



GROWING **BOLDER**

The Power of Pets

Featuring animals from cats and dogs to llamas and lizards.

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MEDICARE

Pets—How they help us live happier, healthier lives

Doris Bloodsworth



Maureen Hatcher was alone when she fell face first in her St. Augustine home from a stroke. Her Labrador Retriever, Sadie, came immediately; and Hatcher told the dog, “Mommy needs help.” A home security video shows Sadie and Bella, Hatcher’s other Lab, running out the front door. Moments later, they returned with a neighbor who dialed 911. Jacksonville doctors removed a blood clot that was cutting off blood to Hatcher’s brain. Sadie’s quick action is credited with preventing permanent brain damage.

Zev, a retired Air Force veteran and neurosurgeon, and his wife, Judy, adopted a 2-year-old rescue dog named Benji on New Year’s Day 2020. A few months later, the couple were among the first to be diagnosed with COVID-19 in Palm Beach County. Zev credits Benji with helping the retirees recover. By walking the dog and playing fetch, the couple gained back their stamina.

Stories showcasing heroic and therapeutic benefits of pet ownership are by no means rare. In fact, researchers have discovered that owning a pet can have many benefits, including lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, reducing stress and risk of depression and improving long-term survival after a heart attack.

It seems Fido really is man’s—and woman’s—best friend.

While canines seem to be “top dog” when it comes to health benefits for pet owners, cats and other household pets also contribute positively to our quality of life.

Healing power

The American Heart Association reported pet ownership, particularly dog ownership, tends to reduce risk for cardiovascular diseases. These findings are especially significant given the fact that heart disease is the leading cause of death in America. Some of their findings include:

- Blood pressure decreased significantly in a patient group that adopted dogs.
- A large-scale study reported lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels for pet owners. Another study linked non-dog ownership with an increase in diabetes.
- Dog owners tended to be less obese, due to increased physical activity.
- One study showed dog ownership decreased the mortality of cardiovascular recurrence by four times.

While increased physical activity likely plays a role, other experts say a contributing factor could be pet owners’ reporting improved mood and emotional state. The journal “Science” reported that oxytocin, the body’s feel-good chemical, is boosted when humans even look into the eyes of dogs.

But what about cats?

For some older adults, and others with mobility challenges, a cat could be the “purrfect” pet. Cats also confer healthy benefits. Cat owners report lower stress and anxiety. A 10-year study found that cat owners were 30% less likely to die of a heart attack or stroke than non-pet owners. Cats also are believed to help reduce allergies and help increase immunity due to pollen, grass and other outdoor elements felines bring into the house.

And for insomniacs, there’s more good news. A British poll found that women slept better with their cats than with their partners!

Researchers found that pets can aid people going through cancer therapy, not only providing comfort but a motivation to get better. Additionally, researchers detected improved oxygen saturation levels of their pet-owning patients.

Even Florence Nightingale, the 19th century social reformist and nurse, advocated for chronically ill patients having “a small pet” for a better sense of well-being.

Older pet owners

Trinity, an 8-year-old black Labrador Retriever mix, was rescued and up for adoption. Shelter workers warned 92-year-old James that the dog was sweet and gentle but could not see that well. Not a problem, James assured them.

“We have something in common,” he said with a smile.

Older people may be the biggest beneficiaries of owning a pet, and a University of Michigan national poll shows 55% of Americans age 50-80 own at least one. Most participants said pets made aging feel “easier, both physically and mentally.”

Dr. Alice Pomidor, a professor of geriatrics at Florida State University College of Medicine, agrees.

“Loneliness in and of itself is a hazard to your health,” Pomidor said. “Lonely people have greater rates of chronic disease.”

While some experts say people are never too old to own a pet, others say aging may bring special challenges when it comes to pet ownership. Reduced mobility, hospitalization and other factors may require special considerations, even for the most avid pet lovers.

Tips for older pet owners

For older people with mobility or balance issues, pets, and their bedding, toys and food bowls, can present a tripping hazard. Large, rambunctious dogs may be too much to handle safely on a walk. As one expert put it, “Dogs have to be walked, but some dogs can walk you!”

