

The human–animal bond

Everyone knows the close bond between some animals and humans. We think of horses and dogs, for example, as domestic animals. We use horses for transport and dogs to look after sheep and guard houses as well as thinking of them as friends, but they were once wild.

One example of this close bond is with a bird known as a ‘honey guide’. This bird can easily find bees’ nests, but it cannot get inside without human help. The Maasai tribesmen can find more honey more quickly with the help of this bird. The honey guide makes a special call to guide the tribesmen to the bee hives. The Maasai can then get the honey and give the bird the honeycomb as a reward.

Another example is a group of dolphins in Brazil. The dolphins herd fish towards the fishermen. The dolphins leap into the air to signal when the men should throw their fishing nets. The fishermen catch the fish and the dolphins can then catch some of the fish that try to escape.

Most people don’t like rats, but they are very good at finding landmines as they have an excellent sense of smell, are very intelligent and like repetitive tasks. People train the rats to find the landmines by rewarding them with food. Rats are particularly good for this task as they are too light to set off the landmines, they are cheap to transport and it only takes about nine months to train them. So far they have cleared landmines from more than two million square metres in African countries.

An unusual example of the human animal bond is the ‘piranha pedicure’. With this treatment, you put your feet in a tank of water and the Garra Rufa fish gently nibble away at the dry skin on your feet. This provides the fish with food and the human with soft skin on their feet. This treatment is not new. The Garra Rufa fish are native to Turkey, Syria, Iraq and other parts of the Middle East where there is a long tradition of using these fish to treat skin problems.

Recent research in Japan shows that dogs are very successful at detecting cancer, for example by smelling someone’s breath. Unfortunately it takes too long to train the dogs and it is too expensive now to use them commercially, but the findings could lead to a breakthrough in cancer detection in the future.

1 Which animal in the text (1–6) helps with each of the following? Choose from the following.

dog	rat	fish	horse	dolphin	bird
-----	-----	------	-------	---------	------

- getting soft skin on your feet _____
- finding honey _____
- detecting cancer _____
- finding landmines _____
- transport _____
- catching fish _____

2 Read the article and decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F). Circle the correct statements and correct those that are false.

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1 Domestic animals were wild in the past. | T/F |
| 2 Honey guide birds can get the honey without help. | T/F |
| 3 Dolphins dive into the water to signal to fishermen when to throw their nets. | T/F |
| 4 Rats have a very good sense of smell. | T/F |
| 5 It takes more than a year to train a rat to detect landmines. | T/F |
| 6 Using fish to treat skin problems is new. | T/F |
| 7 It is too expensive to use dogs to detect cancer now. | T/F |

3 There are a number of infinitives in the text. Complete the sentences with the correct infinitive.

to guide to find to use to treat to set off to signal to look after to train

- 1 We used dogs _____ sheep.
- 2 The honey guide bird makes a special call _____ the tribesmen to the bee hives.
- 3 The dolphins leap into the air _____ when the fishermen should throw their nets.
- 4 They train rats _____ landmines by rewarding them with food.
- 5 The rats are too light _____ the landmines.
- 6 It only takes nine months _____ the rats to detect landmines.
- 7 Garra Rufa fish are used _____ skin conditions in the Middle East.
- 8 It is too expensive _____ the dogs to detect cancer commercially.

4 Complete the sentences with the correct preposition.

in into from to as on of at

- 1 We think of horses and dogs _____ domestic animals.
- 2 The tribesmen find honey more quickly with the help _____ the honey guide bird.
- 3 The dolphins leap _____ the air to show the fishermen when to throw their nets.
- 4 Rats are very good _____ finding landmines.
- 5 Rats have cleared landmines _____ more than two million square metres in Africa.
- 6 You put your feet _____ a tank of water.
- 7 The fish nibble away at the dry skin _____ your feet.
- 8 The Garra Rufa fish are native _____ the Middle East.

5 In pairs, make as many questions as you can about the text. Then ask another pair to answer them, without looking.

6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- What was the most interesting or surprising thing you learned about the human–animal bond?
- Think of other examples where humans work together with animals.
- Do you think it is acceptable for people to use animals for experiments?
- Do you think animals should have the same rights as people?

Glossary

bond (*noun*) – a feeling of love, friendship towards other people **bond** (*verb*)

domestic (*adj*) – a domestic animal is one that is kept as a pet or on a farm

wild (*adj*) – a wild animal lives in natural conditions and is not raised by humans

tribe (*noun*) – a large group of related families who live in the same area

hive (*noun*) – the place where bees live and make honey

honeycomb (*noun*) – a structure with a lot of holes that honeybees make for storing honey

reward (*noun*) – something good that you receive because of something that you did

herd (*verb*) – to make a group of animals move together to another place

leap (*verb*) – to jump into the air

signal (*verb*) – to make a movement or sound that has a special meaning to another person

landmine (*noun*) – a bomb hidden under the ground that explodes when something touches it

repetitive (*adj*) – performing the same action over long periods of time

set off (*phrasal verb*) – to make something explode

pedicure (*noun*) – a treatment for your feet and toenails that makes them look and feel good

piranha (*noun*) – a small South American river fish that has sharp teeth and eats meat

nibble (*verb*) – to eat something by taking a lot of small bites

commercially (*adv*) – in a way that can make money

breakthrough (*noun*) – a discovery or achievement that comes after a lot of hard work