



ANIMAL ANTICS

Have you ever asked yourself “Why Does My Dog”? Over the coming months we shall look at Scent, Sight & Sound to give you a clearer insight into ‘your dog’s world’, thus allowing greater communication between you.

“IN YOUR DOG’S WORLD” PART 1 ... SCENT

Scent is the most highly developed of all a dog’s senses.

Sadly, because we humans depend far more on sight and sound to communicate and understand what is happening around us, we have very little understanding of how important a dog’s sense of smell is to their everyday life and mental well being. This is because our sense of smell is very poor in comparison to that of a dog - humans have approximately 5 million scent receptors in their nose whilst the average dog has over 200 million, and working dogs such as scent hounds can have between 230-300 million. How amazing is a dog’s sense of smell? ... use the analogy of a dog being able to find a single grain of sand on a 10m square patch of a beach!

How Does a Dog’s Nose Work?

When a dog takes a short deep sniff (rather than normal breathing) moisture on the surface of the dog’s nose helps to capture scent molecules in the air and dissolve them. These molecules then come into contact with the olfactory membranes deep inside the dog’s nose, which send nerve impulses to the olfactory centre of the brain (which is 40 times larger in ratio to the olfactory centre of a human brain). These nasal membranes cover the nose’s wafer-thin turbinate bones and have convoluted folds to ensure that the smallest amount of scent can be captured within them and assessed accurately.

The dog has the most sensitive sense of smell of all domestic animals. The nerve cells that detect scent are located in the lining of its nose, which is greatly folded and gives an area of approximately 150cm² (23 sq in) - about 30 times that of a human.

As a result, some dogs can detect an odour at up to one-millionth of the concentration detectable by a human. When you walk your dog, it is moving through a world of smells, receiving messages via scent at levels as dilute as one in 10,000,000. You cannot even begin to detect them! Dogs can also detect a wider range of scents than you can. The average human can detect about 1000 types of scent, and an expert about 4000, but a dog can detect far more.

Scenting ability varies between breeds, and is best in the hounds that were developed for this purpose. The Bloodhound is one of the best: one particular animal is known to have tracked the scent trail left by a man’s feet, through leather-soled boots, four and a half days after the trail had been laid.

Scent is an important means of communication for the dog. Glands that secrete odiferous substances are located around the head, neck and groin area, which is why dogs sniff at these areas when they meet. Two major glands (anal glands) situated on each side of the anus produce a strong-smelling secretion that coats the faeces, leaving a scent message for other dogs (which can persist for quite some time in the environment). These secretions are different in each individual. When your dog sniffs at faeces on the roadside, it is learning about the social status of whoever left the faeces and the time at which they were left.

In a dog’s scent-orientated world, urine carries important messages. Dogs urinate over the spot chosen by predecessors in order to leave behind their own ‘signature’. Therefore, urine indicates who passed by, how long ago, and even the reproductive status.

So, the next time your dog wrenches you off your feet when he stops to sniff, don’t reprimand him ... remember ... he’s just reading the newspaper!

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