



Ferrets: Training or Behavior?

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Training or Behavior

- Trainer

- Skilled in teaching an animal how to perform a behavior to a specific cue
- “Touch”

- Behavior Consultant

- Understands the way an animal makes a living in its environment and the relationships with other animals.

Applied Behavior Analysis

- Related to Learning Theory
- Functional relationships between behavior and environment.
- Implementation of behavior principles and methods to solve behavior issues

A-B-C DATA SHEET

ANIMAL:		BEHAVIOR:		
DAY/DATE:	LOCATION:	TIME BEGAN:	ENDED:	REPORTER:
SETTING EVENT Sleepy, sickness, pain, thunder storm, more than usual stimuli, other				
ANTECEDENT What was ongoing or happened just before?				
BEHAVIOR What did the animal DO?				
CONSEQUENCE What did the caregiver(s) do or what happened as a result?				
POSSIBLE FUNCTION:				

DATE:	LOCATION:	TIME BEGAN:	ENDED:	REPORTER:
SETTING EVENT Sleepy, Sickness, Staff Change, Other				
ANTECEDENT What was ongoing or happened just before?				
BEHAVIOR What did the person DO?				
CONSEQUENCE What did the staff do or what happened as a result?				
FUNCTION:				

DATE:	LOCATION:	TIME BEGAN:	ENDED:	REPORTER:
SETTING EVENT Sleepy, Sickness, Staff Change, Other				
ANTECEDENT What was ongoing or happened just before?				
BEHAVIOR What did the person DO?				
CONSEQUENCE What did the staff do or what happened as a result?				
FUNCTION:				

Behavior

- Behavior Modification
 - Replace a set of rules with a new set that allow the animal to relax and take cues
- Labels
 - Describe the behavior
- Genetic History – natural history
- Behavior History – how long
- Current Conditions

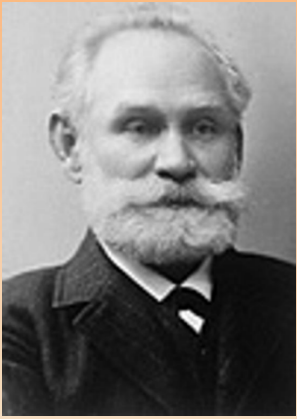


Training

- Reinforcement not bribe
- Lure – show the reward before the behavior (food or praise)
- Extinction – behavior goes away – no longer reinforced.
 - Extinction burst
 - Spontaneous recovery – gone but not forgotten



Relevant Concepts



Classical Conditioning (Pavlov)

- Learn by association
- Pair good thing with stimulus



Operant Conditioning (Skinner)

- Behavior has consequences
- Train a behavior incompatible with problem behavior with pleasurable consequence

CC or OC?

- When dog sees a dog, food appears
- When dog sees a dog, “sit” then food appears

Relevant Concepts

- Unconditioned Reinforcer

- Food, water, air, shelter



- Conditioned Reinforcer

- Previously neutral item becomes reinforcer when paired with unconditioned reinforcer.
- Money – only paper, but paired with commodities. \$=food
- Toy, walk, click

Relevant Concepts

- Habituation
 - Initial response to stimulus
 - Over time repeated exposure w/absence of aversive or pleasure
 - Get used to it! (train)
- Flood
 - Present stimulus at full force until no response with no escape
- Desensitize
 - Low level without response
 - Gradually increase
- Socialization
 - Act of teaching not to react by de-sensitizing
 - Early age

Relevant Concepts

- Premack Principle
 - A positive can reinforce something not so good
 - If you eat your veggies, you can have dessert



Factors that Affect Learning

- Deprivation
 - Increase the speed, intensity and response
 - Work harder for food if hungry
- Novelty
 - Must notice the stimulus
 - Must be relevant
- Timing
 - Warn (CC) and Mark (OC)
- Fear
 - Inability to learn
- Intrinsic (can lead to problem)
 - Internal reward
 - Feel good
- Extrinsic
 - External reward
 - Food or \$

