

THE *Bluffer's*[®] GUIDE TO

DOGS

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NEW EDITION

THE *Bluffer's*[®] GUIDE TO

DOGS



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‘The one absolutely unselfish friend that man can have... the one that never deserts him and the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous is his dog...’

George Graham Vest

IT'S A DOG'S LIFE

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a human in possession of a good home must be in want of a dog... especially because of the huge prize money available from entering them into TV talent shows.

However, in a world where fame lasts no longer than 15 seconds (a relatively long time in dog years), it may come as a surprise to discover that the domestic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*) and mankind (*Homo sapiens*) have been working together for roughly 15,000 years, making it one of the most successful inter-species relationships in history. The irony is not lost on the astute dog bluffer who will have spotted that, when many of man's own relationships break down, more effort is put into fighting for custody of the dog than anything else except the children (and sometimes even them).

The most famous description of the bond between man and dog can be attributed to an American politician and lawyer, George Graham Vest. In September 1870, he represented a dog owner whose faithful four-legged companion, Old Drum, had been shot dead by a local sheep farmer. This farmer had publicly declared that any dog

found on his property would be shot. Old Drum's owner sued for damages, and, in a classic courtroom drama, Vest turned to the jury and said: 'The one absolutely unselfish friend that man can have... the one that never deserts him and the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous is his dog... He guards the sleep of his pauper master as if he were a prince. When all other friends desert, he remains.'

Vest's heartfelt words pulled the jury's heartstrings so strongly that he won the case, and Old Drum's owner was awarded \$500 compensation (so the story goes), 10 times the maximum limit for damages at that time. Since that day, dogs have been known as man's best friend.

Over the years, many millions of dog owners have happily invited their canine friends into their homes, spending hours training them to sit, stay and roll over dead when they shout 'bang' at them. You will of course realise that in these dog-friendly households, it is the dog who has successfully trained the family to run around after him or her, not the other way around.

But dogs are social animals. Leave them home alone for too long and they might be tempted to trash the place. Alternatively, they'll simply leave something unpleasant in your bed, chew the chair legs on your dining furniture, and annoy the neighbours with their incessant howling. Dog-behaviour specialists refer to this as separation anxiety. Dog owners refer to it as bloody annoying. How are they supposed to pay the vet bills if they don't go out to work? It's a fair enough point, but if they can't make arrangements for the dog to be walked in their absence, they might wonder about

the wisdom of having a dog in the first place. Very few dogs' homes and rescue centres will rehome a dog unless there are guarantees about regular daily routines involving plenty of exercise and activity. And then there's the dog to consider.

Dogs can be the ideal companion: they don't answer back (apart from a warning growl if you try to detach them from a chew), they don't care if you leave the seat up on the toilet (in fact, this often makes drinking out of the toilet bowl easier for them) and they're more than happy to curl up on the sofa with you and watch a football game or a soppy film. However, in younger families with nearly every member at school or work, there's often little for the dog to do on their own during the day. There's only so much daytime TV any dog can take. So if you want to be taken seriously as one who understands something of the particular group dynamics involved in a situation where a human family and a dog live together, then you will need a grasp of the essential facts – which is where this short guide can help you.

This book sets out to conduct you through the main danger zones encountered in discussions about dogs, and to equip you with a vocabulary and evasive technique that will minimise the risk of being rumbled as a bluffer. It will give you a few easy-to-learn hints and methods that might even allow you to be accepted as a dog expert of rare knowledge and experience. But it will do more. It will give you the tools to impress legions of marvelling listeners with your wisdom and insight – without anyone discovering that, until you read it, you probably didn't know the difference between a Pekapoo and a shih-tzu.



When it jumps onto a double bed, a dog will seek to split the human occupants by lying down between them, gradually nudging them further apart. It will rarely be satisfied until at least one of you is on the floor.

THE BIGGEST BLUFF OF ALL

A dog is not a wolf in sheep's clothing (otherwise it would look like a sheep). However, today's domestic dogs do share a significant amount of DNA with their wolf cousins. There is a debate about when the relationship between man and wolf, or dog, first began to develop; some say it was 14,000 years ago, while others say it could be as many as 17,000 years ago. The bluffer does not need to split dog hairs over this. Suffice to say that scientists are using fossils to determine this information, so however you look at it, it was a very long time ago.

With all relationships, it takes two to tango, and in this most unusual relationship (for the dog is the only species to take instructions from another animal species as if it were its own), it was the dog who tangoed the first step. This is proof, if ever any more were needed, that dogs have been training humans for far longer than humans think they've been training dogs.

Initially, wolves were attracted to man because of the fire he had created to keep himself warm. This vestigial link continues today, with most dogs successfully curling up

in front of the domestic fire, preventing much of the heat reaching the human.

HUNTING HOUNDS

Like humans, dogs are hunters. However, they're also opportunists. If a human is stupid enough to leave an unattended joint of meat at nose height on a kitchen worktop, a dog is not going to examine its conscience and turn down the opportunity to eat it. They are intelligent animals, who were quick to realise that while they had the means to hunt in packs and bring down huge beasts, there were easier ways of finding supper. Scavenging for food is much safer. Why go out and risk being seriously harmed in the hunt for food, when you can send a human to get a tin of something chunky in gravy from the nearest supermarket?

Despite what many bluffers might think, Stone Age man was quite civilised. For example, while he had yet to discover the delights of supermarket loyalty cards, he had adopted a system of throwing food scraps into one big pile outside of the main settlement area. This meant that rats and other vermin were kept at bay. It appears even Stone Age man had problems getting the local council to come along and empty the bins on a fortnightly basis. Wolves began making the most of this free food opportunity and soon realised it was worth keeping in favour with the human species.

