

Dear Fly

Poems and writings inspired by the extraordinary world of animals
written by researchers from the University of Liverpool
and members of the general public



The key features for identifying male *Drosophila melanogaster*:

(A) end of the abdomen is round and solid black

(B) the genitalia are flat and round

(C) sex combs on the front legs

The work in this pamphlet has been created in order to share with the general public, in an accessible way, some of the amazing research work into animals, and animal-human relations, that is currently taking place at the University of Liverpool.

As a writer I stumbled across this field of academic research in the summer of 2018, whilst I was writing poems about dogs, and I find it completely fascinating. I met Dr. Carri Westgarth and Dr. Chris Pearson at a History of Dog Poo Community Plop-Up Day in Lark Lane, Liverpool, in October 2018. Following this they applied successfully to the Wellcome Trust for funding for this work, for which we are very grateful.

I have worked with 4 researchers on an individual basis, as well as running a workshop with other researchers and members of the general public.

Huge thanks to Dr. Westgarth and Dr. Pearson for their work, vision and enthusiasm for facilitating this work, and taking part in it. And huge thanks to all who have taken part for their willingness and enthusiasm for taking part in this joyous collaboration between art and science – which are both, in my view, simply different ways of working (and playing) to explore the truth and tell the stories as best we can, until a new version comes along.

Matt Black

Visiting Writer, Summer 2019

Copyright belongs to the authors

Printed by Sheffield Hallam Print Unit

To contact Matt Black
for books, workshops, readings, commissions:
matt.black@pop3.poptel.org.uk
www.matt-black.co.uk

They say they saved me

They came while I was dreaming of chasing rabbits
They took me from under my favourite tree
They tied a piece of string around my neck
They filled my bowl and my belly
They put me in a box and we crossed a big blue sea
They said I have a new family now
They say they saw me on Facebook and fell in love
They put a fence in front of me so I jumped it and ran
They caught me and now they don't let me run
They say they saved me
I'm not sure what from

By Dr. Carri Westgarth

Inspired by her research into people adopting rescue dogs from overseas.

Dear Fly

Dear Fly,

I spent hours making your stinky yeasty food,
I found you a room with heavy warmth and light,
I gave you any male you liked
And still you never mated.

Those males don't care that you're hairy and small
They don't mind your ugly bug eyes, not at all.
I saw them court, they tried their best,
I guess they did not meet your standards.

I know you didn't know what I was doing,
The value of the hours wasted on you,
Your mushy, sticky larvae the subject of my stress dreams.
You are too stupid to expect what was coming next.

So little fly,
I will not lie to you,
I did take pleasure at the end of it all
In throwing you away,
Trash to be autoclaved.

Dear Human,

What business of yours is it
What mate I choose, if any at all?
Who are you to say I am stupid,
Just because I am small.

You study me for my easy keeping, my convenient size.
In the literature I am a celebrity.
So much is known of me,
You see into my DNA.

And yet you cannot figure me out!
My mind remains a mystery.

Kill me if you want,
Our numbers are immeasurable.
Our lines will live on far longer than you.
We, the angels to biologists with only a little money and time,
Staple for the undergrads,
And you, the “postgrad” student
Who got sick of it
And quit.

By Alice Davies

I wrote about the female fruit flies I have been working with. I should explain here that after spending the first 6 months of my Master’s degree trying to conduct experiments on the mating behaviour of the flies, I eventually had to give up and change project focus because I couldn’t get the flies to mate under experimental conditions. Writing my poem revealed some quite angry and frustrated feelings towards my little research subjects!

Plea from a postie

From the Internet into my house, that's how I get my stuff.

My home, my castle, my safe place.

Defended by alarms, cameras, a daft spaniel and a bad tempered cat.

Excitement, my packet's arrived!

From checkout, all the way from China, to here in three days, free P&P.

The alarms bing & the cameras blink.

The dog goes crazy whilst the cat dreams of mice & milk.

I silence the alarm, and search for keys.

Trip over the cat and open the door.

"Stupid dog, get back 'ere, put that postie down"

Please pause for us posties.

Wait another minute to get your goodies.

Put your dog, as lovely as it is, in another room,

Before greeting your postie with a smile not a snarling dog.

