

# Helping animals to heal themselves

Animals have an instinctive understanding of their medicinal needs, says Caroline Ingraham, a leading authority on using plant oils with animals. Here she shares three success stories



**Z**oopharmacognosy is not a new therapy: in fact, it's the oldest therapy in existence. It allows animals to use their innate ability to select the remedies they need and guide their dosage. This innate knowing is the key to their healing.

Plant oils are normally taken in small quantities by an animal when it needs its specific medicinal properties. Whether such substances end up being toxic or medicinal in their effects has a great deal to do with dosage. Once the animal has selected its remedy, it will guide the treatment by inhaling it, taking it orally, or by rubbing a part of its body into it. Zoopharmacognosy refers to the process by which animals self-medicate and naturally forage plants, essential oils, algae, clay and other natural remedies.

However, I think this behaviour would be questioned if a dog were observed climbing up onto the table to eat an onion, which is poisonous, leaving the non-poisonous energy rich apple. This is exactly what was witnessed when a young labrador ate an onion and left the apple. However, shortly after ingesting the onion the dog purged, ridding his body of segments of tapeworm. This dog had selected the toxin to rid the body of worms; it knew exactly what it needed.

Worming is one of the most debated and controversial procedures: over-the-counter wormers can be harsh and have side effects and they are often administered as a routine precaution. However, given the opportunity, an animal will know how to maintain its health. This can be achieved by offering appropriate secondary compounds for self-selection – an innate behaviour vital to their well-being and, ultimately, their survival. The first case study below demonstrates just how discerning animals can be in choosing the treatment they need.

## SUNFLOWER SUCCESS

Earlier this year Lynn Hedges Geast, a student at the Ingraham Academy, wrote up this case study on a four-year-old female Staffordshire bull terrier she had treated. The dog had developed a heart murmur after an operation which, the vet advised, could have been caused by the anaesthetic used. He prescribed no medication since the murmur was low grade but recommended regular check-ups to monitor the condition.

Lynn takes up the story: "The dog mainly selected rose otto essential oil (although she also chose neroli, linden blossom, jasmine and frankincense). She sniffed the box but it seemed that whatever I offered her, it wasn't the one she wanted! She was getting really excited and I felt myself getting anxious that I couldn't get there quick enough! I started with barleygrass for its nutrients and magnesium but the dog showed no interest.

"Next I offered spirulina for its immune-stimulating properties and nutrient content – which I thought she would go for but there was no response at all. I offered chickweed and comfrey macerated oils, neem and flax oils, and hemp for nervous tension, with no success. I decided to just keep offering, knowing I would get there eventually! She showed moderate interest in arnica macerated oil and rosehips (dried) but they clearly weren't what she wanted.

"Then I decided to try a fixed oil and offered her sunflower oil. She went absolutely mad for it, jumping up and trying to bite the bottle! I was relieved that I'd found what she wanted but she couldn't get enough of it. She took a total of 160ml and still wanted more. I tried offering other base oils, thinking that perhaps she was indicating more fatty oils in her diet. I offered safflower, then olive oil which she sniffed, licked with moderate



*This labrador is sniffing out rosehips, following her natural instinct to seek out the remedy she needs*

interest but then went straight back to licking the empty sunflower oil bowl. I put another 30ml of sunflower in and she licked it all.

"I offered grapeseed oil but there was no interest, then I offered sunflower oil again and she desperately wanted to lick inside the bottle. I gave her another 30ml (by now she had had 220ml sunflower oil) and she started to slow down a bit, licking her lips and nose a lot and pausing between licks.

"Once finished, I gave her a further 30ml (250ml now – a whole bottle!), of which she left a small amount in the bowl. Then she drank some water, took her toy, settled down in her bed and fell asleep. This seemed a good time to end the consultation.

"She then purged 250ml of sunflower oil and, with it, expelled huge amounts of tapeworm segments! I arranged another visit to re-offer and this time there was no interest in any remedies apart from rose otto. But she was still excited about sunflower oil even though purged. She went through another 200ml the day after purging, and from then on started to cut back on it to 60ml per day".

Two months after Lynn's treatment of this dog I received an email from her saying that the dog had just had a check-up and the vet could not identify a heart murmur at all and, thanks to the sunflower oil, the massive cluster of tapeworms she'd had in her body was now completely cleared. Lynn concluded: "thanks to all that zoopharmacognosy stands for, this dog is now in a much happier, healthier place – physically, mentally and emotionally."

## SKIN DISORDER

Janet Roberts, another of my students, owns an eight-year-old fox terrier called Fin. Around six years ago he started with a skin disorder that the vet described as an allergy to house and dust mites. Janet explains what happened:

"The allergy, which manifested in Fin's ears, was described as an ear infection so he was given antibiotics to clear the infection. Later on, he began to munch at his feet –which proved to be a nightmare since he won't let me even look at his paws, let alone touch them. This investigation required a lot of patience but, when I eventually did get a good look at his paws I could see that they were sore and irritated after so much licking. Another course of antibiotics was given.

"This pattern was repeated at regular intervals over the next couple of years. Antibiotic after antibiotic was prescribed whenever his condition worsened (which was happening more often) and, as an obsessed dog owner, I began to despair for him since the condition was now spreading to his back.

