



In Defence of Dogs

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John Bradshaw, one of the world's leading dog experts, brings us a compelling insight into what dogs would ask us for, if only they knew how. The dog has been mankind's faithful companion for tens of thousands of years, yet today finds itself in crisis throughout the western world. Until just over a hundred years ago, most dogs worked for their living, and each of the many breeds had become well suited, over countless generations, to the task for which they were bred. Now, in their purely domestic roles we fail to understand their needs. And it is time that someone stood up for dogdom: not the caricature of the wolf in a dog suit, ready to dominate its unsuspecting owner at the first sign of weakness, not the trophy animal that collects rosettes and kudos for its breeder, but the real dog, the pet that just wants to be one of the family and enjoy life. Biologists now know far more about what really makes dogs tick than they did twenty years ago, but this new understanding has been slow to percolate through to owners, and has not yet made enough of a difference to the lives of the dogs themselves. This book is here to set the record straight.

In Defence of Dogs Details

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From Reader Review In Defence of Dogs for online ebook

Rai says

This is an absolute must read for any dog lover! *In Defence of Dogs* is a look at the history of dogs, how we domesticated them from wolves, and why the prevalent idea of dogs as ‘wolves in dog’s skin’ is completely wrong – in fact, most of the things we think about dog psychology is wrong.

According to Bradshaw, our dogs don’t want to ‘dominate’ us; they want us to parent them. The whole concept of dogs wishing to be the ‘alpha (fe)male’ and be the dominant force in the household stems from our concept of dogs as still being wolves, but this is very flawed, and scientifically inaccurate thinking. So much time and evolution has passed since the domestication of dogs that they barely resemble wolves anymore, and even if they did, wild wolf packs have never been seen to have a hierachal structure – they have a family dynamic. It stands to reason then that even if our pet dogs still resemble wolves, then surely they also see us as family, and parents, not a rival for the ‘top spot’.

Bradshaw talks us through this with logical arguments, well researched science and extremely engaging writing. He wants people to know that this idea of our companions is wrong, and therefore dominance training and punishment training is also completely wrong. *In Defence of Dogs* is an absolute must read if you have a dog, you wish to adopt a dog, or even if you just love man’s best friend and want to know more about how they work and how they view us.

5 / 5

Richard says

Let's get this out of the way: this is not a book about how to have the perfect dog, or anything along those lines. This is science. Specifically, the over-looked science of what we know about dogs, their origins, perception, and their role in society. And I loved it.

The first third or so of the book looks at the history of wolf to dog, pointing out that all the dominance theories of dog behaviour are based on faulty understanding of wolves, especially the false belief that the study of captive wolves has a useful contribution to understanding modern dogs.

Beyond that, the text feels like a call for more use of science and education, and less celebrity and fads, to make dogs a rewarding part of our society. I'll single out pedigree breeding as one area that is just insane, but along the way there's a lot of science input to how we live with dogs.

Plenty of references and foot notes to follow up on.

Allie says

I am so glad that I read this book, and as some recommendation on the blurb says, I want to give it to every current and prospective dog owner to read and understand. I finished the book months ago, having purposefully read each chapter slowly and thoroughly, fully digesting it all. It had a huge effect on me and my thinking; I just don't know what to say about it. The book is brilliant.

I have been a dog lover and owner my whole life, but in the last 18 months or so, have become more interested in the training, behaviour and health side of dog ownership. This book enlightened me to a number of myths and misunderstandings about dogs, which completely opened my eyes to different methods and approaches to training and dog handling.

Dominance and the erroneous interpretation of wild wolf behaviour, which I now know was disproven nigh on 40 years ago, continues to underpin the interpretation of dog behaviour by many celebrity dog trainers. And whisperers. (No names mentioned). I want to throw this book at anyone who does the alpha roll on their dog at home, or won't play tug with their dog lest it encourage "dominance". Urgh.