Another concern: Some people on a limited pension may find that food and veterinarian bills are prohibitive.

Still, if you love animals, many experts say there are ways to keep them in your life. Here are some tips:

- Instead of a dog, consider a cat, bird or even fish.
- Be sure to have a backup plan for pet care in case you face a sudden health crisis that may require hospitalization. Make sure a friend or family member is aware of the plan.
- Consider the breed of the dog. Smaller dogs may be easier to handle. Recommended breeds include Bichon Frise, French Bulldog, Maltese and Corgi.

Rescue shelters can also provide ideal companions. In Manatee County, Florida, the local Humane Society created Senior for Seniors, a program that promotes the emotional and health benefits of owning an older dog or cat to adults 65 years and older. Adoption fees are waived.

“We believe matching a senior pet with a senior citizen enhances the lives of both the animal and human,” said Rick Yocum, executive director of the Humane Society.

They won’t get an argument from Maureen Hatcher, the St. Augustine stroke victim.

“By rights, I shouldn’t be in the shape that I’m in,” Hatcher said gratefully, with Bella and Sadie sitting at her feet. “I am blessed, very blessed.”

Doggy medical detectives

Doris Bloodsworth

Dogs are super sleuths at detecting cancer, diabetes and even COVID-19, according to “Scientific American.” Dogs have even been known to alert their owners to oncoming seizures.

Just how they do so is not fully understood. But what is known is that a dog’s nose is a million times more sensitive than a human nose; and 35% of a dog’s brain is devoted to smelling, compared to 5% for humans.

There are numerous accounts of dogs alerting their owners to a medical problem by continually sniffing at one body area; sudden, repeated barking or even trying to lick or chew off a cancerous lesion.

Training a dog to be a medical detector can take up to 18 months. Certain breeds are better suited for this work, such as German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers, Setters, Poodles and Pomeranians.

Scientists are working to try to replicate this canine superpower. Researchers say recent breakthroughs with artificial intelligence software that duplicates dogs’ success in detecting certain cancers may soon be available to anyone with a smart phone.





Can we Talk to Animals?

How to understand your furry family members

Laura Savini

Dr. Dolittle provided a familiarity with the concept of talking to animals. But this is not a crazy Hollywood idea. We CAN talk to the animals. Animal Communicators are trained to uncover the reason why your dog is barking so much or why your cat is not using the litter box — or what they desire as a member of your family. It deepens your relationship.

In animal communication, telepathy is used to transmit emotions, images and sensations with the animal. Animal Communicator and respected instructor Kristin Hadley explains, “Telepathy is being aware of what is available to perceive. This is not a skill we are taught to develop or rely on.”

Animal Communicator Stacey McMullan confirms, “I’ve always had a deep connection with animals. I could hear them as a child until I was told it was nonsense. I trusted the adults around me to know. Years later and with daily meditations I became more in tune with the subtleties in my awareness. I instinctively felt my two large dogs wanting to convey information to me.”

Communicators send and receive vibrations with the animals. Tam Hunt deftly explains the science in his Scientific American article, “The Hippies Were Right: It’s All about Vibrations, Man!”. He writes, “An interesting phenomenon occurs when different vibrating things come into proximity: they will often vibrate together at the same frequency: they ‘sync up’... Vibrations, resonance, are the key mechanism behind human consciousness, as well as animal consciousness.”

Karen Silverstein has documented McMullan’s work. “When Stacey connects with an animal, they both change, whether it’s a dog, bear, alpaca or horse. She gets a sensory reaction from the animal — if it is in pain, unhappy, or trying to warn its pet guardian of something — Stacey senses it and conveys the message.”

“I know I am communicating with an animal,” McMullan adds, “when I feel their energy blending with mine. Sitting in quiet helps us to listen in other ways besides our minds. Once I am communicating with permission from the animal and their guardian, I ask them what they have to say. Some animals are very shy while others are ready to be heard. I ask for evidence from them to give to their guardians so they know I am communicating with them.”

