

From The News-Record, Wednesday, April 2, 2008, page A-19  
By Dr. Pat Mahoney

## PETS' EYES LEAVES NO DOUBT ABOUT ANIMALS' INTELLIGENCE

The cover for the March 2008 issue of National Geographic is titled "Inside Animal Minds." And the main article is "Minds of their own; animals are smarter than you think."

It is a well-written article with the usual spectacular photography we all expect from National Geographic. Do I think animals are smart? Yes.

As a pet practice veterinarian for these last 30 years, I have formed some opinions and beliefs about cats, dogs, and avians. I think they experience some of the basic emotions that we do. I think they're sometimes able to figure out more than we had previously given them credit for. And I believe I know how they seem to think about some things anyway. I believe these things because I can see it in their eyes.

I do think pets experience joy and happiness. How could I doubt this when I see a kitten fascinated with a new toy? The greeting a pet will exhibit when recognizing a friend, family member or their "special" person is a treasure to behold. Watch the sheer happiness of a retrieving dog at work. It seems to be an unconditional joy of just being there. I admire that.

I think pets feel anxiety and fear as well. Thunderstorms and fireworks can terrify. Not feeling well can produce more than just the predicted physical responses. I have seen some pets, like some people, overcome devastating traumas or illnesses. And I have felt that some pets have just plain given up.

Some pets seem to worry about so many things and this can lead to physical illnesses, just like in people. Most pets benefit from regular exercise, and not just in the physical sense. I think they are really bored without it.

I do not believe that our pets know when they've been bad. I think they're very good at reading body language and assessing tone of voice, among other clues. So, yes, they will shrink back when we're upset about something like a house training oopsie, but not out of guilt.

I do not believe that pets think about damaging something in our homes because they're mad about something. I think the stress of being left alone or of simply not having enough exercise, either physical or mental, will find a physical outlet.

The chewed-up furniture leg or the urination on your pillow, is kind of like the canine and feline versions of our smoking or drinking. Psychological stress often vents itself in physical, often destructive behaviors. So, yes, I think our pets share that with us.

Do I believe animals are smart? You bet. Just look into the eyes of those National Geographic photos.

Dr. Pat Mahoney is the owner of American Animal Hospital in Neenah, an AAHA certified pet care clinic. To submit your pet related questions for a future column, go to the email link at [www.ameranimal.com](http://www.ameranimal.com).