

Perceptive Pets: A Survey in London

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by Rupert Sheldrake, Catherine Lawlor and Jane Turney

1. CAN PETS BE TELEPATHIC?

Pet owners often comment on the surprising perceptiveness of their animals. For example, some cats seem to pick up when their owners intend to take them to the vet, and disappear, even when the person has tried to give the cat no clue. And some dogs seem to know when their owners are about to return, half an hour or more in advance, even when the person comes at an unusual time or in an unfamiliar vehicle (Sheldrake [1994]).

Such phenomena have, so far, been neglected by biologists, ethologists, psychologists, veterinarians and even by parapsychologists. One reason for this neglect may be the widespread taboo among scientists against taking seemingly 'paranormal' phenomena seriously. Another may be the taboo against taking pets seriously (Serpell [1986]). The scientific understanding of animal behaviour has so far been based mainly on laboratory experiments and on the observation of animals in the wild, or in farms and zoos. In these kinds of research, investigators typically try to avoid emotional connections with the animals they are investigating; they aspire to a detached objectivity. They would therefore be unlikely to encounter kinds of behaviour that depend on close attachments between person and animal. In this realm, pet keepers are generally more knowledgeable and experienced than professional researchers on animal behaviour.

In order to assess how common the claims of pet owners are about the perceptiveness of their pets, it is necessary to survey randomly sampled households. One such survey has already been carried out in Greater Manchester, England (Sheldrake and Smart [1997]), and another in Santa Cruz, California, USA (Brown and Sheldrake [1998]). Here we describe the the final survey of this series, in London, England. We used the same questionnaire as the previous two surveys so that the results can be compared.

Of course, what people believe about their pets' abilities may not be true. But it may not be false either. Only empirical investigation can shed further light on the seemingly unexplained powers of pets investigated in this survey.

2. THE TELEPHONIC SURVEY

This survey was conducted by telephone by Jane Turney (JT) and Catherine Lawlor (CL) in London between November 1996 and September 1997. Households were selected from the British Telecom Telephone Directory 616, North London Residential, by JT, and from Telephone Directory 614, East London Residential, by CL. Random number tables were used to determine the page numbers and the line numbers, and the column was selected by throwing a die.

JT and CL introduced themselves as follows: "My name is Jane /Cathy. I'm doing research on unexplained powers of animals, and would like to ask you a few questions" Approximately 75% of the people reached by phone agreed to take part in the survey. JT or CL then asked a series of questions and recorded the answers on a standard form as follows.

Name: _____

Tel: _____

Address: _____

1. Do you or anyone in your household own a pet?	Yes	No
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2. What type of animal? Species:

3. Have you/they ever noticed the pet getting agitated before a family member has arrived home? Yes No

4. How long before you/they arrive is your pet agitated?
0-5 mins 5-10 mins 10-20 mins 20 mins or more

5. Would you agree or disagree that your pet knows you are going out before you show any physical signs of doing so?
Agree Disagree Don't know

6. Would you agree or disagree that you pet responds to your own thoughts or silent commands?
Agree Disagree Don't know

7. Would you agree or disagree that your pet is sometimes telepathic with you?
Agree Disagree Don't know

8. Would you agree or disagree that any of the pets you have known in the past were telepathic?
Agree Disagree Don't know

9. How frequently have you yourself had what you would consider to be a psychical experience?
Never Sometimes Frequently

In cases where respondents currently had no pets (i.e., they answered 'no' to the first question), they were only asked Questions 8 and 9.

In response to question 3, people living alone often replied "don't know". Such answers were treated as "no". Hence the number of pets anticipating their owners' arrival may have been underestimated.

In Tables 1 to 4, where dogs and cats are compared, responses from people who kept both dogs and cats are included in both totals. In most cases their replies referred to their dog rather than their cat, and when no information was given about the other pet, it was classified as "no" for question 3 and "don't know" for questions 5-7.

Statistical analysis was carried out using 2 x 2 contingency tables and the chi-squared test (Campbell [1989]). Probability values for two-tailed tests were used. For the comparison of data for dogs and cats in Table 2, and for the comparison of 'psychic' and 'non-psychic' owners in Table 4, 'don't know' answers were ignored.

3. PET OWNERSHIP

Out of 387 households surveyed, 180 (46.5%) had pets, slightly below the UK national average of 50% (Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, 1995). Cats were the most common pet, followed by dogs. The number of households with the following species were:

Cats	95	Horses	2
Dogs	63	Tortoises	2
Rabbits	9	Sheep	1
Fish	9	Ferret	1
Birds	7	Guinea Pig	1
Hamsters	5	Terrapin	1

Most of these households had one kind of pet: 84 had cats only, and 51 had dogs only; 8 had both dogs and cats; 3 had cats and other pets (excluding dogs); 4 had dogs and other pets; and 30 had only other pets.

These London households were unusual in that more had cats than dogs, whereas nationally more households have dogs than cats. A lower proportion of households had dogs (16%) than the U.K. average of 23% and a higher proportion had cats (25%) than the average of 21% (Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, 1995). The relatively low proportion of dogs reflects a general tendency for dog ownership to be less in large cities, where more people live in flats, than in small towns, suburbs and rural areas, where more people live in houses.