By Mark Evans

Mark Evans has worked for the Post Office for thirty years, and campaigns to prevent injury at work from dog-bites. His TUC Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety Research Project is "A review of the systems used in Royal Mail to reduce the hazards of dog & animal attacks on delivery staff & their effectiveness in deployment."

Marking the D

Signing out, going home.
Best part of the day, shower and a brew.
Kids to the park, dog to the field.....cheeky pint.
It's my time not theirs.

Better than A & E and stitches,
Needles and drugs.
Nurses, patient but tired,
Doctors tired with patients.

But it's kids and dogs and beer and tea,
'Cos my mate looked after me,
Prepped up my walk, she saw the dot.
Marked the "D" on Mrs Asquith's catalogue .

I knew her terrier would snatch at the mail,
As I walked to her door.
Posting peg at the ready,
'Cos my mate looked after me.
Saw the dot & marked the "D".

So for me, it's chips for tea,
Not bits adrift.
Common sense when you think of it -
Comfy bed, not a hospital cot,
Because of my mate and a little yellow dot.

By Mark Evans

Don't Run Your Pug In The Sun

Don't run your pug in the sun, Mrs. Sullivan
Please, don't run your pug in the sun
When your eyes are like pies
And your nares hardly there
It really is. no. fun

Don't feed him cake, Mrs. Sullivan
Please don't serve up buttered toast
With a face that flat
And the extra fat
He won't skip and jump, he'll roast

I know he brings joy, Mrs. Sullivan
When his gaze meets yours in awe
But please note:
That's not love, it's hypoxia
Like breathing through a straw

Don't let him melt to a puggle, Mrs. Sullivan
Take steps before he's ill
Your vet will help to keep him well
And show which end to pill

Please make for the shade, Mrs. Sullivan
Go out when the heat is done
Carry water, wear a hat, Mrs. Sullivan
And don't run your pug in the sun.

By Marisol Collins

Vet Eyes

If all the pens and cups of tea
The phone, the watch, the pots of wee
Steth-oto-ptalmoscopes and leads
The gloves, KY, the scrubs, the keys
If all the urgent things misplaced
Were piled up high right by my face
With signposts, bells and all lit bright
By torches, flares and Christmas lights
If all the nurses in the land
Pointed right at it with both hands
I bet my life I wouldn't see
The b*****d thing in front of me.

By Marisol Collins

These two short poems are linked to my experiences as a vet. Hearing “Mrs. Worthington” by Noel Coward on the radio was an inspiration for the first. The second is about something familiar to vets (and long-suffering vet nurses), though I imagine it is not unique to our profession, or indeed to anyone with a scatter-brained partner at home.

Dear Hamish

Dear Hamish,

You started out as my sister's cat, but we all came to love you.

You were a bit like a dog, often wanting attention and affection. But you sometimes lashed out and clawed my legs.

I forgave you.

I loved you so much growing up. We were knotted together.

Then you got old and your fur got knotted

Your teeth came out, you dribbled.

And then one day you died and I was sad.

But then I got into dogs, and I forgot about you a bit. But I still think about you now.

You weren't as smelly, or as loud, or as big as dog. But you had a big presence in my life.

Love, Chris

Dear Chris,

Meow

Meow

Meow

Meow

Purr

Purr

Meow,

Love, Hamish

By Dr. Chris Pearson

For the love of a rescue dog

Dear Brienne,

I'm so sorry that somebody didn't love you like you deserve.

It makes me swell with joy to see you laid back in the crook of the arm of my boy, gently snoring as he fondles your velvet ears.

What does it feel like to now feel secure and loved? Can you feel loved? You behave like you love us, as you shriek and yodel when we come home.

I wonder what it was like, where you lived. Was the kennel cold? Did you have to pee in your bed? It took me ages to wash the smell of urine from your body.

Did you love your puppies? I wonder where they are now.

Hello, I think I like it here. The food is good.

I like the boy and the woman. The man though, sometimes I forget and he makes me jump. But then I remember and I sniff him and give his head a little wash to say sorry.

I do love. I love the grass and the trees and the wind in my ears.

The soft brown stinky treats I find in the grass are so delicious and mean I never have to feel hungry again.

So life is good. Except when I realise I am on my own. That makes me frightened.

Please don't leave me alone. I've never been alone.

Always hear barking, always a warm body next to mine, a baby tugging on my belly, or chewing my ear.

They are gone now, and I came here to you.