TERRITORIAL TENDENCIES

In addition to sharing the hunting instinct, wolves and humans realised they had something else in common: they

were territorial. Now that wolves had found this useful source of food, they protected it from other dangerous animals hoping to tuck into a free lunch. Whenever another hungry, slaving beast got too close to the cave or encampment, the wolves would bark and howl, alerting the humans to the potential danger. Together, they saw off many threats, and it was through this cooperation that man and wolf began cohabiting. By pretending that the human was the dominant partner, the wolf laid the foundations of a convincing bluff that no other non-human species has since surpassed.

THE FAMILY CANIDAE

There are many subspecies within the canine world (dogs, wolves, jackals, dingoes, foxes and coyotes), but they all belong to the biological family known as Canidae. DNA evidence suggests that the first canines to be domesticated were grey wolves (*Canis lupus*). These were social animals who, after mating for life, often travelled around in family groups, only looking for a new partner when their current partner had died, or been killed. Clearly, they had lots to teach humans about loyalty and fidelity.

The size of a wolf family pack will range from five to 12 animals, with the parent wolves – the alpha male and alpha female – at the core, and an elaborate hierarchy of offspring of various ages below them. When the younger wolves become sexually mature, they tend to go off and look for a mate and create their own pack. Many people might feel a profound admiration for an animal species

where the kids actually fly the nest and don't return on a Sunday afternoon three or four years later, broke and with two months' worth of washing in a collection of bin bags.

A wolf is a predatory animal, often tracking prey over large distances. Its cunning allows it to remain hidden for as long as possible, and when the intended victim finally realises how close it is to meeting its maker, its reaction can determine whether it lives or dies. Wolves enjoy the chase. If their prey stands its ground, a wolf may give up and ignore it. But if the wolves fancy a little fun, they'll try to spook it into running.



If you achieve nothing else in training your dog, ban it from sleeping on your bed. Otherwise, very soon it will be sleeping in it and you'll be on the dog blanket.

If they chase a group of animals, wolves will attempt to split the group, and then home in on one particular member of it. With their prey in sight, they'll try to force it over rougher ground to slow it down, or corner it at a dead end or sheer drop. An observant bluffer might notice that the family dog adopts similar tactics. When it jumps onto a double bed, a dog will seek to split the human occupants by lying down between them, gradually nudging them further apart. It will rarely be satisfied until at least one

of you is on the floor. There is a vital lesson to be learnt here. If you achieve nothing else in training your dog, ban it from sleeping on your bed. Otherwise, very soon it will be sleeping in it and you'll be on the dog blanket. This is known as Alpha Dog Syndrome. Other signs include:

- The best seat in the living room belongs to the dog. It's the one nearest the fire and with the best view of the TV. In extreme cases the remote control is Velcroed to the armrest.
- The dog sits at the head of the table at dinner time.
- The dog is the first one to leave the house when the family pack goes out as a group, and is also the first one to enter on their return.
- When the family pack goes out in the car, the dog travels in the front passenger seat.
- On walks the dog will be the first through gates and over stiles. It will always be ahead of the leading human in the group.

Dogs that are true domestic pets (or animal companions as we must learn to call them in these politically correct times) tend to be the ones who succeed in dominating their pack. Dogs trained to undertake specific jobs as part of the human-canine team, such as sheep dogs, police dogs or guide dogs, are trained to know their place from the moment they join the human pack. However, non-dog-owning bluffers may take the attitude that all dogs are alpha

dogs. After all, in the human-dog relationship, who's the one who goes round picking up whose poop? If you were a visiting Martian, who would you think was in charge?

FROM WOLF TO DOG

Turning a wolf into a dog was not a trick Stone Age man managed to pull off overnight. It took many successive generations of wolves and humans to finally negotiate the deal that would lead to wolves agreeing to be fed, sheltered and kept warm in return for helping with the hunting and gathering, and warning of an unexpected visitor at the cave door.

Modern-day experiments to domesticate wolves have failed. Wolf cubs can be hand-reared and are quite tame, but by the time they reach maturity, their wolf DNA has kicked in and told them that there is an alternative to human society. A dog might know not to bite the hand that feeds it, but researchers soon discovered that a wolf isn't quite so respectful, especially if the hand doing the feeding looks more appetising than the dried dog food on offer.

The wolves that survived were the ones who learned to live side-by-side with humans – without biting them. Any scavenging wolf that posed a threat to our ancestors was summarily sent packing. Therefore, only the wolves with gentler temperaments were invited over the doorstep. 'Two Socks' in the 1990 film *Dances With Wolves* is a good example of a wolf with the right sort of attitude.

Scientists have realised that today's dogs, even when fully grown and mature, still exhibit many puppy-like

qualities. Whereas a wolf-pup is happy to frolic about with a ball, a fully grown wolf isn't. One of the major differences between adult wolves and adult dogs is that adult dogs still retain a playful attitude and juvenile qualities. The technical term, should you need to drop this into a conversation with a dog owner, is neoteny: the retention of child-like features in an adult. Many women often use this term about husbands and boyfriends who have a knack of regressing to their four-year-old selves when their football team loses.

Indeed, should you find yourself being asked the question 'What's the difference between a wolf and a dog?', you can confidently answer 1.8%. That's the only difference between a wolf's DNA and a dog's DNA. Domestic dogs are essentially wolf puppies that have grown up physically, but not reached emotional maturity. That's why many women prepare for life with a man by first practising with a dog.