It's well written, thoroughly researched and referenced, and an easy pleasure to read. I'm not so sure about the underlying premise that the domestic dog is under threat through misunderstanding, but I do wholeheartedly believe that people, communities and dog would all live much easier and less stressful lives if we all took the time to care about and understand how dogs actually work.

If you live in an apartment, do not get a working dog and then have the audacity to disown him when out of physical and mental boredom, he destroys your couch and curtains. If you get a Jack Russell, please understand the instincts for which s/he was bred, and that he will bark and bark and chase and chase. He wouldn't be here, were his ancestors not bred and able to do those things.

Learn about how dogs learn, and how they see and interpret the world. A great understanding will help us all.

Sharon Burgin says

If you are looking for a 'training manual' telling you how to cope with your 'problem' dog you'll be disappointed. However if you are looking for an in depth look at how the domestic dog came about, an insight into it's psychology, how it's behaviour is shaped by early interactions and genetics, then this is the book for you.

Bradshaw has written a comprehensive intellectual history of one of our most beloved pets. He reviews experiments and studies and explains how the ancient wolf developed into the pet dog. It is well written, in easily understandable language. A definite must read for anyone planning on getting a dog or someone wondering why their dog behaves as they do. But that's as far as it goes. It doesn't start to explain how you can fix any problems.

Jodie Mitchell says

I think this was a fantastic book, gave a proper scientific explanation into dogs behaviour instead of something hyped up by The Discovery Channel. I wish I had come across it before owning a dog! Really useful and correct insight into dog behaviour, would recommend to anyone who already owns a dog and especially for someone considering to buy or rescue one.

Bionic Jean says

In Defence of Dogs: Why Dogs Need Our Understanding by John Bradshaw is aimed at the general reader, giving an overview of both the development of dogs as a species and their ethology. The author's credentials are excellent; he is a biologist who founded the anthrozoology department at Bristol University, and his studies into canine behaviour are causing ripples throughout both the scientific and the popular dog world. Increasingly, the idea that we have to somehow get the upper hand and dominate the dogs we have as companions or working dogs is coming to be thought of as wrong thinking. According to Bradshaw, "*Dogs don't want to control people, they want to control their own lives.*"

Before investigating dog behaviour however, Bradshaw delves deeply into dog origins - their evolutionary journey and their relationship with ancestral wolves. For about a century we have assumed that dogs are merely "tame wolves", and even in recent decades we have sought to justify this scientifically because 99.96% of their DNA is the same as the grey wolf. However Bradshaw catalogues the DNA of many types of wolves, foxes, jackals and wild dogs from prehistory to more recent times, and comes up with some surprising conclusions. The timber wolf, whom we all tend to assume is our dogs' remotest ancestor is unlikely to be so, since its territory became more and more restricted (due to human intervention) and the genetic material in modern dogs looks much more similar to a little foxy/jackal-type creature living many years ago in North Africa, not America.

These first three chapters about the genetic inheritance of dogs do tend to drag a little. Bradshaw is so keen to properly document his findings, referring to numerous studies which have been done, that he is in danger of forgetting that his audience is not academic scientists but the general public. He often seems to be writing a book for other biologists as part of an ongoing study. Nevertheless the material is fascinating, covering not only the differing genus of wolves/dogs but also the tribes of people world-wide and their relationships with them. Dogs were pictured in prehistoric cave-paintings for example, showing their value and importance to the peoples of the time.

The middle chapters concentrate on the physical attributes of dogs; their brainpower, emotional states and sensory capacities. We tend to think of dogs as similar to children; to assume that their behaviour is essentially similar to our own. Bradshaw demonstrates that this is doing a dog a great disservice. Because of the way a dog's brain is constructed it has differing abilities from us, and thinks in a different way. It is not "lesser" but "different". Similarly, the emotional experiences and sensory capabilities are different. The most obvious difference in their capabilities is their sense of smell, which for physical and mental reasons is profoundly superior to ours - somewhere between 10,000 to 100,000 better in fact. We have 6 million olfactory receptors in our noses, but dogs have 300 million. And the area of a dog's brain devoted to analysing smells is 40 times greater than ours. They even have a special organ which we do not have - a "Jacobson's organ" somewhere at the back of the palate - to help them identify and catalogue odours even more precisely. At this point the reader begins to wonder what we are subjecting our dogs' sensitive noses to

with our fake "clean" household detergents, air fresheners and so on.