"Kind friends shared stories of products they had heard about that might help. Friends of friends also shared their own stories, so I ended up with a cupboard full of products that didn't work. After so many failed attempts I had almost accepted that steroids and antibiotics would be the only treatments that could help him.

"However, I had always believed that there was much more to essential oils than sweet-smelling massage and

through my study of essential oils I came across a therapy called zoopharmacognacy. I was fortunate enough to meet Caroline Ingraham who uses essential oils, clays, macerates, and herbs for animals to treat themselves for a wide range of disorders. I bought her book and it was so absorbing and interesting that I called her to arrange a consultation to see whether she could help Fin.

"At this first consultation Fin selected valerian, linden blossom, peppermint, German chamomile, thyme (ct carvacrol), spirulina (helpful with allergies, immune function, and for animals who are run down), grapeseed oil, barley grass (rich in vitamin C, calcium and iron). A gel was also prepared for Fin using aloe vera as the base and adding essential oils of peppermint (cooling), German chamomile (anti-histamine) and thyme (anti-bacterial), to be applied as he wanted it.

"This treatment gave him some relief for a couple of months but then the same pattern began to emerge and I have to admit that my faith was fading rapidly. However, with hindsight, I realise that, at that first consultation, Caroline did not see the true extent of his skin condition because Fin had just had a course of antibiotics.

"I persevered with the treatment for the next couple of years, with courses of antibiotics in between. But when I heard that Caroline was holding a workshop in Reading in June 2009 I decided to attend with Fin to see whether there was some remedy we'd missed.

"At that time Fin's skin was particularly bad. In fact, just a couple of weeks before I'd got some more antibiotics from the vet but I delayed giving them because I wanted Caroline to see how bad the condition was. When we arrived at the venue Caroline saw at once that his skin condition might have been caused by psoriasis and, almost immediately, he selected several remedies associated with this skin disorder.

"He chose:

- Beeswax and marigold oil – which he still loves from time to time. It works as a natural antibiotic, and helps with skin disorders and tissue repair
- Rosehip shells – which support the immune system and assist cell regeneration/scar tissue
- Bergamot – helpful for skin disorders (dry, crusty and flaky) and most effective for psoriasis
- Sandalwood – good for dry flaky skin, conjunctivitis, ear infections. Also, Fin was experiencing regular eye infections, diagnosed as 'dry eye'. Since using the blend of oils he lets me apply some to his nose, which often gets sore and irritated, but the blend has also reduced the number of eye infections
- German chamomile – useful for skin eruptions, inflamed skin conditions, allergies
- Spirulina – during occasional breakouts Fin still loves this and it is offered routinely throughout the year

"Sandalwood, German chamomile and Bergamot were blended together in a base of xanthum gum powder and water and applied directly to the affected area. Fin likes to lick this as well. Six months down the line he still selects these remedies. His skin condition seems to be an ongoing disorder but is under control. I still have the antibiotics

the vet gave me back in June 2009 but have never used them. It has been an amazing journey with Fin and I am overjoyed with the fantastic results achieved."

## WOUND HEALING

Fiona Haberson, an animal behaviourist, healer and certified zoopharmacognist who trained with me, used her skills and knowledge to help heal her dog Belle. The dog had had major abdominal surgery and the incision ran the whole length of her body. The wound was red, spotting blood, and very proud, and the inflammation was pulling at the stitches.

Fiona recalls that Belle "inhaled yarrow deeply and lifted her leg for it to be applied to the wound. It was dripped directly on to the wound until it had stopped absorbing. Almost immediately the redness disappeared. The dog took little interest when German chamomile was offered but, later that day, there were still some spots of blood and inflammation pulling at the stitches so she was offered yarrow again.

"This time however her eyes became wide and worried. The bottle was immediately taken away – at which point she laid back and opened her leg for it to be applied to the wound. It appeared that she was clearly saying that she didn't want to inhale it, but did want it applied. She was then offered German chamomile, which she inhaled deeply, but got up to prevent it from being applied. This continued for a few days and each day the wound was healing rapidly.

"After five days or so the wound had all but healed, but two lumps had appeared under the skin at the top and bottom of it. Belle was now walking away if shown yarrow, so German chamomile was offered and she allowed this to be applied topically. Within two days the swellings had gone. These swellings were mentioned at the seven-day veterinary check-up and the vet said that Belle may have had an allergic reaction to the internal stitches. Within a week and a half the wound had completely healed, there was no proud flesh and only the faintest of incision lines remained."

Caroline Ingraham, Director of the Ingraham Academy of Zoopharmacognosy, has studied aromatic plant extracts and their symbiotic relationship to animals for over 25 years, founding the first school of Animal Aromatics in 1995. Her internationally acknowledged work attracts significant media attention and her books, *Aromatherapy for Horses* and *The Animal Aromatics Workbook*, are essential reading for those interested in enhancing animals' health and environment. She has worked with many animals at home and abroad, including companion and farm animals, tigers, elephants and reptiles. Contact: [caroline.ingraham@gmail.com](mailto:caroline.ingraham@gmail.com); [www.ingraham.co.uk](http://www.ingraham.co.uk)