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SELECTED TRAINING SYSTEMS FOR VARIOUS TYPES OF WORKING DOGS

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Abstract. The aim of the study was to characterize the basic training systems for the main types of working dogs used in Poland. The training system for each group aims to improve on the innate traits that identify the animal with the function it is to perform. A well-trained dog is focused on its handler, in whom it has complete confidence, developed through consistency and mutual respect while working together. Irrespective of the type of training conducted and the breed or working type, it is important to observe the principles of safety and welfare, and above all, to be patient and consistent in conducting exercises.

Key words: dogs, training systems, types of working dogs.

INTRODUCTION

As an animal accompanying and assisting humans, the dog was domesticated ten to fifteen thousand years ago. Initially, dogs served mainly as guards, but with time and the division of labour, the role of dogs changed as well. This was a factor initiating the process whereby different groups of working dogs were distinguished. Around the turn of the 20th century, many breeds were established that not only kept order in herds of animals and around the home, but also began to serve as guides for the blind, to serve in the police and the military, and to assist in hunting (Monkiewicz and Wajdzik 2008; Jakubowski 2014; Fernandes et al. 2017).

Training is a concept that is integrally linked to successfully bringing up man's four-legged friend. The dog's receptiveness to teaching is determined by many factors, only a few of which depend directly on the human being. For many years research has been carried out all over the world to develop the best methods for assessing the character of puppies, their predisposition to work, and the relationship between the young animal and its future owner. The most popular of these are the Puppy Aptitude Test (PAT) and the Campbell-Fisher test, which can initially determine the dog's type of temperament and help in the selection of training methods. However, the effects of the training will also depend on the environment where the mother has spent her pregnancy and the puppy has spent its first few weeks of life. Too many stress-inducing stimuli can contribute to behavioural disorders later on, and these in turn delay learning. Each dog owner or handler should remember that the training will be ineffective without trust, patience and consistency in issuing commands, and that the degree of difficulty

should be adapted to the animal's temperament and its psychophysical disposition on a given day. Training should evoke positive associations and be fun for both parties (Rooney and Cowan 2011; Turcsan et al. 2011; Karpiński et al. 2012; Scandurra and al. 2016b).

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HUNTING DOGS

Training of hunting dogs should begin as early as possible, and no later than about 3 months of age. The animal should work with the person it will be hunting with in the future. The entire work cycle is based on three development periods characteristic for this group. The first is the initial period (3–4 months), in which the exercises should take the form of play. This mainly involves learning to sniff and strengthening the sense of smell. One recommended form of exercise involves creating a scent of puppy food: for example, before feeding time we can pull a piece of meat along the ground on a string (creating an information signal for the olfactory receptors), with a bowl of food at the end of the trail. A puppy with a good sense of smell and a good appetite will quickly become interested in the scent and begin to follow the trail. Repeating this exercise several times while giving the search command will result in a positive association.

During this period the dog also learns to heel, to come on command, to sit down, and to retrieve objects. In the second period (5–6 months), the dog begins learning to search for hidden (missing) objects and is habituated to gunfire. This process is a continuation of the tracking work. Initially, the hiding places for the object, usually the dog's favourite toy, are not very complicated. Over time the level of difficulty is increased, and at the same time the type of surface on which the animal works is changed and distractions from the environment are increased. The trainer encourages the dog by saying 'search' or 'find it', and shows it the beginning of the trail on the ground. Each time the dog correctly performs an exercise, it receives praise and a reward. In the third training period (7–8 months) dogs reveal their innate predispositions, which determine what type of group they will be assigned to. At the age of one year, a well-trained dog should know how to approach, flush and track game, and should respond to a shot fired by its owner (Turcsan et al. 2011; Kočańska 2016).

GUARD DOGS

Guard dog breeds include the Rottweiler, Doberman, Tibetan Mastiff, Caucasian Shepherd, South Russian Ovcharka, and Appenzeller Sennenhund. The main features that predispose them to this type of work are endurance, strength, courage, distrust of strangers, resistance to various weather conditions, good hearing and sight, and a well-developed defensive instinct. Properly trained animals are capable of guarding houses, farms, garden plots, warehouses, workshops, and all of their owners' possessions in their absence. There are specialized forms of training directly related to the work the dog will perform in the future. The first stage is the completion of basic training. This is a system in which the dog performs exercises to strengthen physical fitness and obedience. The dogs also learn not to pick up food that they find or accept

it from strangers, and to bark only on command or in specific situations, e.g. to signal the presence of strangers in the area it is guarding. An additional element in the training of defence dogs is the participation of 'helpers' or 'decoys' wearing protective bite suits. The decoy simulates an attack on the owner or dog, which helps to introduce and train many commands involving holding or releasing the attacker. Initially, the 'watch him' command is introduced; at even the smallest movement on the part of the helper, the animal should react immediately (usually by growling and then by barking), and when the decoy tries to move away from the dog, it is expected to catch him by the forearm or knock him down (Arhant et al. 2010; Haverbeka et al. 2010).