Rewards

- Quality – ferretone
- Quantity
- Relevant

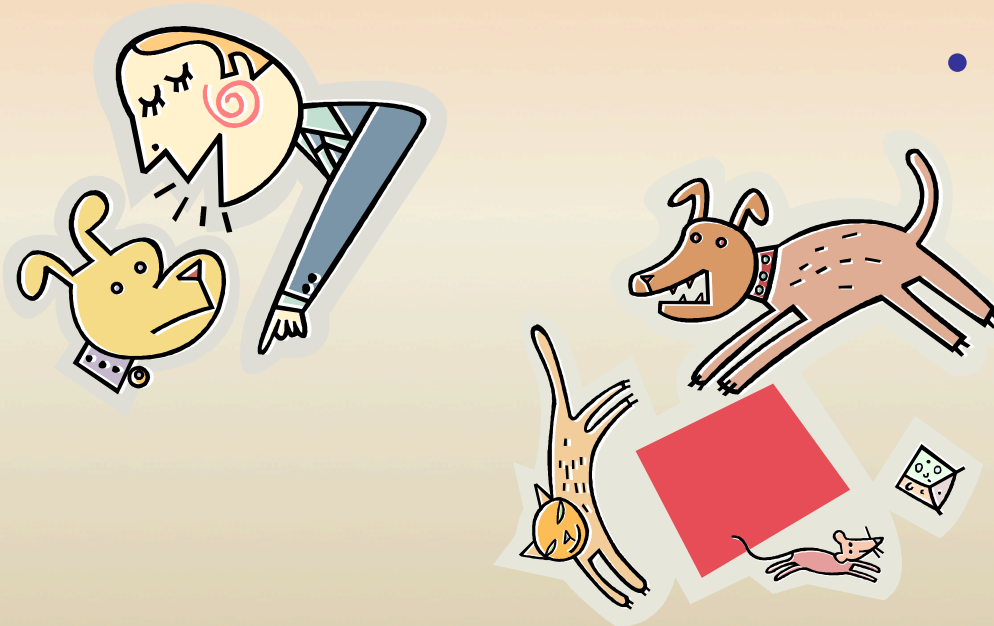


Factors that Affect Learning

- Criteria
 - Expectations
 - Consistency
- Rate of reinforcement
 - Quick at first
 - 10/minute
- Schedule of reinforcement
 - Variable, Fixed, Interval
- Past experience
 - How long has it been going on
- Natural History
 - Can't expect a pig to put a coin in a bank, but a raccoon can
- Communication
 - Are you being clear

Punishment

- Immediate
- Every time
- Strong enough
- Can cause aggression
 - Re-directed
 - Suppress warnings
- Suppress other behaviors
 - Learned helplessness
 - Can't "think"



ABC

- A – Antecedent. Stimuli, event, and conditions that occur immediately before the behavior
- B – The behavior is the action taking place (good or bad!)
- C – Consequences. Stimuli, event, and conditions that immediately follow a behavior



ABC

- What do you see
 - Under what conditions
 - What events predict it
 - What does he get out of it/
get away from
 - Conditions he doesn't do it
 - When is it successful
 - What to do instead
 - Are you willing
- A – while in the cage, my hand moves to the bird
 - B – bird bites at my hand
 - C – Hand moves away
 - Prediction – if I don't "deal" with this, chance of bite increases

ABC

- What do you see
- Under what conditions
- What events predict it
- What does he get out of it/
get away from
- Conditions he doesn't do it
- When is it successful
- What to do instead
- Are you willing



ABC

- Consequences influence the frequency of the behavior
 - Good or bad
 - Scream?
 - Remove hand?
- Used to understand, predict, and change past consequences and explain current behavior
 - What will happen in future?
 - What should I do?

ABC

- Positive reinforcement
 - Pair something good with new behavior
- Train an alternate behavior
 - Step on a perch
- Identify competing behavior
 - Can't bite hand with toy/
treat in mouth
- Identify desired behavior and consequences
 - “step up” without biting
- What has been tried and for how long
- Learn to ignore changes, so slow down!

Argh...*Misuse of “Dominance”*

- Dominant & Submissive
- Alpha
 - Breeding male/female
 - Implies fighting for status
 - Control of resources
- Hierarchy
 - Fluid
 - Dependent on circumstance
- Alpha Roll
 - Actually an appeasement ritual
 - Status determined by force is often overturned



Argh...*Misuse of “Dominance”*

- Captive wolf studies
 - Short-term studies
 - Wild wolves live in stable group of related animals
 - Captive animals A-typical of wild
 - No dominance hierarchy in wild
 - Misinterpreted ritualistic behavior
- No dominance contests – posturing during social interactions



Dr. David Mech

"Alpha" Wolves

Argh...*Misuse of “Dominance”*

- Dominance is a relationship not a characteristic!
- Feral dogs don't form stable groups (Coppinger)
 - Fluid
 - Scavengers
 - Don't socially raise pups
- Hierarchy preferences
 - Food
 - Space
 - Toy
 - People
 - other
- Ferrets are not dogs or wolves!

Ferrets - Senses



- Effective vision in low light
 - Pupils slit horizontally – chase prey that hops
 - See better up close
 - Keen sense of smell
- Mark territory with poop and scent
 - Increase in butt drags when intro to new ferret
 - Preferred location is clean (unused)



The nose knows!