I consulted with McMullan on my cat Chai. Stacey told me Chai didn't like hot tuna — I had been heating it up. McMullan was speaking with Chai! She helped us understand how Chai was coping with losing his eye and shared extraordinary experiences he was having with the backyard wildlife. "The most poignant communication I have had, was with Chai," McMullan says, "He taught me that animals can see the world from perspectives of which we only dream of." Chai also told her he prefers that I don't share his secrets, so we will leave it here!

Hadley was once asked to warn a group of chipmunks that there was going to be construction and that their tunnels and nests would be dug up. She repeatedly conveyed images of heavy machinery and their homes being demolished. She explains that it was like "sending a compressed movie file." The chipmunks got the message and moved to other yards.

There was a cat who was urinating on its owner's bed while she was away. McMullan made an uncomfortable discovery when she connected with the cat—the pet sitter was looking through the personal items in the bedroom. The pet sitter was let go and the cat returned to her litter box.

Hadley said that some come to the work more naturally than others but good listening skills, the belief that animals are sentient beings, and experience with meditation are a strong starting place. And "you cannot let your own agenda get in the way." When you are doing it right, "it feels light and effortless, a complete sense of knowing," says Hadley.

What does Hadley say to nonbelievers of this skill? "I am not trying to convince anyone. It is not an exact science, but all of it is explainable and measurable through science."

Communicating with a horse getting a new trainer, telling a dog there is a baby joining the family, calming an animal approaching death, or just understanding what your pet is thinking — these are reasons to engage with an animal communicator. Select yours carefully. Animaltalk.net hosts a directory with trained, certified communicators.

Hadley explains her mission in teaching women to become animal communicators; it creates more opportunities for women to become financially independent. It also grooms them to be better listeners and communicators with humans, more in tune with the natural world. Then they can make community decisions about animals, nature and our planet, making it a better world for all of us.

I am not trying to convince anyone. It is not an exact science but all of it is explainable and measurable through science.

KRISTIN HADLEY

Laura Savini is an Emmy-winning producer and host for PBS. She produced five seasons of the public TV music series "THE KATE" before COVID-19 put that series on hiatus. Now she is developing and producing lifestyle and music programming. She works closely with her husband, Grammy-winning composer Jimmy Webb, to share his music, words and stories with the world. She is often seen riding her bike while wearing a skirt, and she can't wait to get on a plane again to visit friends and granddaughters.



A true friend leaves paw prints on your heart.



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Giselleflissak via Getty Images



Second Chance Wildlife Sanctuary

Jim Bronzo and his 350 animal menagerie

George Diaz

Noah built an ark to save the world's animals from a world-engulfing flood. Jim Bronzo has built a wildlife sanctuary in Central Florida to rescue thousands of animals with nowhere else to go.

Bronzo and his creatures have seen fire and rain and weathered the storms.

Nearing 62, Bronzo bears the joy and the pain of a heart that has unconditional love for animals. It's been a calling of his since his days as a wildlife trapper, which eventually morphed into establishing the Second Chance Wildlife Sanctuary, a nonprofit refuge in Orlando, in 1985.

It began innocently enough. As a trapper, Bronzo sometimes took his "work" home with him, finding a more humane alternative to euthanizing the animals he was called to remove.

Bronzo's menagerie starter-set grew exponentially. There are now about 350 animals living with him in a 3-acre property, along the Big Econ River in East Orlando on acres of wetlands.

"You heard of the crazy cat lady?" he said. "This is like the crazy animal person. You have no life. You have to be dedicated to these animals."