POLICE DOGS

The category of police dogs includes dogs that work in the police, military, and customs, as well as those working in border guards and in prisons. Due to the nature of the tasks performed, the animals should be distinguished by an excellent sense of smell, self-control, courage, lack of fear of gunfire, willingness to cooperate with people, and a predisposition for tracking. Breeds with these traits include the Belgian Shepherd, Dutch Shepherd, German Shepherd, and Beauceron (Haverbeke et al. 2008; Bekasiewicz 2016).

In Poland, one location where training of police dogs takes place is the Police Cynology Unit of the Police Training Centre in Sułkowice. Specialized training of police dogs begins at the age of 12 months, but before that the puppy takes a qualifying test, which evaluates its reaction to gunfire, level of aggression, courage, intelligence and endurance. After passing the tests, the animals are assigned to specialized training, e.g. patrol, tracking, or combined patrol and tracking. Patrol dogs must learn to detect, stop and incapacitate the offender until the handler appears.

Tracking dogs learn to work on a long and difficult trail, regardless of weather conditions, while specialized sniffer dogs are taught to use their sense of smell to find hidden explosives, drugs or weapons. This training consists of two stages: the first, preliminary stage involves tracking the handler, and the second involves tracking strangers. Exercises are always carried out calmly, carefully and consistently. They should be repeated 2–3 times a week but must not be repeated more than 2–3 times a day. Difficulties related to time (freshness of the trace) and distance are gradually introduced. Animals of all specializations undergo basic training lasting from 3 to 6 months, during which basic obedience commands are repeated the entire time alongside the specialized exercises (Arhant et al. 2010; Wach 2016).

HERDING DOGS

Herding dogs have an innate, genetic instinct to care for and guard herds of animals, not only livestock. Characteristic traits of these animals include a strong and compact build enabling agility of movement, determination and courage, vigilance, a good sense of smell, the capacity and willingness to learn, distrust of strangers, and absolute obedience and attachment to the handler. Qualities directly related to the training and shaping of specific kinds of behaviour include a tendency to circle, which involves running around a herd and forcing the

animals to remain in a compact group, and the ability to steer them in a specific direction. The training principles and system are primarily based on their later use in working with a specific group of individuals in their future environment. The most common breed for this type of work is the Border Collie, but dogs of other breeds can also be used successfully, e.g. the Kelpie, Mudi and Welsh Corgi (Monkiewicz and Wajdzik 2008; Charytonik 2015a).

Training begins at the age of 2–3 months, immediately after weaning. During this time, trainers suggest including the dog in a herd of dogs that have already been trained. This makes further training much easier, as young individuals learn the desired behaviour more quickly by imitating adult dogs. The process of socialization with other animals takes place at the same time. After the socialization period, at about 12 weeks of age, the training focuses on obedience and coming when called. The training proper should begin at the age of 5–6 months. The herd of animals used for exercises should consist of about 50 sheep, preferably young ones, as they are more easily led by a young sheepdog than adult individuals. This will allow the dog to gain confidence.

The next stage in working with the herding dog is improvement of additional features, which include concentration, anticipation, steering and control of the flock. Concentration is a very important feature in this group. It is taught by introducing the dog to the flock and issuing a command directing it to the right and then to the left side of the herd. This exercise makes it possible to manoeuvre the herd. Anticipation is a feature that allows the dog to read signals indicating the direction the flock will move in, and steering allows it to uniformly move the herd in the designated direction and to a fixed place. This skill is developed using two commands (with the dog kept on a rope the entire time): 'go out' – the pupil runs with the trainer in the indicated direction and 'stand' – when the group or individuals have been turned around and are in the designated place. The last trait, control over the flock, allows the dog to supervise the flock and gather dispersed and lost individuals. Elements characteristic for guard dog training are also introduced during the training (Rooney and Cowan 2011; Scandurra et al. 2016a).

