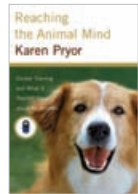




Reaching the Animal Mind: Clicker Training and What It Teaches Us About All Animals

By Karen Pryor
Scribner, 272 pp., 2009; \$25
Reviewed by Karen B. London, PhD

I STARTED SMILING IN CHAPTER ONE when Karen Pryor wrote, “I have heard of professors of behavioral science, who should revere positive reinforcement, boasting about how tough they make life for their graduate students. As if it would help them learn better. Oh, come on, folks!” Throughout *Reaching the Animal Mind*, Pryor tells it as she sees it in this manner, which kept me smiling through the next 11 chapters, too. Her use of storytelling to teach and explain makes this book delightful to read.



The main point is that animals learn best with positive methods of training, and that event markers, such as clickers, are most advantageous for quick learning. The book covers the reasons for rapid acquisition of new skills through the use of event markers: Lack of punishment prevents poisoning of the cues; event markers allow a two-way flow of information even across species; and the brain easily processes the sound of the click. Her explanation of this latter point is accessible to all readers whether or not they are knowledgeable about the biology of the brain, and she references works that go into more detail for anyone with an interest in delving deeper into the relevant research.

Pryor gives simple explanations of operant conditioning’s basic terms such as primary, secondary and tertiary reinforcers; cues; event markers; shaping; and successive approximations. She further clarifies these terms and others by comparing the proper usage to the erroneous way these terms are sometimes applied. Her explanations are interspersed with

illustrative stories from her years of experience training dolphins, wolves, hermit crabs, fish, people and, of course, dogs.

Pryor feels that observation is a part of science, and that there is no reason to dismiss observations by disdainfully referring to them as mere anecdotes. I agree with this completely, and it’s my experience that all good scientists consider observation to be a crucial part of the process. We do, however, part ways on the subject when Pryor takes these observations and comes up with what they mean (forms a hypothesis) and then accepts the hypothesis as the truth without further investigation, study or testing. That’s just not science. It’s a shame, too, because Pryor has contributed greatly to science in many ways, but this issue sets back her assertion that people like herself, without formal training, can be scientists. They can, of course, but only if they are doing science.

Beyond explaining why she favors one particular training technique, *Reaching the Animal Mind* is an enjoyable, informative journey through Pryor’s life, which has been marked by adventures with many animals and her ever-growing knowledge of how best to train them. I highly recommend this book and hope it will be as popular as her other books have been.

To the Rescue: Found Dogs with a Mission

By Elise Lufkin, photographs by Diana Walker
Skyhorse Press, 160 pp., 2009; \$19.95
Reviewed by Laurel Maury

THERE’S SOMETHING TOUCHING about “helper” dogs. Those lucky enough to know search-and-rescue, detection, service or therapy dogs feel they are among



the noblest creatures on the planet. After 9/11, the very sight of a sniffer or SAR dog was enough to bring many to the verge of grateful tears.

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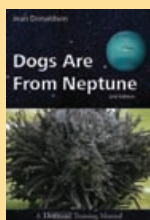


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In *To the Rescue: Found Dogs with a Mission*, Elise Lufkin takes as her subject therapy and service dogs who were themselves once rescued, and the mix of loyal canines and their compassionate owners makes for a spiritual and awe-inspiring read. Her profiles of owners and dogs at work make one feel that, on some deep level, all is right with the universe.

Most books on search-and-rescue dogs focus on well-bred, highly trained animals, the Green Berets and elite detectives of the canine kingdom, while books on guide dogs are full of images of limpid-eyed, well-cared-for purebreds. In contrast, Lufkin's stories start heartbreakingly—take Laddy, for example: “The dog was filthy, with matted fur, and was bleeding at the mouth”—yet have happy endings. This large Australian Shepherd mix was also “patient, intelligent and eager to please,” so owner Deborah Zapusek trained him to be a therapy dog for at-risk children. Now Laddy spends his days with those who need him the most.

In a book full of triumphs, a few stand out. Sunny, a Golden Retriever, was rescued from a highway meridian. After performing well on tests, he was trained and given to Valarie, a high school sophomore with brittle-bone disease. Seven years later, Valarie (who's now a pharmacy student) says that—in addition to making her life easier in a physical sense—his greatest contribution is “changing the way other people look at me.” Or Marlee, a pound pooch with only one front leg. Trained as a therapy dog, she helps newly disabled veterans accept life with missing limbs.

In this wondrous little book, we see mutts who've been rescued from shelters, from ditches and from dogfights turn into therapy dogs or talented search-and-rescue, detection or service dogs. Although each dog's story seems like a miracle, the dogs' owners are, by and large, simply regular folk who saw a glimmer of something special in an animal's eye. Lufkin's book is a lesson in how everyday critters (on two *and* four legs) can help change the world.

Laurel Maury reviews for NPR and writes regularly for the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*; she lives in New York.

Bonding with Your Dog: A Trainer's Secrets for Building a Better Relationship

By Victoria Schade

Howell Book House, 224 pp., 2009; \$16.99

Reviewed by Pat Miller, CPDT, CDBC, APDT

AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, MANY OF us have longed for a better relationship with one or more of our canine companions. In her first book, author/trainer



Victoria Schade offers a valuable in-depth look at that much-coveted quality in dog-human relationships known as “the bond,”

which she describes as “a relationship steeped in love, plus equal parts mutual respect, trust and regard. In short, it's the glue of your relationship with your dog.” Graphic examples of damaged relationships from her own case files provide ample opportunity for the reader to grasp, and relate to, the frustration and disappointment that accompany a failed relationship.

Well-grounded in a positive perspective on training and behavior, Schade examines the role each of these plays in building a rock-solid relationship between canine and human in Part One of the book. She also points out, for example, that while many owners and trainers expect and demand that their dogs respect them, they too often neglect to return the respect, and thereby far too often fail to earn their dogs' trust—a critical piece of the bond.

She underscores her points by reminding the reader that physical punishment, collar “corrections,” shock collars and other old-fashioned coercive techniques such as the alpha roll and scruff shake have no place in modern, positive, relationship-building training programs.

Schade moves from theory to practice in Part Two, and offers a wealth of practical suggestions owners can employ to create or repair their own relationships with their canine pals, from management tools and basic training techniques to the critical importance of having fun with your dog. Some gems include Find