Clearly dogs are able to detect infinitesimal traces of scents compared with us, just as they are able to hear well outside our auditory range. These senses are both much more highly developed than humans'. Yet their vision is not as precise. They have different colour receptors, which mean that they can easily distinguish between red, blue and green, but find yellow/orange/red differentiation slightly tricky. Night vision is easy for them, but they do not see as well as we do in bright light.

Yet knowing all this we do not properly take it into account when assessing dogs' behaviour. We continue to criticise dogs for not sensing the world the way we do, and castigating them for behaving differently. Their brains clearly work differently from ours in a multitude of ways in addition to the simple sensory organs described. Tests have indicated this over and over again.

Here is an example of a basic mistake in understanding and being realistic in terms of dog behaviour. We insist that we want our pets to be loyal and attentive, but also to "understand" if they are left for hours on end. A dog may well try to occupy itself during this time by shredding something. The common perception is that it "looks guilty" when its owner comes back. (We all do this - even dog behaviourists have been caught out!) But how can it? The dog makes no connection between the shredding and the return; its brain simply does not work that way. This is just our habit of slipping into anthropomorphism.

What the dog is doing is simple reinforced behaviour. The dog thinks, "Sometimes when my owner comes back I get told off. Sometimes I get praised. I don't know which this will be," and proceeds to stay low and do affiliation or appeasement behaviour until the situation becomes a bit clearer. The dog learns quite quickly how to handle us - or teach us how to behave! What often goes wrong in such a situation is that the owner gets increasingly angry at the shredding on each return, thereby setting a pattern and making the dog increasingly anxious. The same thing happens on daily walks. How often do you see a dog returning to its owner, only to be chastised for taking too long. Where is the motivation to return then?

These middle chapters document many studies into dog behaviour, based on the earlier methods of work by Konrad Lorenz. For instance his theories on imprinting, feedback mechanisms, adaptations - in fact all his behavioural research was based on observation. Bradshaw uses similar studies - sometimes but by no means all devised by himself - to demonstrate how a dog's brain works. There is one experiment which is very similar to Thorndike's boxes, which carefully analyses the thought processes a dog will go through in order to obtain food, when it is hidden in various places. Including an owner in such experiments makes even more deductions possible, especially an owner who deliberately lies, or an owner who has been misled about the truth. A mine of information can be gleaned from such an experiment when correctly performed and recorded. From here the reader can move to drawing conclusions about dogs' behaviour when interacting with humans.

The last two chapters go into the problems which come with breeding for looks rather than temperament. Humans have interfered in the genetics of dogs more than any other animal. Such is the gene pool of some particular breeds now, that all the existing dogs descend from just 6 males. Even with most dogs any mating within the breed at all is equivalent to humans marrying their first cousin. There are numerous instances of illnesses and conditions endemic to a particular breed, solely caused by human intervention. And the situation is escalating and getting worse all the time. Responsible breeders are recognising that something must change. Even as recently as a century ago breeds were crossed for strength, but large-scale concerns have done a lot of damage by line-breeding to produce a certain cosmetic "look." Bradshaw also advocates small breeders for behavioural reasons too. They will give the time and care needed for puppy socialisation. The first 7 or so weeks in a puppy's life are crucial in order to develop healthy behaviour.

Bradshaw is also critical of the plethora of different regimes and "societies" that have sprung up in recent years devoted to helping us to turn our companions into the sort of dogs we want them to be. They are for the most devoted to reinforcing "good behaviour" encouraging partnership and cooperation between owner and dog, which he feels is laudable. Only a few remain which are endorsing outmoded theories about dominance. However the list even in the UK is a very long one, so that a new dog-owner would be hard put to select an appropriate organisation to go to for advice.

