

(3) *Dogs Likely Born with 'Canine Telepathy'*

JUN 9, 2011 02:50 PM ET // BY JENNIFER VIEGAS

Dogs are so in tune with us that they can read our minds, according to a new [Learning & Behavior](#) study that also determined canines are probably born with the ability.

Practice makes perfect, however, so the more a dog hangs around humans, the better he or she becomes at “canine telepathy,” which actually relies upon hyperawareness of the senses.

Those of us who have owned or been around dogs for any period of time know how well they often “get” us, sensing tiredness, depression, headaches or other maladies before we consciously exhibit any major outward signs of distress. Dogs can even [detect when a person has cancer](#). They also seem to sense our joy and good health.

Monique Udell and her team from the [University of Florida](#) wondered why dogs are so clever at reading us, and how they accomplish this feat. Are dogs born with the ability to sense our mental states, or do canines learn from experience?

To explore these questions and more, Udell and her team carried out two experiments involving both [wolves](#) and dogs. In the experiments, the two sets of animals were given the opportunity to beg for food, either from an attentive person or from a person unable to see the potential begger.

The researchers showed for the first time that wolves, like domestic dogs, are capable of begging successfully for food by approaching the attentive human. This demonstrates that both species - domesticated and non-domesticated - have the capacity to behave in accordance with a human’s attentional state. They are therefore likely born with the ability, since wolves would not have had much practice, which the typical pet dog gains by begging for treats during dinner and at other times.

Some dogs were better at reading people than others were, however. [Shelter dogs](#) were not nearly as good as pampered house pooches, demonstrating that exposure to humans allows dogs to hone their natural people-reading skills more.

According to the researchers, “These results suggest that dogs’ ability to follow human actions stems from a willingness to accept humans as social companions, combined with conditioning to follow the limbs and actions of humans to acquire reinforcement. The type of [attentional cues](#), the context in which the command is presented, and previous experience are all important.”