

Animals are much smarter than we think

by MARK PAVILONS

‘Until one has loved an animal a part of one's soul remains unawakened.’- Anatole France

As an ‘animal-lover’ I'm happy to say that, yes, part of my soul has been awakened.

I truly believe that all life on this planet has a purpose and is sacred in its own way.

Whether they be plants or lower life forms that are part of the food chain, all creatures, great and small, are fascinating.

Humans spend a great deal of time and energy trying to figure out other humans. For hundreds of years, psychologists and scientists of all branches have been studying human nature and the entire human condition. And yet, how far have we come?

Even after millennia, we're no closer to coming up with undeniable truths about human emotions, the power of the brain, and our ultimate purpose in the big picture.

And through all of this, loyally by our sides, are our four-legged friends of all shapes and sizes.

From iguanas, gerbils and pigs, to kangaroos, horses and dogs, our animal friends are fascinating to say the least.

We tend to measure the value of both animals and people by their level of intelligence. Well, the jury is out on humans, and we really don't fully understand the capability of animals.

I have seen lizards and rats and spiders being smart, playful and even displaying a sense of humour. I've seen a cat groom a rat; a kangaroo protect a dog, and a turtle play with a ball.

We really have no idea what creatures can do, how smart they are, or the level of emotions they can develop.

In humans, the eyes are the windows to the soul.

According to Martin Buber, ‘an animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language.’

Animals make us laugh, smile and shake our heads. Some make us leap onto chairs and others make us dash away for safety. Many comfort us.

For pet owners out there, you understand the joy our main family members – cats and dogs – bring. They likely love us more than we love them.

There's no question we take them for granted from time to time. We trip over them when preparing meals in the kitchen. We get yanked off balance when taking them for walks. We blame them for many things, even if wasn't their fault. But expert pet owners know when the dog did it.

Our dogs understand our language and researcher John Pilley taught his dog, Chaser, to recognize over 1,000 toys by name.

We worry about their health and well being, and will go to great lengths, even extremes, to ensure they remain healthy. We buy the best food, give them everything they need, and let them run and play.

They do age quicker than we do and often we're caught off guard when we realize our buddy is now a senior citizen. Slower walks, more accidents and physical limitations become part of the new regime.

We've replaced more fish and hamsters than we care to remember. We've tried to save birds who have landed unexpectedly in our yard. We try.

For the life of me, I still can't figure out why our dogs loves to chase the light produced by a flashlight. They even know exactly where the light comes from, and will nudge the gizmo as it rests on the table.

Simple pleasures, I guess.

According to a post by Sherrie Hurd in 2019, animals are indeed ?spiritual beings.?

There is evidence to suggest animals can react emotionally to their surroundings. They can feel and respond to grief and can express the wonderful feeling of existence itself.

Psychologists Marc Bekoff and his colleague Steven Kotler looked at whether animals really experienced spirituality. They found ample evidence that animals can have a ?morally conscious and emotional intelligence.?

Darwinian theory, which includes evolutionary continuity, supports it as well. This belief states that there are no different kinds of intelligence, only different degrees with the various species.

We believed that only humans were self-conscious, linguistic, moral, and rational. It seems that animals could possibly think about pains and pleasures from the past. Darwin said they actually possess ?excellent memories and some power of imagination.?

Experiments have displayed the intelligence of crows, for instance. These are indeed creatures with remarkable talent, especially when it comes to solving problems. The University of Auckland researchers discovered that crows noticed that liquid rises when objects are dropped into tubes of water, water which held a treat. They would then be able to reach the treat that was inside. If the water levels were higher, they could get the treat faster as well.

Crows can also bend a wire to fish treats from small tubes. This is why researchers compare a crow's intelligence to 5-7-year-olds.

Elephants seemingly show understanding and empathy and experiments showed their desire to work together with tasks.

Cockatoos have been known to solve puzzles and even pick a lock!

Ok, most of us can't converse with a dolphin or play poker with our dogs. But we know there's much more behind those beautiful eyes.

From the persistent dedication of worker bees and intricate webs of spiders, to regenerating salamanders and colour-changing octopi, all creature great and small are simply marvellous.

And dare I say incredibly intelligent!