SLED DOGS

In Poland, the most popular breed of sled dog is the Siberian Husky. Other breeds used are Alaskan Malamute, Greenlandic Dog and Samoyed. Training of this group begins with the selection of the most psychologically stable puppies that enjoy working in a group, preferably from a line of working dogs. First general training principles are introduced, with special emphasis placed on the socialization of puppies and frequent long walks in diverse terrain, not only in terms of shape or surface but also having a variety of stimuli. Puppies from 2 months of age are habituated to the rope and harness. Another element of the training is learning to run with a cart, initially without a load and then systematically increasing the load, while simultaneously lengthening the route. During the exercises basic commands are introduced, such as 'go' or 'hike' – the dog should only move straight ahead, 'haw' – go left, 'gee' – go right, and 'whoa' – stop. In addition to the sledge training, condition training is introduced, in which the length of the route or weight of the sledge or cart is gradually increased (Gorazdowski 2002).

RESCUE DOGS

Today's rescue dogs are used in water and mountain rescue. Only dogs with special physical and psychological qualifications are eligible for training as rescue animals. They should be no more than 2 years of age, of a medium-sized breed, strong and well-built, and resistant to adverse weather conditions. Moreover, they should have excellent hearing and sense of smell and a good sense of direction in the field and they should be controlled, calm, gentle towards strangers, and above all not responsive to other animals.

A dog can begin training for rescue work only when it has learned to be absolutely obedient and to flawlessly carry out difficult tasks, such as overcoming an obstacle course and crawling. During rescue training, the dog is trained to be active, perceptive and interested. Most important is continual work on the dog's physical fitness. A reduction in work efficiency, lack of interest or the appearance of any negative habits, e.g. aggression or chasing after wild animals, immediately eliminates the animal from the list of working dogs. Rescue training can last up to two years before the dog can begin searching for missing people. The development of physical fitness in the dog is aided by exercises of increasing difficulty, e.g. jumping over obstacles, crawling, etc. At the end of the training, an adult dog should be able to cover a distance of about 10 km within 70 minutes without excessive fatigue. At this stage of the rescue dog training programme, the dog's perseverance, strength and dexterity are perfected. For training to be successful the exercises should be alternated, and the training session should not last more than 10 minutes.

After each exercise the dog should have the opportunity to rest, which usually means playing with the handler. Improving obedience in special circumstances consists primarily in consolidating the acquired habits and introducing new distractions, such as gunfire or unexpected acoustic stimuli. In this exercise, it is also advisable to introduce elements involving the absence of the handler, e.g. leaving the dog alone in a strange environment among a group of people, while the handler hides.

A well-trained rescue dog, after receiving the command, chooses the shortest route to its handler while ignoring the people around it. Accustoming the dog to various weather and terrain conditions begins with exercises that are closely related to its future role. In the initial learning period, tasks are carried out in conditions that make searching easier for the animal: the most suitable time of day, wind strength and direction, and ground surface, as well as good weather. The dog is gradually habituated to more difficult conditions. Mountain rescue dogs, in addition to the basic training system, also learn to work in snow-covered areas and dense forests. One aspect of the training technique involves searching for the handler, who this time is hidden in a hollow, under a layer of snow, or in a thicket of shrubs. This exercise is primarily aimed at improving the olfactory capacity and reflexes needed in subsequent exercises. The next stage of this exercise is to penetrate the area in search of strangers.

After the command has been issued, the dog should thoroughly search the indicated area and track down the hidden person. The training is completed with an exam in which the animal has 30 minutes to find objects and a helper. During the test the trainer can only guide the work of the dog by showing it the right direction and calling it back, e.g. with a whistle. During this

test, the thoroughness of the search of the area and identification of objects and people are evaluated. The animal does not pass the test if it loses interest and stops searching (Valsecchi et al. 2010; Jakubowska 2014; Scandurra et al. 2016b).