John Bradshaw tries to cover a lot of ground in this book; possibly too much ground. It could easily have been converted to two books - or even three. That way more anecdotal information could have been included, to increase the flow; unfortunately it is frequently not an easy read. Some parts could be edited, whereas others are interesting in themselves but presented in a dry academic style rather than a readable one. However it is well worth sticking with as the information is not easily available elsewhere, and Bradshaw makes many good points.

Jennifer says

This was a slightly odd book, the main message of which is that theories of dog training which rely on the notion that because of their wolf-heritage dogs require punitive training and constant vigilance to maintain owner dominance are wrong. In fact the main message seems to be "Don't punish your dog" (except insofar as he points out that merely withholding a reward can be punishment for some dogs)

So there is a lot in the book about wolves and what the current state of knowledge is about their social systems. He points out that earlier theories were based on artificially created packs living in artificial circumstances - rather as if we were to think we could understand all human society by reference to prison inmates. There's also a good deal about how dogs may have become domesticated - perhaps uniquely by their own choice. This was interesting, as was the section on the nature of canine intelligence. Given the acuteness of dogs' olfactory abilities I would have liked rather more about that - I almost wondered if he had another book in the pipeline on that! There were a lot of really good bits that had me yearning for more detail - for example he writes briefly about the importance of dog tails in communication.

Despite my instinctive distaste for what I am delighted to accept are outdated approaches and my distaste for the self-publicist type guru, I felt Bradshaw rather misrepresented the position of 'the opposition' to make his point and only once did he seem to refer to the variety of styles adopted by the protagonists. In the end it was this kind of thing which bothered me about the book - he wants to say how expressive dogs faces are, so he says cats don't have faces with the slightest expression, and so on.

FIONA Norris says

Although I am admittedly, someone for whom the company of most dogs is preferable to that of many people, you don't have to be a dog-lover to enjoy this fascinating and very readable book by anthrozoologist John Bradshaw. Based on extensive published research, the book provides a history of the evolution of the dog, from grey wolf to its present status of domestic companion; and investigates the mind of the dog -as far as possible, that is, since current research suggests that dogs have no 'theory of mind'. Although Bradshaw states categorically that this book is not a training manual, nevertheless it has many pertinent things to say to anyone who is thinking of acquiring a pet dog. In doing so, it destroys the arguments of those trainers who

base their methods on the idea that dogs are really just wolves in pets' clothing, who want to dominate their 'pack', and must be prevented from doing so at all costs - and by force, if necessary. If you enjoy this book, you might be interested in Bradshaw's recent companion book, 'The Animals Among Us'

Simon Stevens says

Backs up all my ideas of having a dog, but ultimately a bit repetitive and spends a long time disassociating dogs and wolves only to then bang on about how similar they are. A good bathroom read.

Julie says

I started off well with this book, but after a while found it to be hard work, as it was based completely on scientific experiments the author or other people had carried out on dog's e.g. intelligent tests, colour tests, . There were no personal tales or " well science has said this but owners have said this .." it was very impersonal and I personally found my attention wondering after a while as there was nothing new in the book it had just brought together many other theories. Dog training used to be based on the theory that dogs needed to be dominated, this theory was proved wrong some time ago and although there are still some unenlightened trainers using harsh methods most of them have recognised this is not the way to go. This was based on people studying wolf packs which were said to be run by an alpha male and female who ruled the group this has now proved to be wrong and the wolf pack is a democratic pack where everyone has a part to play. It is thought that by studying captive wolf packs this is where the information came from as these packs are stressed out and their dynamics completely different to free ranging wild packs. The Author did not name and shame the trainers who still use this method but did praise certain trainers such as Gwen Bailey and Karen Pryor who use positive reinforcements. It was interesting to read about the genetic makeup of dogs and the theory of how dogs became domesticated and what the DNA of dogs contain more of a certain type of Jackal than North American Wolf. This book was ok maybe if you are studying dog behaviour and want to dip in and out of it but was a bit repetitive for me.