By Dr. Carri Westgarth

How to keep all your fingers till you're 65

(a warning poem for posties)

Noone wants to see blood dripping
Down the garden path, fingers missing.

10,000 fingers snapped each year, it's true
Don't think it can't, it could be you.

Any dog can get annoyed,
If in any doubt – please AVOID!

Don't think "I'm good with dogs" or "Dogs are cool" –
Don't take the risk, don't be a fool.

Posties, posties, PLEASE just listen –
Avoid the dog, and don't get bitten.

Noone wants to see blood dripping
Down the garden path, fingers missing!

By Matt Black

Inspired by conversations with Mark Evans, as well as Sara Owczarczak-Garstecka's work in:

"Trusting he wouldn't bite me": how relationships, trust and a sense of responsibility keep us safe around dogs.

Dog bite safety at work: an injury prevention perspective on reported occupational dog bites in the UK.

F' m' dog is a life-saver

For he understands me

For he never tells me what to do

For he is warm and smells of damp fur and nuzzles my leg reassuringly

For he looks up to me with respect, and waits with big eyes for the next treat

For he sits next to me on the sofa, through the long nights, through the years

For while people come and go, he stays

For he is not from the job centre, or the NHS, and he does not ask questions

For I have to get up in the morning, to feed him biscuits and water, and he slops his chops

For he needs to go out in the backyard to relieve himself

For I am proud to clean up after him

For when I am with him, I can do anything, or say anything, and he will not judge me

For I can rant, or throw a cup at the wall, or tell him terrible secrets, and he never thinks the worse of me

For my dog's big eyes just look at me wisely and patiently

For he trusts me to get through

For he helps me to accept myself

For he constantly hunts for socks, under the bed, in the kitchen, under the settee, and when he finds them he hides them from me

For he loves me to scratch him under the chin with my kind fingers

For he does not care or worry about my scars or my past

For he is much simpler than my family, and so I am blessed

For he does not care about Facebook, or Instagram

For he likes biscuits, and I like biscuits

For when I hear voices, he distracts me

For he takes me to the green woods, and on the way we meet kind people who we chat with

For he does not read newspapers or worry about climate change

For he is an oasis of light in a world of darkness and arrows

For I give him treats, and best meat, and I see myself differently

For he lets me sleep, and I sleep well to the echo of his deep breathing

For he can tell when I am upset, and he looks at me, or sits beside me, but
he lets it go

F' m' dog is not interested in risk assessments

F' m' dog is beyond words

F'm' dog never tells me what to do

By Matt Black

Inspired by a conversation with Helen Brooks, and the two papers:

Ontological security and connectivity provided by pets: a study in the self-management of the everyday lives of people diagnosed with a long-term mental health condition by Helen Brooks, Kelly Rushton, Sandra Walker, Karina Lovell and Anne Rogers

<https://bmcpsychiatry.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12888-016->

The power of support from companion animals for people living with mental health problems: a systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence by Helen Brooks, Karina Lovell, Penny Bee, Lauren Walker, Laura Grant and Anne Rogers

<https://bmcpsychiatry.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12888-018-1613-2>

Wolf has an idea

*But really it was nuance, adaptive advantage, chance,
the genes less in the mind, more in the dance.*

Listen, kids, we are alpha,
in our grey coats, prowling over lava,
howling across the steppes. We stalk
through endless forests, called by the chase.
We race after wild horse, our big teeth
sink into bulky mammoth, bison flesh.
But I'm worried. The weather's changing,
the ice is melting, our prey is getting quicker.
We're going to need a strategy quite soon.
Some of us should move on, change, rebrand,
within the next forty, fifty thousand moons.
My wolfish bristles can sense the mood.
Hunting's different, the Two-Legs have new tools,
are growing up, will settle down, take over land.
They fish the raging rivers. My sharp eyes see
one day our forests will be their fields.
They will leave the thrill of the wild,
the travelling life behind, find new skills -
but do not worry, pack, we've got cunning
on our side, and I've got a plan.

It's simple. Yes, some Two-Legs are vicious,
but my wisdom says, Be Kind to Two-Legs,
Two-Legs will be kind to you. And they have
warm caves, big fire, thrown out food.
So listen up – for the next ten thousand moons
we'll hang around their gatherings, sit and smile.
Let them discover, so they feel clever,
the jobs for them that we can do.

