

DESERT DOG NEWS

Tucson's Pet Paper

Summer Heat Busters *Pet-friendly activities that beat the heat*



By Jamie DeBenedetto

Nothing kicks off the annual air conditioning hibernation season like a weather forecast of 90 degrees by 9 a.m. By the time July rolls around, my dogs are noticeably struggling with a decrease in activity and socialization. Short of waking up at 3 a.m. to hit the dog park during the half-hour window of pre-dawn "coolness" (when it's only 85 degrees), what's a caring dog owner to do? Well, if you have an open mind and you are willing to get a little creative, here are some ideas.

Forget HBO, tune in the H2O

Simple, fun, and maybe as close as your backyard, swimming is a very low impact exercise. More than that, it's not hard to find places to go. Pools, ponds, lakes, streams; don't be picky; just get wet! If your

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Canine Body Language, Part III Understanding and Transforming the Reactive Dog

By Debora Hogan

When the sheriff hurls a coffee cup and lands it with a resounding thud on "The Dude's" forehead in "The Big Lebowski," I laugh uproariously every time. The sheriff is deemed as "real reactionary." I love that type of sardonic humor.

It was with this same humor that my neighbor recounted an incident that occurred during her daily walk with Sam, her Welsh Cardigan corgi of 11 years. An unknown dog charged from seemingly nowhere and attacked poor Sam before he knew what hit him. The owner of the loose cannon strode up slowly, and while leashing his dog, looked at Sam and his owner and simply said, "He's a little fussy sometimes."

It seems that no matter what the situation, there are often differing views of an action's meaning and intensity depending on the personalities and experiences of those involved. While Sam's owner was certainly disturbed—not only by the unprovoked attack, but also by the cavalier attitude of "Kujo's" owner—some questions come to mind: Was the dog aggressive? Was he a danger to others? And if so, what should be done?



Jake's chest is puffed out, his ears forward, eyes wide. This is the language of a dog that is about to attack.

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Dog DNA Analysis *Discovering the Mix-Breed's Origin*



Photography by Gabe Sarah

According to Wisdom Panel, Logan is part chow, with traces of dachshund and Irish terrier.

By Lisa K. Harris

"Drum roll, please. And the breed is..." announced pet owner Gabe Sarah at a dinner party he hosted to mark the revealing of his dog's genetic origin.

Logan, the star of the night, came in the guise of a Wheaten terrier. Sarah ripped open the envelope containing Logan's DNA test results and learned that Logan had only been playing an Oscar-deserving Wheaten role. According to the Wisdom Panel MX Mixed Breed Analysis, by Mars Veterinary, he wasn't a Wheaten, but was instead a mix of indeterminate breeds, with some chow and traces of dachshund and Irish terrier.

"I was so surprised," Sarah said. "He looks and acts like a Wheaten. I can't see any chow in him." Part of the fun about Logan is the curiosity his appearance creates, said Sarah. "Everyone guesses what he is. He's such a unique-looking dog." He was an eight-week-old puppy at the Humane Society of Southern Arizona when Sarah rescued him. Humane Society representatives thought he was a terrier mix. "I wouldn't have taken him home if I had known he had chow in him," Sarah said.

Information about a dog's ancestry is only a blood draw or saliva sample away. Several companies offer breed determination from a DNA sample. Wisdom Panel MX (www.whatsmydog.com) is one of the most comprehensive and has been featured on several national news programs. Wisdom Panel MX utilizes a blood sample drawn at a veterinary clinic. The clinic requests the test, and both owner and vet receive copies of the analysis. Test costs vary, depending on the clinic's fees. Sarah paid \$170 and received Logan's results within three weeks.

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Take a Hike!



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Pets Helping Kids



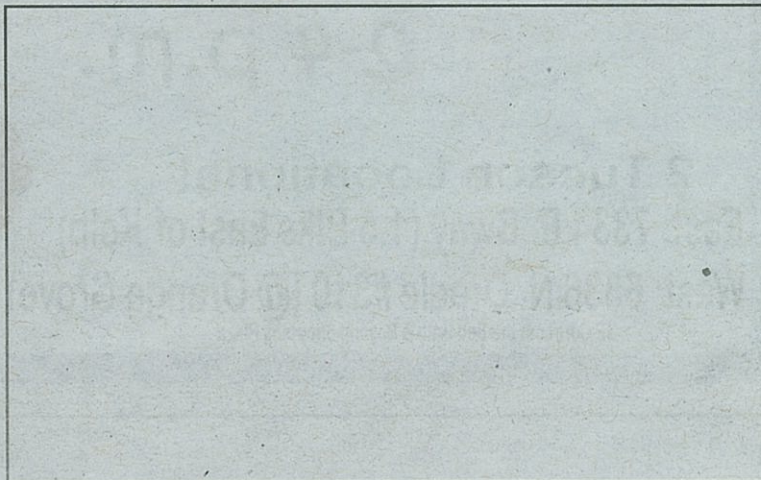
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Southern AZ Beagle Rescue



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Ask Dr. Newman



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An in-home test, based on a cheek swab, is available from many companies on the Internet. A quick online search found several sources ranging in price from \$60 to \$200. The least expensive was Canine Heritage by MetaMorphix (www.canineheritage.com), which detects 100 American Kennel Club (AKC) registered breeds.