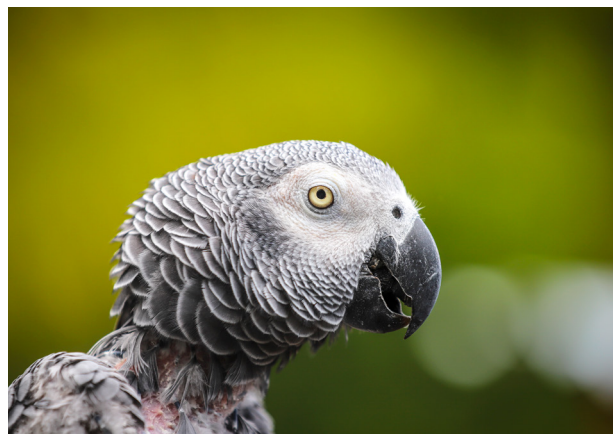
Whooper swans. River turtles. Goats. Emus. Sulcata tortoises from Africa. Peacocks. Muscovy ducks. Iguanas. Geese. Cockatiels. Parakeets. Snakes. Dogs. Cats.

They create their own chaotic soundtrack, with birds chirping incessantly, a handful of emus scampering about and an earthy odor permeating the air from the pigs and other creatures rolling around in the dirt and mud.





**There's a fine line
between becoming
a hoarder and not
being fair to the rest
of the animals.**



Photos: Jacob Langston



Bronzo wakes up every morning at 3:30 a.m. By 4 a.m., he is at a local Publix picking up donated produce and other food items, which he serves for breakfast, along with a hundred or so scrambled eggs.

But paradise has also seen its share of hell.

The sanctuary has weathered hurricanes that have damaged and flooded the property. Then came the fire. Around 1:30 a.m., on Feb. 4, 2019, a screaming peacock awoke Bronzo to a terrifying scene: Flames were enveloping his home at the sanctuary. He screamed at his four dogs to run. Not used to the sound of that loud tone, the dogs instead went for cover in the house.

"I looked out the window and saw the orange flames...I had no clothes on. I had no phone," he said. "I screamed out, 'Somebody help me! Somebody please help me!'"

Three of his dogs would be among the 41 animals who perished.

"Saddest day of my life," Bronzo said.

Thanks to the generosity of friends and strangers, who raised \$190,000, Bronzo was able to keep his sanctuary and rebuild from the ashes.

But every day remains a struggle. It costs about \$100 a day to feed the creatures, notwithstanding the donations from Publix.

"If it wasn't for Publix, I couldn't even have this place," he said.

Bronzo relies on donations and selling artwork, mostly images of celebrities or pet portraits from customers.

COVID-19 has brought additional challenges, because some people can't afford to keep their exotic animals; or with more time on their hands, during walks and such, they stumble onto creatures in need.

Meanwhile, the clock keeps ticking. Except for a paid, part-time caretaker, and occasional volunteers, Bronzo is a one-man operation. And he is cognizant of his age and eventual limitations.

"I have to know when to say when," he said. "There's a fine line between becoming a hoarder and not being fair to the rest of the animals."

Jim Bronzo isn't a hoarder. He is a savior. If animals could talk, they would echo the same sentiment. Through it all – together -- they have withstood death and destruction, defiant in their purpose.

"The animals need the help," he said. "And if there's nobody who will take them, I'm there for them."

Exponential kindness and unconditional love are Jim Bronzo's most admirable qualities. They also are his greatest weaknesses. Each day he strives to find a balance that won't break his heart.

**Please visit
SecondChanceWildlifeSanctuary.org
to learn more or make a donation.**



**You heard of
the crazy cat
lady? This is
like the crazy
animal person.
You have no
life. You
have to be
dedicated to
these animals.**



Dog lovers *ReToice!*

Paws up on Florida's dog parks

Must. Love. Dogs.

Need we say more? They are family. Upwards of 63 million households in the United States own at least one dog, with the overall number of dogs owned pushing 90 million.

Those numbers are rough estimates, but it's obvious that plenty of people like a face-lick along with a cup of coffee in the morning. So what to do when your furry friend gives you a look that says, "I want to play, Dad" or "Let's have some fun, Mom."

We got this. Check out some of the best dog parks in Florida that offer green or sandy spaces to co-mingle with new furry friends and plenty of places for dogs to do their business (please remember those poop bags).

And an important cautionary note: dog parks can be a great experience. But they can also be traumatic if dogs get aggressive and out of control. Be aware of your dog's disposition with other dogs and respect the space around you.