See what evolves. If all goes well,
we'll proceed to phase two – change our coats.
No more uniform grey, we'll do fashion,
they can't resist stripy, spotty, pretty!
And my masterstroke, we'll wag our tails.
They'll forever think they make us happy.
After that, job's done, we'll let our brains
get smaller, they can do the thinking,
we can hunt for them, might even steal
their sense of smell. And we'll do protection,
G4S, Growling for Security, that's us.
We won't need such big, bad teeth except
for archetypal roles in wooded fables.
Because Story is All, for Two-Legs,
and our USP will be our mystery.
We'll never tell them where we came from,
what we're thinking, we'll do loyalty,
patience, guardians, sleeping by the hearth.
Change our name to something near divine.
Some of them will take us for animal-teachers
from a world they think they've lost.

So that's it pack, keep your ears pinned back,
play it right, and we might leave these wild woods,
this savage life behind. An easier future calls,
with daily walks, treats, and comfy beds,
and eating peanut butter out of plastic balls.

By Matt Black

Inspired by a conversation with Professor Keith Dobney about the current prevailing theories regarding the history of the domestication of dogs, as well as some of the papers listed at the back of the booklet.

Go for a walk

Go for a walk on the highest hill,
see the pink of the sun going down;
get out and unwind, leave your worries behind
as you stand and look over the town.

Go for a walk with the wind in your hair,
with a dog racing, chasing a ball;
with a bounce and a bound, sniffing around,
a dog teaches tricks to us all.

Out with a dog your spirit runs free,
the fields and woods come alive,
you're back in the wild, like a young child
you're ruling the world, aged five.

Fresh air and fun, leaping and love,
we share the same simple needs -
head for a long 'un out on the common,
now you've both been let off your leads.

Feeling a loafer, bum stuck on the sofa?
Or it's cold? Just set off and stride.
Even half a mile will bring you a smile,
release the endorphins inside.

A country ramble, then café or pub,
wake your limbs in the park in the morning;
meet folks on the green, be part of the scene,
trapped in four walls is boring.

Your dog and you and wide open sky,
no talk but the whisper of trees,
while the wind sorts your journey of thoughts
as answers arrive on the breeze.

More fun than a run, the gym or a swim,
a dog's joy will show you just how
happiness habits, chasing squirrels and rabbits,
can teach you to live in the now.

So love your dog, as they clearly love you,
learn from their ways and make hay,
find half hours of treasure, fresh air and pleasure,
and go for a walk every day.

By Matt Black

Inspired by Dr. Carri Westgarth's research project called 'Understanding dog ownership and walking for better human health', funded by the Medical Research Council.

For further reading into the work of these researchers:

twentysomethingalice.home.blog

www.facebook.com/thedogwalkingproject

<https://chairliverpool.wordpress.com/>

<https://sniffingthepast.wordpress.com/>

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sara_Owczarczak-Garstecka

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/infection-and-global-health/staff/carri-westgarth/publications>

Dobney, K. and Larson, G. (2006). DNA and animal domestication: more windows on an elusive process. *Journal of Zoology* 269 (2): 261-271.

Larson, G., Karlsson, E., Perri, A., Webster, M.T., Ho, S.Y.W., Peters, J., Stahl, P.W., Piper, P., Lingass, F., Fredholm, M., Comstock, K., Modiano, J., Schelling, C., Agoulnik, A.I., Leegwater, P.A., Dobney, K., Vigne, J-D., Vila, C., Andersson, L. and Lindblad-Toh, K. (2012). Dog domestication revisited: A new genetic, archeological, and biogeographic perspective. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, U.S.A.* 109 (23): 8878-8883.

Frantz, L., Mullin, V., Pionnier-Capitan, M., Lebrasseur, O., Ollivier, M., Linderholm, A., Mattiangeli, V., Teasdale, M., Dimopoulos, A., Perri, A., Tresset, A., McCormick, F., Bartosiewicz, L., Gál, E., Nyerges, E., Bréhard, S., Mashkour, M., Bălăşescu, A., Hitte, C., Vigne, J-D., Dobney, K., Hänni, C., Bradley, D. and Larson, G. (2016). Genomic evidence for a dual origin of domestic dogs. *Science* 352, (6290): 1228-1231.

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0022821>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0960982215004327>



Hamish

This project was funded by the Wellcome Trust through the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Public Engagement Grants Scheme at the University of Liverpool.

