

Most American pet owners say their animals have a sixth sense: poll

By Sue Manning (CP) – Jan 11, 2011

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Lassie could always sense when Timmy was in trouble. Black Beauty knew the bridge was out.

Now two-thirds of American pet owners say they can relate — their pets have a sixth sense about bad weather. Forty-three per cent say the same about bad news, according to an Associated Press-Petside.com poll.

Seventy-two per cent of dog owners said they've had weather warnings from their pets, compared with 66 per cent of cat owners.

For bad news, 47 per cent of dog owners and 41 per cent of cat owners said they've been alerted by their pets, according to the poll conducted by GfK Roper Public Affairs and Corporate Communications.

Jim Fulstone says his farm dog, a Pomeranian named Austin, gives warnings about 15 minutes before earthquakes and 45 minutes before thunderstorms

"He'll run around in circles and look at you. If you sit down, he'll sit down with you. If you are outside, he will come up to you, run around, look off, sniff your leg, just kind of be there. He's a lot more active," said Fulstone, 65, of Wellington, Nev. "For the quakes, he was very alert and started barking and doing his run-around routine."

The reason? Hard to know.

"A sixth sense is something we can't explain but we tend to trust. It's a matter of belief and faith," said psychologist Stephanie LaFarge, the senior director of counselling services for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Scientists have suggested animals sense bad weather because of changes in barometric pressure or other factors, LaFarge said, and dogs anticipate seizures, low blood sugar or other medical problems because of hormonal changes. But they haven't figured out what alerts pets to earthquakes, bad news or other events — or if it's just in the eyes of their owners.

Kay Moore, 64, of Loma Linda, Calif., said she gets quake warnings from her dogs, Brie, a 40-kilogram yellow Lab and Great Dane mix, and Lola, a 22-kilo basset hound. "They get very, very hyper," Moore said.

If a friend or relative comes to the door, Lady, a four-year-old golden retriever mix, doesn't even bother to get up, said Stacey Jones, 50, of Stone Mountain, Ga. But if it's a stranger, she goes on minor alert, she said.

Lady's sixth-sense tendencies are very subtle, said the Atlanta university writer and editor.

But 18 years ago, when Jones was ordered to bed toward the end of her pregnancy, her dog Silver "planted herself next to me and would not leave. She knew something was going on with the baby and it was her job to take care of the baby."

Anne Radley was raped and suffers from post traumatic stress syndrome. If she has an episode or panic attack, whether it lasts a few minutes or all day, she can count on her three dogs and four cats.

"If I have high anxiety, I have pets all over me. All of the pets will come and try to cuddle. It gets a little crowded, but they all do it," said the 37-year-old Hiawatha, Kan., mother of two.

They are led by Mickey, about 15, a mixed breed terrier she got from a rescue 10 years ago. He can't see her pain, Radley said, because he has gone blind, so she is sure it is a sixth sense.

He has always watched over her daughters and if they get sick, he will not only cuddle them, but cuddle them exactly where they hurt, she said. "He warms them up, he's a little heating pad. He's always done that."

LaFarge has had similar brushes with a pet's sixth sense.

"I have been awakened in the middle of the night by a dog," she said. "Very shortly after that, I received some very, very shocking bad news. I was awake when the phone rang. I couldn't explain why I was awake except the dog was next to me nudging me. How did the dog know my father died at midnight?"

Bridget Pilloud of Portland, Ore., a pet psychic who prefers the title "intuitive animal communicator," is a believer.

She has a client who keeps her dog's ear medicine and his dog treats in the same drawer. "When she goes to get the treats, he is sitting there waiting for them. When she goes for the medicine, he's not there. The dog just knows."

How do pets convey their concerns?

Sixty-four per cent of those polled said their pets tried to hide in a safe place, 56 per cent said they whined or cried, 52 per cent said they became hyperactive, erratic or made unpredictable movements, and 36 per cent said they barked or meowed persistently. Often, they use more than one form of communication.

If a storm is coming, Emma, 3, a longhaired miniature dachshund, and Bella, a seven-month-old miniature Chihuahua, will mope around, make noise and hide under the bed.

When owner Timothy Gilbert, 43, a telephone communications foreman from Mabank, Texas, gets a cold, "Emma will come lay with me. She can tell when things are wrong. She kept talking to me, letting me know it would be OK."

Gilbert believes all animals are born with a sixth sense, and they're more likely to show it if they have strong bonds with their owners. Otherwise, "humans tend to think they have a dumb dog, a lazy dog or a worthless dog," he said.

The [AP-Petside.com](http://www.petside.com) Poll was conducted Oct. 13-20, 2010, by GfK Roper Public Affairs and Corporate Communications. It involved landline and cellphone interviews with 1,000 pet owners nationwide, and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

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Deputy Director of Polling Jennifer Agiesta contributed to this report.

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