In water rescue, dogs with innate predispositions for work in water are used. These are not only character traits (gentleness, obedience and willingness to work with people), but above all physical characteristics (body structure and quality and type of hair coat). Dogs designated for this type of work should spend time near the water from puppyhood, as this is conducive to more effective training. The first stage of training, as for the previous groups, consists of obedience exercises. The main elements of this training are following the handler and learning to carry various objects. After passing of this part of the training, the dog can move on to the water stage, i.e. swimming together with the handler ('team swimming') and retrieving items from the water. During this exercise, the handler focuses the dog's attention on himself, while they swim side by side at an equal pace, keeping a distance that allows both the handler and the animal to move freely. This teaches the dog not to harm the person it will be rescuing. The second task is retrieving items from the water. Initially, these are small objects, usually favourite toys (floating), with larger and heavier items introduced over time. The third stage of the training is overcoming increasing distances, initially without retrieving, and when it is able to cover a distance of 200 m in both directions without showing much fatigue, retrieving is included.

The final stage of the training is simulation of a rescue operation. During the exercises, the dog always wears a life jacket with a handle by which a person can be pulled. The dog's task is to swim to the drowning person and give them a buoy or life ring and then tow them as close as possible to the lifeguard or boat from which the dog was released into the water. If the person is unconscious, the dog is taught to catch the wrists in such a way that it causes no harm but is able to safely tow the victim. In conducting this type of training it should be remembered that the rescuer is a human being, while the dog only provides support in the operation (Jakubowska 2014; Kusińska-Leontiew and Izdebska 2016).

THERAPY DOG

In Poland, dogs began to be used to support treatment of sick people in 1987. The most popular breeds used in therapy are retrievers (Labrador, Golden and Flat-Coated), Samoyeds, Newfoundland dogs, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, and Beagles. The training process of a therapy dog is long, requiring many hours of exercises. The selection of puppies and adult animals for this type of work requires not only training skills but also thorough knowledge of the canine psyche. Animals used in various forms of therapy must be very gentle, obedient, subordinated to people, fearless and submissive. They should learn easily and they must not exhibit aggression or domination. The selection of a dog for therapy is determined by a number of tests, which assess their sensitivity to touch (discomfort threshold), sensitivity to sound (noise stress threshold), interest, ability to establish contact, and response to stress. After the dog passes the tests, there is a period of basic training and socialization. This is done in a similar way as in the groups discussed above, and lasts from 3 to 6 months. Then the handler and pupil take a basic companion dog exam.

The next stage is therapy dog training, during which the animal learns to perform tasks that will be useful in its later work, e.g. placing items in containers and taking them out, opening doors, vocalizing (barking) on command, and various tricks help to establish contact with a human being. The training ends with an exam that checks the acquired skills. The test for therapy dogs includes 14 stages, including communication between the handler and the dog, excitability, acceptance of touch in sensitive places and obedience. After passing such a test, the dog can begin work as a therapist together with its handler (Pawlik-Popielarska 2005; Drzazgowska 2012; Dorskocz 2013).

CONCLUSION

Training modifies dogs' behaviour through various learning systems. One such system is instrumental conditioning, in which the animal learns the connection between behaviour and its consequences. The work of the handler (owner) is primarily to provide the appropriate consequences of specific behaviour, i.e. to reinforce or suppress the effect of a given stimulus. Animal training consisting in negative reinforcement allows the animal to develop a mechanism to avoid punishment, but the use of aversive stimuli that are too strong can unfortunately lead to behavioural disorders (e.g. anxiety or aggression). Research is being conducted to introduce the best possible tests enabling proper selection of puppies for a given training system. Irrespective of the type of training conducted and the breed or working type, it is important to observe the principles of safety and welfare, and above all, to be patient and consistent in conducting exercises.

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CHARAKTERYSTYKA WYBRANYCH SYSTEMÓW SZKOLENIA RÓŻNYCH TYPÓW UŻYTKOWYCH PSÓW

Streszczenie. Celem pracy była charakterystyka podstawowych systemów szkolenia w ramach głównych typów użytkowych psów utrzymywanych w Polsce. System szkolenia każdej z grup ma na celu udoskonalenie wrodzonych cech utożsamiających je z pełnioną funkcją. Dobrze wyszkolony pies jest skoncentrowany na przewodniku i ma do niego pełne zaufanie, wypracowane poprzez konsekwencję oraz wzajemny szacunek podczas wspólnej pracy. Bez względu na rodzaj prowadzonego szkolenia, rasę czy typ użytkowy psów nie należy zapominać o zachowaniu zasad bezpieczeństwa i dobrostanu, a przede wszystkim o cierpliwości w prowadzeniu ćwiczeń.

Słowa kluczowe: psy, systemy szkoleń, typy użytkowe psów.