Lake Baldwin Park

📍 Winter Park

Welcome to 23.16-acres of pet paradise. Formerly known as Fleet Peeples Park, this is one of only two Orlando city parks that features a sandy beach.

Amenities include two pavilions, more than two dozen picnic tables, benches, a dock, boat ramp and a restroom. "From the exercise trail through the double-gated entries, this dog park focuses on good clean access and safe fun," wrote a reviewer on tripadvisor.com.

"The parking is nicely shaded by old oaks, there are drinking stations, beach lake access, and a cleaning stand at the main exit to get the worst of the sand or mud off. There are acres of mixed terrain for dogs to run and socialize in, with limited seating for humans when you wear down from the high energy level."

It's a dog's life for sure!

Fort De Soto Park

📍 Tierra Verde

What's not to like about 1,100 acres along the Gulf of Mexico shoreline, bracketed by mangroves, wetlands, and hardwood forests?

Located just south of Tampa and St. Petersburg, Fort De Soto Park was named America's Top Beach by Trip Advisor in 2009. It features 300 yards of beach for swimming and off-leash play. Amenities include doggie water fountains, water hoses and a concession stand.

"This park was a great find!," wrote a reviewer on bringfido.com. "Beautiful area with mostly friendly people and animals. The fenced areas are a good size, the dog wash is a nice bonus."

A bonus for nature lovers: the park's natural ecosystems feature more than 328 species of birds.

Jonathan Dickinson State Park

📍 Martin County

Check out K-9 Corner at Tequesta Park, a doggie paradise about a quarter acre inside Jonathan Dickinson State Park, close to the Jupiter Lighthouse.

Your dog can run along the sand, go digging (yeah!) and then roll around in the sand. So be it. Take a blanket to wipe the sandy stuff off and all is good.

The entire park is quite expansive – 45 acres – and leashes are required everywhere else except K-9 corner.

There are plenty of benches and shady areas for humans and doggies to chill, as well as waste stations and faucets. It is recommended that you bring your own bowl.

Amelia Earhart Bark Park

📍 Hialeah

The coolest feature about this park is that there are separate play areas for big dogs and little dogs.

Located just outside Miami in the city of Hialeah, this 515-acre "Bark Park" features a lush five-acre fenced-in dog park divided into sections. That's a huge plus for dog owners, especially those with smaller breeds who may be fearful of bigger dogs.

Amenities include benches, play equipment, picnic tables and drinking fountains.

Several other activities are available, including The Miami Watersports Complex (MWC) that offers cable wakeboarding, boat wakeboarding, wake-surfing, waterskiing, kneeboarding, and paddle boarding.

Bonita Springs Dog Park

📍 Bonita Springs

One size does not fit all with this dog park that encompasses more than six acres. Don't let the small size lead you to misconceptions. Bonita Springs is a big deal.

There are fenced areas for three sizes of dogs: under 25 pounds, 25-50 pounds, and 50+ pounds. Better yet, there is ocean access for your pooch to cool off.

"The beach is absolutely stunningly beautiful and worthy of a visit in its own right," wrote a reviewer on tripadvisor.com. "Beyond that though is the fact that it is a fully dog friendly beach and virtually everyone who uses it brings their dog(s) along. The result is a joyous canine carnival of dogs having the collective time of their life in the sea."

Amenities include a covered pavilion, dog washing station, picnic tables, benches, and an asphalt multi-use path.

Larry McCool And 'Caesar The No Drama Llama'

Together they help cooler heads prevail

Emily Thompson

As if his business success wasn't unique enough, an unexpected hero emerged from McCool's herd of llamas. From humble beginnings, one loving llama has become known across the United States as "Caesar the No Drama Llama." And for Mystic Llama Farm owner Larry McCool it wasn't — at first. But he loved his llamas and their soft, fluffy fiber. So, he found a creative way to make the business viable while helping others in his cottage industry.