Play

- Imitate patterns of aggression and sexual behavior
- Juvenile behavior



Biting

- Teething
 - Teeth at 10 weeks
- Lack of learning
- An increase in early social experience equals a decrease in aggressive behavior
- Illness
- Redirected
- Play
- Fear



Litter box

- Low side
- Thin layer
- Substrate
- Place where used
- Large
- Wire to cage



New Ferret

- A new ferret = combative behavior
- Neutral area
- An increase in early social experience equals a decrease in aggressive behavior



Other issues

- Digging
- Burrowers
 - Sharp claws
- Long flexible body for tunnel travel
- Small animals elicit prey response
- Socialized ferrets habituate better than isolated



Case Study: Biting

- Leo. Male, neutered
- Rescued, albino
- Age (estimate) 4
- Leo bites ankles

- A
- B
- C



Case Study: Litter

- Manta. Female, spayed
 - Rescue, est. age 3
 - Manta will go to litter box and fake using it
-
- A
 - B
 - C

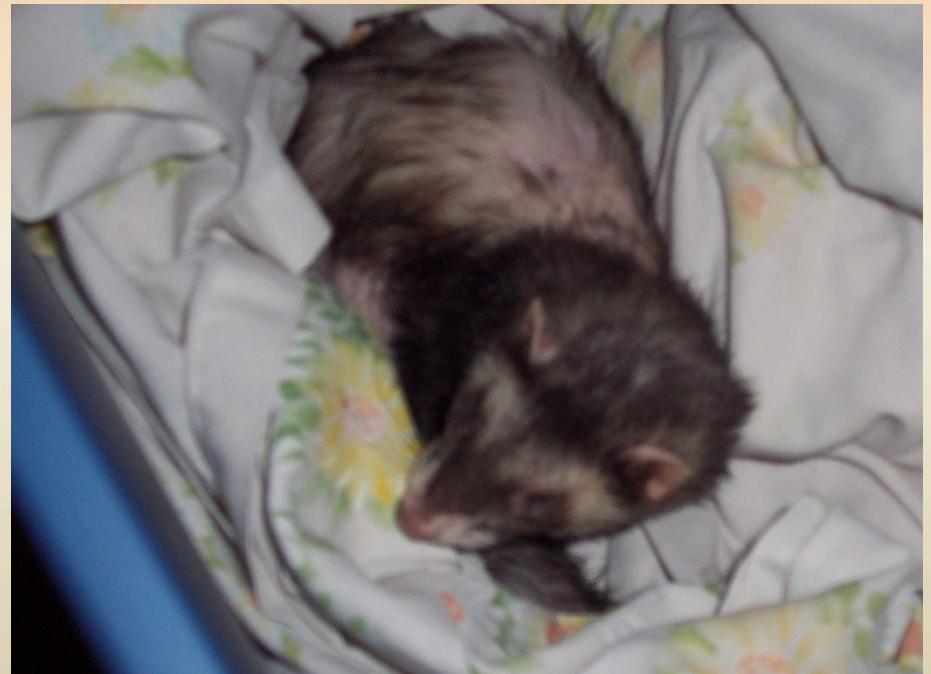


Case Study: Licking self/Scratching

- Echidna. Female, spayed
- Rescue, est. age 2
- Echidna has been licking herself to the point that she is losing hair

- A
- B
- C

- Time in cage
- Medical
- Playtime



Case Study: Not eating

- Fisher. Female, spayed
- Rescue, est. age 2
- Fisher will not eat the new food I bought.
- Imprint early
- Lack of experience
- Dislike
- Illness

- A
- B
- C



Case Study: Bite cage

- Gentoo. Male, neutered
- Birth, age 1.5
- When in his cage, Gentoo would spend hours biting at the wire
- A
- B
- C
- How long in cage
- What do you do when he does it
- How does he spend his time in/out of cage



Case Study: Bite ferrets

- Badger. Male, neutered
- Rescue, est. age 4
- Badger constantly attacks other ferrets
- A
- B
- C
- How often
- Describe attack
- Any ferrets



Case Study: Digging in food

- Minx. Female, spayed
 - Rescue, est. age 3
 - Minx digs in the food dish and spills the food
 - A
 - B
 - C
- Type of dish
 - Time out of cage
 - How long



Case Study: Chewing fabric

- Rockhopper. Male, intact
- Birth, age 4mo
- Rock chews holes in all of the bedding
- A
- B
- C



Case Study: Bite

- Male ferret, neutered
- Bites cage
- New ferret, female Spayed
- Now bites cage



Case Study: Misc

- Ferret anal drags
- Ferret licks/drinks urine
- Important to note:
 - age of ferret
 - Overall health



To Do - Prevention

- Diet
 - High quality
 - Meat
- Clean
 - Litter box
 - Environment
- Enrichment
 - Play
 - Toys
 - Human and ferret interaction



To Do - Prevention

- Consistency
 - Know what you want
 - Patience
- Medical
 - Annual vet visit
- Other
- Nothing is Free
 - Work for it



Resources

- Burch & Bailey
- Coppinger, Ray
- Domjan, M
- Mech, David
- Pryor, K
- Reid, Pamela
- Van Kerkhove
- Yin, Sophia
- How Dogs Learn
- Dogs
- Principles of Learning and Behavior
- Reaching the Animal Mind
- Excel-erated Learning

Thank You



4 Quadrants

Come when called

<p>R+</p> <p>Add something to the environment to increase the behavior</p> <p>Treat when ferret comes</p>	<p>P+</p> <p>Add something to decrease the behavior</p> <p>Scruff the ferret when he comes</p>
<p>R-</p> <p>Remove something to increase the behavior</p> <p>Put the ferret in another room</p>	<p>P-</p> <p>Remove something to decrease the behavior</p>