"The test is only as good as the number of breeds whose genetic makeup has been identified," said Ginger Boykin, veterinary technician and founder of the rescue organization Pathfinder Critters who's had six dogs tested. "The Wisdom Panel detects 134 breeds, so the chances of learning what your dog really is are better," she said.

For Boykin, a mixed-breed dog is a puzzle that's "entertaining to figure out." Pathfinder Critters currently cares for 66 mentally- and physically-challenged dogs. "If I had enough money, I would have all my dogs tested," said Boykin. "You'd be amazed at what they are."

Manuel Pacheco's heritage poised a mystery to Boykin. His previous owner had bought Manuel as a puppy from a national pet store chain, assuming he was a chihuahua. To Boykin, Manuel Pacheco didn't look like a chihuahua at all. Boykin used Canine Heritage's buccal swab kit to determine Manuel Pacheco's heritage. "I suspected he was a petite malinois," said Boykin. Manuel Pacheco's test results showed he was a beagle-Doberman



According to Canine Heritage, Manuel Pacheco is part beagle, with some Doberman pinscher in the mix.

mix. "We don't know enough about the mixing of breeds to know what is produced," Boykin said. "We look at a dog and see something that it isn't."

Saguaro Vista Veterinary Clinic has tested eight dogs with the new Wisdom Panel MX product. "Clients have their dog tested out of curiosity," says Andrew Carlton, DVM. "People come in with a new dog and ask, 'What breed is this?'"

John Reid had his dog, Maggie, tested after he brought Wisdom Panel to Carlton's attention. "We thought Maggie was a schnauzer-poodle mix. But she also has a spotted tongue and a curled tail." Reid adopted Maggie from the rescue organization Cold Wet Noses, and thought that if he knew Maggie's heritage, he "might be able to understand her behavior and be a better pet owner."

Maggie has a medium amount of Siberian husky and a trace amount of chow and German shepherd, according to her Wisdom Panel MX report. While Maggie doesn't look like these breeds, "The test results made sense based on her behavior," said Reid. "Maggie loves to run like huskies do and has a shepherd gait to her walk." Reid was glad he had Maggie tested: "She comes from dog breeds that need a lot of activity. If I hadn't tested her, I wouldn't have known it."




According to Maggie's DNA test results, her heritage includes Siberian husky with trace amounts of chow and German shepherd.

Can a dog's DNA really detect its breed history? Boykin initially questioned the tests' reliability. "I tested a purebred German shepherd first," said Boykin. "Cotty was registered and had papers. I did it to see if the company's claims were true." Boykin collected a bit of skin with a swab from inside Cotty's mouth. The test results confirmed what she and Cotty already knew—that he was indeed a German shepherd.

Carlton was skeptical at first, too. "The more I read about the test, the more confidence I developed in the results." Scientists, with the aid of the AKC and breeders who supplied DNA samples, have detected more than 300 genetic markers within canine DNA that identify pure breeds. From this information, Mars Veterinary developed a library of genetic signatures for many AKC-recognized breeds. The test compares the extracted DNA to the library and determines the best fit with known genetic markers.

Many of Carlton's clients have asked if they should have their mixed-breed dogs' DNA tested as a diagnostic tool, because some purebred dogs are more susceptible to certain diseases. "Testing a dog's DNA is not diagnostic," Carlton said. "If we suspect a dog has liver damage we test its liver functions. A DNA test for the breed wouldn't matter."

Learning a mixed-breed's genetic history may pull the rug out from under our beliefs about how genetic traits manifest themselves visually. It certainly has surprised some Tucson pet owners, who have found their dogs to be top contenders in the Best Camouflaged Dog category at the Canine Oscars. Most test out of curiosity. Yet knowing a dog's heritage can lead to a better understanding of the dog's behavior and needs. 

Lisa K. Harris is a wildlife biologist. She lives in Tucson with her two daughters and many four-footed friends.

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Ivalee's heritage includes American Staffordshire terrier, Old English sheepdog and Lakeland terrier, according to Wisdom Panel



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How do we define an aggressive dog, and how do we handle it? Everyone has opinions and the result can be anything from muzzles to courtrooms and sometimes to the demise of the offending party. Most dogs that growl or snap at another dog or person are labeled "aggressive."

Aggression is defined in the dictionary as "Hostile or violent behavior or attitudes. Undue force." "Reactive" or "reactivity" is defined as "Showing a response to a stimulus. Acting in response to a situation rather than creating or controlling it."

Aggression is usually interpreted as unpredictable and without due cause, while reactivity indicates behavior that occurs in response to a specific stimulus. While behaviors

such as lunging, growling, and biting are all indicative of both aggression and reactivity, the similarities stop there. Not only are the two different in meaning, but the treatment for each of them differs also.