Sabrina says

Interesting book with lots of research and practical information, as well as ethical approaches and urge to take responsibility for 'man's best friend'.

Gumble's Yard says

Both informative and enjoyable (albeit not easy) to read this is an excellent scientific account of dogs: their original genetic make up, the way in which selection for domestication has altered this profile, what we understand of how their intelligence, senses and emotions works.

The coverage of domestication – both the role dogs themselves played in it, and some of its almost unique elements (ability if not preference for attaching to and playing with another species) is fascinating.

The author is particularly keen to debunk the “dominance” theory of training, which he believes is:

Firstly based on a wolf-centric view of dog’s behaviour (ignoring both the type of wolf from which they are likely to have been descended and the domestication effect)

Secondly often focused on addresses “bad” behaviour of dogs based on an anthropomorphic misunderstanding of both the behaviour ,and more importantly of the dog’s ability extrapolate back from punishment to non-immediate behaviour.

The author is also concerned at the pedigree breeding of dogs with narrow gene pools since breeds were categorised and frozen for show purposes in the Victorian era, rather than regularly cross-bred for desirable traits.

Amy Laurens says

Refreshingly unsentimental dog behaviour analysis book written with the purpose of discrediting "dominance theory" ie your dog wants to be top dog, you need to show it you're boss. It's an old-school but persistent approach to dog training which, according to this dude, has been based on faulty and misunderstood research--and not much of it.

This is welcome news to me. Obviously I don't want to use a choke chain on my dog, avoid cuddling it, or constantly reassert my "alpha" status. That is DEPRESSING. But I don't have to, because my dog perceives me as a parent, not a leader.

Written by an anthrozoologist so a lot of discussion about how much or how little we can learn about dogs from observing their closest relatives the grey wolf, plus archaeological evidence for where, when and why dogs were domesticated.

Much more rigorous than other trade books on this subject. A little bit repetitive. Kind of prejudiced against cats.

Joanne Hall says

Fascinating insight into the challenges facing dogs in the 21st century, and how we as dog owners can make our dogs lives better by learning to understand them better.

Bradshaw starts off exploring how dogs are likely to be descended, not from modern wolves, but from an ancestor of both wolf and dog, and explores how they came to be domesticated while wolves didn't, and on the way debunking much of the popular "dominance" myths that have been popular in dog training for a long time. He talks about how many traits that were desirable in the working dog of 50-100 years ago are very much the opposite of desirable in the modern pet, such as a tendency to herd or guard. The sections on dog body language and how they communicate with both humans and other dogs were particularly fascinating. Read alongside Temple Grandin's "Making Animals Happy" :)

A couple of points that reflect my own particular bias when it comes to dogs - Bradshaw talks about the horrific genetic conditions that many pedigree dogs suffer from, the overbreeding of dogs that has led to shelters struggling to cope, and the fact that the modern pet dog is (his words) "Required to be inactive

almost 3/4 of their lives".

So, if you want to rescue a dog and free up space in a shelter, rather than buying one, if you want a dog that has been bred purely for health (and speed!) and has no genetic problems like hip dysplasia or heart conditions, and if you want a dog that sleeps about 18 hours a day - adopt a greyhound! ; -)

Making Animals Happy: How to Create the Best Life for Pets and Other Animals

elizabeth says

I am a nerd. I am the type of nerd who wishes I knew more about science, but don't want to actually study it -- i.e. design experiments and test hypotheses. I just want to read about interesting shit, hopefully in as entertaining a fashion as possible.

In defense of In Defence of Dogs (the British and their spelling quirks), it was full of interesting information.

But Mr. Bradshaw, you can't spend the first half of the book saying "Dogs are nothing like wolves" and then say "Dogs are a lot like wolves." I think what you meant to say was, "Dogs are kinda like wolves, but wolves are nothing like what most people think wolves are like."

It felt like you wanted to just come out and tell Cesar he was full of shit, and maybe you should have.