McCool created a llama fiber cooperative to help producers pool their fiber. Now it is the largest llama fiber cooperative in North America. Starting with 15 farms in Oregon, the co-op has grown to 140 farms in 23 states and Canada.

Caesar's affectionate personality isn't the usual temperament for llamas. McCool discovered Caesar's gift and interest in interacting with large groups of people by chance at a state fair. Caesar loved the attention from people who couldn't help but notice him and his fluffy stature. He brings joy to so many people just by being himself, letting people hug him, fawn over him and take pictures with him.

McCool and Caesar are a warm and fuzzy duo sharing that joy with their community. They regularly visit nursing homes and interact with the residents, similar to the way service dogs are welcomed to brighten residents' spirits.

When tensions rose during protests in Oregon, McCool saw an opportunity for Caesar to bring joy and calm to the situation, just by being himself. McCool and Caesar walked through the crowd, offering a chance for both sides to put their differences aside to share a moment of joy and get a selfie hugging the newly nicknamed, "No Drama Llama." Caesar is a beacon of joy and wonder in a sea of high emotions.

"He has just taken over my world. So, he and I have just done everything together. We're just really, really happy. I retired about three years ago. So I get to give back," said McCool.



**This guy here,
he and I, we get
mistaken identity all
the time. He's kind
of the better looking
of the two, but
I appreciate just him
being with me.**



CAESAR IS THERE TO AMPLIFY THE EVENT, NOT TO DETRACT FROM IT.



HE HAS JUST TAKEN OVER MY WORLD. SO, HE AND I HAVE JUST DONE EVERYTHING TOGETHER. WE'RE JUST REALLY, REALLY HAPPY.



Well, as you can tell right now he is being very affectionate, but this is what he does with people and he brings to people. All he has to do is to show up, and I understand that there's dogs and different animals like that, but let me tell you, when a big white 300-pound fluffy lover like this shows up, it really takes the air out of the sails of anybody who is just feeling aggressive, and angry, and stressful.

And I know we have a lot of that going on in the world right now, but Caesar just is able to diffuse that. When you see somebody in full riot gear, in camo, with a gas mask on and they're all of a sudden, they just stop, and they can come up, and also they want to hug Caesar. You just know you've done something right with him and he's done the right thing. So we really are very thankful that that's what we're able to do. And no, llamas generally do not have this temperament, to be this way. They tend to be a little bit standoffish, but Caesar is truly one of a kind.





DOG GOES FROM
SHELTER TO SAVIOR:

Sadie, The Rescue Dog



Some people would consider Sadie a bad dog. She had been turned away at three shelters before ending up at the Ramapo-Bergen Animal Refuge in Oakland, New Jersey, last September. It was a shelter of last resort for dogs like Sadie.

Nearly 100 pounds—and not being good around men—Sadie was a lot to handle. And that is why Brian Myers adopted her.

“I thought, ‘Let me give this dog a chance, because she’s beautiful; and I think I can work through her issues,’” he told CBS News. He thought he was rescuing her.

But then came a poignant plot twist.
On January 16, Myers fell to the floor, with no feeling on his left side. He could not stand up and was stuck in a crawl space between his bed and the wall.

Myers, 59, had suffered a stroke. And except for Sadie, he lived alone.

“It was really frightening. I couldn’t get up, and I didn’t realize at that moment that I’d had a stroke,” he told the Washington Post. “My cellphone was on the dresser about 15 feet away, but there was no way I could get to it.”

He then felt something wet and rough licking his face: It was Sadie.

He was able to grab her collar, and she pulled him out of that space, and most importantly, within reach of his cell phone.

He was rushed to a local hospital in Englewood, New Jersey, and spent a couple of weeks in treatment and rehabilitation. Just before his release, he got a special visitor: Sadie.

“She just immediately jumped on me, was kissing my face, knocked my glasses and my mask off,” he told CBSnews.com. “And I just thought, ‘I love this dog.’”

And so, the rescue dog nobody wanted saved the life of the man who saved hers.

Unconditional love and kindness have a way of paying things forward.



Pets understand humans better than humans do.



Sean Murphy via Getty Images

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