A dog may be predisposed to aggression for many reasons. Genetics can play a big part. The dog may just be "wired" that way due to a parent or grandparent. A male dog that has not been neutered will be more prone to aggressive displays. Medication can often help in correcting this problem. Physical illnesses or injuries, such as seizures, thyroid problems, allergies (which can be a sign of sub-clinical hypothyroidism), joint or hip pain, or a bladder or kidney infection can cause aggression. Valley or tick fever, tumors, and disorders of the brain can also contribute to aggression.

Diet can also be a factor. A high-quality food, while initially often more expensive, can ultimately save money and time, preventing unnecessary vet visits.

If a dog has a sudden onset of aggressive behavior, it would be wise to schedule a complete physical examination along with a blood panel and thyroid and urine checks to determine if the cause of aggression is, indeed, physical.

Once medical issues are addressed, it may be time to bring in a professional trainer. The aggressive behaviors could have been repeated to the point that they are ingrained, and the expertise of a trainer can enhance the healing process.

As a trainer, I have seen first-hand the pain and suffering these behaviors can cause dog owners and their families. There are two things every person should know, whether they are a dog lover or not. First, dogs aren't people (I'm sorry, someone had to say it), and second, most dogs fight. This does not mean, however, that we should treat them as if they don't feel pain, either physical or emotional. As smart as they are and as much as we love them, dogs cannot form mediation committees when one dog takes a bone from another.

Reactivity in canines is acquired through association. For instance, if a man with a beard and sunglasses beats a dog every day, you can be sure that the dog will be afraid of men with beards and sunglasses. Most people understand this. However, what gets tricky for us is understanding how that fear is manifested. While one dog may cower and run away at the sight of such a man, another may bare teeth and growl or even bite. At first, you may not think the second reaction is based on fear, but in this case it may be. After all, the best defense is a good offense.

Fear can be a learned behavior in response to a negative stimulus and displayed in what appears to be an aggressive manner. But what about dogs that lunge, growl and bark at other dogs or that raise a lip at their human when a toy or bone is taken away? These dogs may have loving homes and enough toys to play with and food to eat.

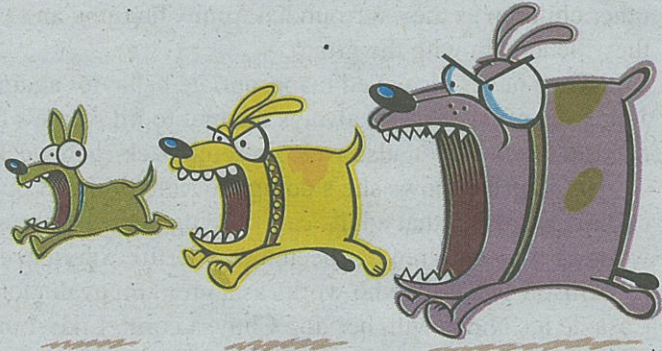
In my experience, dog-to-dog reactivity is becoming more and more common and is worth exploring further. Due to leash laws that are a bit over-the-top and a society that has become lawyer-happy, dogs all over the country are becoming confined more often and for longer periods of time, resulting in increased frustration.

Frustration is a major factor in unsavory behaviors, such as lunging and growling. It is second only to lack of exercise. This, along with our failure to understand canine body postures and much of society's clear disregard for animals as sentient beings, has shelters full and, in them, a high rate of euthanasia due to problems labeled as aggression.

Aggression and reactivity behaviors are the number one reason that dogs are euthanized, with separation anxiety a close second. The \$50 million question is "What, if anything can be done other than euthanasia?" Plenty.

First and foremost, educate yourself and your children on the art of reading canine body language. There are many great books that discuss operant and classical conditioning. Second, don't let your dog practice aggressive behavior.


If your dog goes crazy when you pass by the house on the corner, then stop walking past the house on the corner, at least until you and a trainer have worked on how to handle the situation. The more a dog practices a behavior, be it undesirable or desirable, the more ingrained it becomes!



If your dog is resource-guarding (e.g., growling or snapping when he has a bone, toy, or anything he considers valuable), don't confront the dog. I had a client who hired a trainer who told her to take the bone if the dog growled, and guess what the dog did? Yep, he bit her! A growl is a warning. Listen to it.

Begin basic obedience right away and have your dog sit or lie down for all resources, including food, treats, toys, petting, affection, and anything else that is of value to the dog. Review your dog's diet and make sure that he is getting high-quality food. Increase your dog's physical and mental exercise. A tired, stress-free dog is less likely to react than one who is pent-up.

Having a reactive or aggressive dog is frightening, as well as embarrassing. But there is help and there is hope. It is everyone's responsibility, from owners and breeders to shelter staff, vets, and trainers. We, as a race, are responsible for having domesticated canines and for having brought them into our homes.

We must keep safe that which we have tamed. 



Martha Lochert

Debora Hogan is the owner of Dog Direction, which specializes in reactive dog training. Through the implementation and practice of positive reinforcement training, Dog Direction aims to educate human and canine teams on communication and health issues.





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