



Animal Talk

7 surprising ways animals and humans communicate

BY ALINE ALEXANDER NEWMAN

Can you speak monkey? How about hippopotamus or squirrel? Talking to animals is not just for Dr. Dolittle. In fact most people can learn to do it. Reading animals' body language is one way. Another trick is to teach animals humanspeak—in the form of words, symbols, sounds, or gestures. It's generally far easier to get animals to understand what we're telling them than it is to get them to say things to us. But sometimes, such a close bond develops that an actual two-way conversation takes place. Keep reading for true stories about chatting with animals.

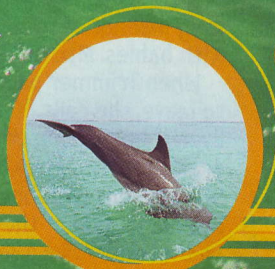
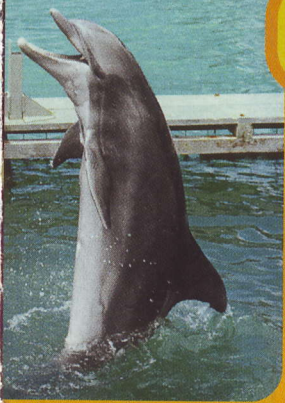
1 Fish Fry

Josephine the bottlenose dolphin (left) likes her fish frozen. Taught to press a paddle whenever she hears a certain sound, she earns 25 fishy treats in a row. But one day something happens. Josephine ignores 25 straight *dings*. She doesn't jump into the air or flap her tail. She just stubbornly refuses to participate. "I didn't know what was wrong," says Ronald J. Schusterman, a marine biologist at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Finally, he asks a

student to check the fish machine. It's working fine, but...ewww! The fish it is dispensing are sunbaked and about as appetizing as warm ice cream.

Josephine watches as the student replaces the warm fish with frozen. Schusterman hits the sound button, and she zooms right over and presses the paddle.

"It takes a very bright animal to figure out how to signal the experimenter that something is wrong," Schusterman says.



2

Say Again?

Boring. That's what most kids think when somebody asks them the same question over and over. Apparently, Alex the African gray parrot (right) agrees.

Behavioral psychologist Irene Pepperberg, of Brandeis and Harvard universities, presents a tray of different-colored blocks. Two are green, three blue, and six red. "What color three?" she asks, expecting Alex to say "blue."

But Alex has been there, done that. He seems to want Pepperberg to ask a different question—one that requires a brand-new answer. So he deliberately gives a wrong answer. "Five," says the parrot, stating a number instead of a color.

Surprised that Alex gives the wrong answer, the psychologist asks again, "What color three?"

"Five," repeats Alex. He keeps giving that wrong answer until Pepperberg grows frustrated.

"OK, smarty-pants," she finally blurts. "What color five?"

This is it—the question he's been waiting for.

"None," squawks the brainy bird.

C'MON,
GIVE ME
SOMETHING
HARDER!



3

Manners First

Suppose you could tell a gorilla what to do. Carol Trimmer, of Dublin, Ohio, can boss around a handsome silverback named Mac. But it takes lots of time and effort to build their relationship. Since 2004, Trimmer has averaged three hour-long visits to the Columbus Zoo each week.

While there, she entertains the lowland gorillas Mumbah (right) and Mac by blowing bubbles, playing with puppets, or showing them pictures in books. Plus, she talks constantly, using the same high-pitched, sing-song manner of speaking that people use with babies. Mac now recognizes her voice.

When Trimmer packs up her bag of tricks to leave, she calls, "Come walk me out." Even if he's sitting on the far side of his enclosure, Mac rises and ambles toward her. She beckons with one hand, and he follows her on his side of the fence—seeing his guest to the "door" like a proper primate.

NEXT WEEK
CAN WE
READ ABOUT
KING KONG?



