

### **Animals as 'people whisperers'**

My dog, Bonnie, is a people whisperer, so I feel confident about writing about this ability in animals to communicate with human beings and often to sense what we are thinking and feeling.

My close friend, Dr Carla Hannaford, neurophysiologist, best-selling writer, and adventurous thinker, lives in Hawaii but has spent a good deal of time travelling the world, speaking and giving workshops, especially in Brain Gym, a form of educational kinaesiology. Years ago, she gave workshops in Durban for Embambiswaneni, my upgrade project for teachers of English at township and rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal. She had already worked in some of our distant rural areas and done invaluable research on hemispherical dominance, one of her specialist fields.

In her splendid book, *Playing in the unified Field*, with its foreword by distinguished physicist, William A Tiller, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University, Carla speaks of "stunning cognitive abilities" found in parrots, crows, ravens, jays and jackdaws and of tools made by New Caledonian crows that are more sophisticated than those made by chimpanzees. The crows not only crafted a range of tools, but were also able to teach other members of the flock to copy them accurately.

Irene Pepperberg of Purdue University studied her parrot Alex and a group of African Gray parrots who became famous owing to their ability "to name fifty different objects, ask for and only accept what they asked for, know different colours and shapes (and) know the meaning of "same", "different" and "and". They were able to learn "intricate communication systems", had perfect memory, and were extremely sociable.

Carla says that, listening to all the sounds made by insects, birds and other animals during both day and night, she feels the world is "awash with communication", and that we just need to tap into this in order to become "animal whisperers". One can communicate with pets at a really deep level. She quotes researchers in the field, William Benda, MD, and writer Rondi Lightmark, who are of the opinion that animals "have the capacity either innately or intentionally to sustain and restore us in ways that we've forgotten or never imagined".

These researchers cite an Australian study that found that cholesterol, triglycerides and blood pressure were all typically higher in non-pet owners, with far more doctor and hospital visits and higher use of pharmaceuticals than was the case with people who had relationships with pets.

Carla mentions the interesting fact that cats purr at 25 Hz or 50 Hz, and that these happen to be the most effective frequencies for promoting bone growth and repair. "In studies with patients hospitalized with myocardial infarctions, or unstable angina, only 5.7% of pet owners died within a year compared to 28.2% of non-pet owners." Just communing with a pet decreases stress hormones and increases emotional stability, Carla says. Consciously taking really good care of an animal and keeping it healthy and happy increase our feeling of self-worth and meaningfulness. She reminds us that our pets are "fully present with unconditional love and acceptance" for us. Being conscious of this adds immeasurably to the quality of our lives. Pets are 'people whisperers'. If we recognise this and communicate fully back, we become 'animal whisperers' and create a language that is fully reciprocated.

Browsing through Carla's book again, I came across:

The powerful vibrational field around the heart makes it possible for us to be affected by or affect other people and animals and may explain how highly

sensitive/receptive children and animals are able to pick up another person's and even the environment's coherence or incoherence.

We have seen this time and again when animals flee an area soon to be devastated by earthquake or tsunami.

We live in rich vibrational fields which are also within us, the heart producing our largest vibrational field: "We can choose to be coherent," Carla says, "we can choose to be conscious and present to life's situations, and we can choose our responses from moment to moment."

Animals pick up our feelings, even when we are not recognising our feelings ourselves.

### **Hand-fed wild hyenas**

National Geographic recently published an article by Alexandra Genova about a remarkable relationship between wild animals and humans, one that has been kept alive for fifty years by the family concerned.

A young man, Abbas Yusuf, in the small, old walled city of Harar in Ethiopia, hand-feeds wild hyenas inside his home. Hyenas have among the most fearsome jaws in the world, but trust has developed between these hyenas and the villagers. When Abbas holds out a chunk of meat, a hyena takes it from his hand as would a pet dog. Abbas was taught to feed the hyenas by his father, Yusuf Mume Salleh, who began to feed the hyenas to keep them away from his livestock. The hyenas also feed on food scraps from the town's garbage dumps, but do not threaten humans. Photographer Brian Lehmann, who took the stunning pictures that accompany the article, admitted that he was in awe at what he had witnessed. There is nothing new about this relationship between the villagers and the hyenas. It has existed here for centuries. There have apparently been no hyena attacks for a couple of hundred years, even while they occur elsewhere in Ethiopia. Abbas calls out to the hyenas at dusk and feeds them in his house, often watched by tourists. People elsewhere in Ethiopia are justifiably terrified of hyenas, but even the children in Harar are unafraid.

In our country there was great fear of hyenas in early days, with stories of hyenas biting off the faces of men sleeping in the veld. Decades ago, I read Stuart Cloete's then well-known South African novel, *The Mask*, which uses just such an incident as the main theme.

### **Banning animal testing in the cosmetics industry**

Australia has banned all forms of animal testing of industrial chemicals intended for use in the manufacture of cosmetics or any substance used on the body or in the mouth. This includes products like shampoos, soaps, perfumes and deoderants. This is a lead to be followed.