and support. A practice evening could even be arranged if enough clients are interested.



Calmex

Calmex is a new short acting neuropeptide anxiolytic by Vet Plus. Onset is suggested to be 30-60 minutes and duration 4-6 hours. One of its modes of action includes increasing circulating serotonin so care is needed with other serotonergic products. As it is relatively new evaluation is on-going.

Top tips for helping pets through the firework season

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- Adaptil has been shown to reduce signs of distress caused by fireworks in 74% of dogs. Diffusers are usually recommended but where the dog also shows fear when leaving the house during firework season a collar may be more appropriate
- Exercise should be given when there is little risk there will be fireworks.
- Owners should try not to do things that bother their dog when fireworks are being let off
- Owners should stay calm and relaxed. The key message they should be aiming to communicate is that there is nothing odd going on. They shouldn't pay their dog extra attention, nor should they punish or ignore their dog: ignore the fearful behaviour but not the dog as social rejection is a punishment.
- A den can help the dog feel more secure. The den should be cosy, covered on all but one side, always available and associated with great things such as toys and special treats. Put two blankets in the den and rotate washing them to keep the scent of the den familiar whilst maintaining hygiene

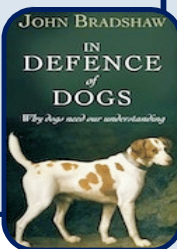


- Further client resources can be found at www.petfireworkfear.co.uk
- The BSAVA policy statement on the use of medications for management of fireworks can be found on the BSAVA website (www.bsava.com) under Advice - Policy statements

Book review

There are lots of new books about dogs published every year. Some offer excellent advice - others - not so much. However, it's not very often a new book comes along that I feel has the potential to have a major impact on the way owners and many canine professionals understand dogs. John Bradshaw's book 'In defence of dogs: why dogs need our understanding' is one such book.

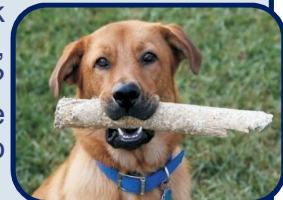
Academics, scientists and qualified canine behaviour professionals have known for some time now that the traditional view that dogs live in dominance hierarchies is misguided and that the use of 'dominance' based techniques to modify behaviour is potentially very harmful. However this message has been slow to filter through to common knowledge, perhaps due to their continued use on TV. This book addresses this problem by presenting a very readable and easily understandable summary of the latest research and thinking in dog behaviour. It is therefore a must read for anyone interested in dogs or wanting to improve their relationship with and understanding of them.



Do dogs make conscious decisions?

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The gift of conscious thought has always been believed to belong to humans alone. But could it be that dogs also think rationally or make deductions, albeit at a simpler level? Researchers in Vienna have developed a clever way to test for this



When humans perform a task their first choice is to do so with their hands. They also learn a great deal through observation. Researchers found that if a 14 month old child observes an adult perform a task such as turning on a light switch using their forehead they will perform the task in the same way. It is assumed they rationalise that the person must have a reason for doing so even if they don't know what it is. However, if the adult turns on the light using their forehead when their hands are full they will work out that was the only reason they didn't use their hands, and so will use their hands to perform the task when doing so themselves.

Researchers wanted to test if dogs would do the same. Dogs prefer to use their mouth for tasks if they can. They therefore trained a Border collie called Guinness to pull a lever with her paw. They then let other dogs observe Guinness pulling the lever for food. Those dogs that watched her pull the lever with



her paw also used their paw when mimicking the task. However, those that watched her perform the task whilst holding a ball in her mouth chose to use their mouth.

Scientists are conducting further tests to work out exactly what this implies. However it may be that the dogs also worked out that the only reason Guinness didn't use her mouth was because she was holding the ball. This potentially shows dogs are capable of much more complex 'thought' than has so far been recognised.

Case history

Immy had always loved her walks so it came as a complete surprise to her owners when one day she bolted back to their car mid walk, seeming desperate to go home. They were even more concerned when Immy also started to show signs of fear even when being walked in the local fields. They decided it was time to get some help.

Although the trigger for the first incident was never identified, it became clear that Immy's worry that it may recur had caused her fear to spread to any large open space. Walks had to be suspended for a short time to prevent further deterioration or the risk she may run off again and get lost or injured. We then developed a desensitisation and counter conditioning program to gradually rebuild Immy's confidence when outdoors. Caroline patiently followed the program over a period of a few weeks, during which Immy gradually got back to her old self and to enjoying her walks with her friends (Immy is the brown dog on the right).

"I'm so pleased to say we're back enjoying long family walks and Immy's thoroughly enjoying her rediscovered love of time off her lead." Caroline



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