4

Panic Attack

I USED TO BE
A WILD CHILD,
BUT NOW
I'M A MELLOW
FELLOW!

Horses talk with their bodies. Knowing that helps Dennis Wright, a horse communicator from Arlington, Washington, calm a wild-eyed, rampaging thoroughbred.

On entering the arena, Wright expects the horse to charge. When it does, he throws up his arms to mimic a rearing stallion and yells. Spooked, the thoroughbred thunders away, and Wright moves into his spot. This makes Wright the alpha horse, or leader.

As the panicked horse circles, Wright doesn't chase or lasso him. Instead, he repeatedly steps in front of him, forcing the horse to change direction. That wins respect. Last, Wright raises one hand and turns his back, showing trust.

"That horse isn't crazy," says Wright, "He's afraid, and lonely for his herd." By acting the way horses do with each other, Wright makes him feel secure.

Twenty minutes after their first meeting, the thoroughbred approaches Wright, and man and horse walk together, as friends.

NOTHING
SCARES
ME!

5



In Touch

An alert dog "hears" everything we say, even when our message is unspoken.

At the age of 13, radio pet show host Harrison Forbes had a mysterious problem

with his American Staffordshire terrier, PJ. Whenever Forbes's mom walked the dog, PJ would pick a fight with a neighbor's Rottweiler. But if Forbes walked PJ along the same route, the two dogs would sniff and play. Forbes never knew why, until he was an adult.

He had a long talk with his mom and discovered she was terrified of Rottweilers. Weighing about 100 pounds, with large heads and powerful muscles, Rottweilers can look scary. Without even knowing it, his mother tensed every time she met one. PJ picked up on that fear. "A leash is like an electric power cord," says Forbes. "Your feelings, whether of confidence or anxiety, travel straight to the dog."

So remember: If your dog misbehaves, maybe changing your own behavior could help.

NOBODY FORGETS MY FRIENDS IF I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT!

6

Timely Reminder

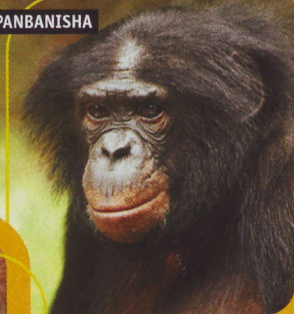
Every night, Panbanisha the bonobo (below) and the other bonobos living at the Language Research Center in Atlanta, Georgia, watch a DVD or listen to someone read from *Harry Potter*. Program director and scientist Bill Fields hands out blankets and glasses of milk. The apes smooch their blankets into nests on the floor and curl up inside. Then Fields turns off the light.

On Friday, Mari the orangutan sleeps over. Mari prefers sleeping outside, so Fields lets her out early and forgets about her later, when he hands out milk and blankets. But it can get chilly at night, and Panbanisha is concerned for her friend. Grabbing a large, laminated paper chart covered with symbols, she points to the signs for blanket, milk, and Mari.

"Oh, I forgot," Fields exclaims.

"Yes," Panbanisha agrees. She actually utters that word out loud!

PANBANISHA



MARI



WHO'S UP
FOR A GAME
OF HIDE-AND-
SEEK?

Kids wanting to go out to play simply ask their parents for permission. But of course Shanthi (right), the young zoo elephant, can't talk. And she's locked in a cage with bars that reach to the roof. What can she do?

Behavioral biologist Karen Pryor, of Watertown, Massachusetts, finds out when she tries to train the elephant. Shanthi cooperates just long enough to charm her way into Pryor's heart. Then she drops the sweet potato Pryor gives her and pokes her trunk out through the side of her enclosure.

"She keeps looking back and forth, from me to where her trunk is," says the biologist.

Unsure what she wants, Pryor and a zookeeper follow the elephant's gaze—and see that her trunk is gripping the fist-size padlock that holds her in.

"Her message is clear," says Pryor. They unlock the door, and the playful pachyderm spreads her ears and bounds out into the yard.