4. DOGS AND CATS THAT SEEM TO ANTICIPATE THE ARRIVAL OF A MEMBER OF THE HOUSEHOLD

The great majority of animals said to anticipate their owner's arrival were dogs and cats, but one rabbit and one ferret were also said to do so. Data for dogs and cats in reply to Questions 3 and 4 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Replies to Questions 3 and 4

Anticipation of owners's arrival

	Numbers (and percentages) of dogs or cats		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Anticipation</u>	<u>No anticipation</u>
<u>DOGS</u>	63	33 (52%)	30 (48%)
<u>CATS</u>	95	22 (23%)	73 (77%)

Period of anticipation: minutes before arrival

	Numbers (and percentages) of dogs or cats reacting				
	<u>Total</u>	<u>0-5 min</u>	<u>5-10 min</u>	<u>10-20 min</u>	<u>20+ min</u>
<u>DOGS</u>	33	20 (61%)	6 (18%)	5 (15%)	2 (6%)
<u>CATS</u>	22	12 (54%)	6 (27%)	1 (5%)	3 (14%)

A far higher proportion of dogs than cats appears to anticipate arrivals. In this survey the figures were 52% and 23% respectively. This difference was highly significant statistically ($p < 0.0005$).

Most pets that were said to anticipate arrivals did so less than five minutes beforehand, but 21% of dog owners and 19% of cat owners said that the animal showed anticipatory behaviour more than ten minutes before the household members' arrival.

5. PETS THAT SEEM TO RESPOND TO THEIR OWNERS' THOUGHTS AND INTENTIONS

Pet owners often report that their animals seem to know when they are going out before they show any physical signs of doing so. Some also claim that their pets can actually respond directly to their thoughts or silent intentions, or are telepathic with them. Questions 5, 6 and 7 were asked to find out how common these impressions are. The results for dogs and cats are summarized in Table 2. In addition, one budgerigar, one canary and one cockatiel were said to respond to their owners thoughts and silent commands, and one rabbit and one ferret were said to be telepathic with their owners.

Table 2. Replies to Questions 5, 6 and 7.

Numbers (and percentages) of dogs and cats. The total number of dogs was 63 and of cats 95

A. Anticipation of owner's departure

	<u>Anticipation</u>	<u>No anticipation</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
<u>DOGS</u>	46 (73%)	14 (22%)	3 (5%)
<u>CATS</u>	45 (47%)	40 (42%)	10 (11%)

B. Responses to owner's thoughts and silent commands

	<u>Response</u>	<u>No response</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
<u>DOGS</u>	27 (43%)	21 (33%)	15 (24%)
<u>CATS</u>	36 (38%)	48 (51%)	11 (12%)

C. Telepathy with owner

	<u>Telepathy</u>	<u>No telepathy</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
<u>DOGS</u>	37 (39%)	16 (25%)	10 (16%)
<u>CATS</u>	33 (35%)	50 (53%)	12 (13%)

Dog owners agreed more than cat owners (73% and 47% respectively) that their pet knows that they are going out before they show any physical signs of doing so. This difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.005$).

Slightly more dog than cat owners (43% and 38% respectively) agreed that their pet responds to their thoughts or silent commands, but this difference was not significant statistically.

More dog than cat owners (59% and 35% respectively) believed that their pet was telepathic with them, and this difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

6. TELEPATHIC CONNECTIONS WITH PETS IN THE PAST

Both pet owners and non-pet owners were asked about telepathy in pets they have known in the past, and the results are summarized in Table 3. 46% of current pet owners, and 36% of non-pet owners said that they had known pets in the past that they considered to be telepathic. This difference was not statistically significant.

7. THE RESPONDENTS' OWN PSYCHIC EXPERIENCE

In our survey, 39% of pet owners and 38% of people without pets said they had had psychic experiences themselves (Table 3). These figures are lower than those in a similar survey in North-West England, 54% (Sheldrake and Smart [1997]), and by other surveys in Britain: 64% (Haraldsson [1985] and 54% (Gaynard [1992])). We do not know why a relatively low proportion of the people in this survey gave positive answers.

Among non-pet owners, there was a remarkable difference between people who had kept pets in the past and those who had not: 38% of those with pets in the past claimed psychical experiences, compared with only 8% of those who had never kept pets (Table 3). This difference was highly significant statistically ($p < 0.0005$).

Table 3 Replies to Questions 8 and 9: Replies to Questions 8 and 9: Comparison of present pet owners and people with no pets now in relation to (A) telepathy with past pets and (B) the person's own psychic experience.

Numbers (and percentages) of people**A. Telepathy with past pets**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Telepathy</u>	<u>No telepathy</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
<u>PETS NOW</u>	180	82 (46%)	68 (38%)	30 (17%)
<u>NO PETS NOW</u>	207	75 (36%)	69 (33%)	63 (30%)

B. Frequency of people's own psychic experiences

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Frequently</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Never</u>
<u>PETS NOW*</u>	180	11 (6%)	59 (33%)	110 (61%)
Dog owners	63	3 (5%)	22 (35%)	38 (60%)
Cat owners	95	5 (5%)	33 (35%)	57 (60%)
<u>NO PETS NOW**</u>	207	12 (6%)	66 (32%)	129 (62%)
Pets in Past	123	7 (6%)	39 (32%)	77 (63%)
No Pets Ever	38	0	3 (8%)	35 (92%)

* "Pets now" refers to all people currently keeping pets, of whom some had neither dogs nor cats, but other animals. This is why the total of dog and cat owners comes to 158 rather than 180.

** Not all the 207 people with no pets now were asked whether they had had pets in the past; only 161 were asked this question. That is why those with "pets in past" and "no pets ever" add up to 161 not 207.

The proportion of dog and cat owners who said they had had psychic experiences was the same, 40%.

We compared the answers about their pets given by dog and cat owners who said they had themselves had psychic experiences frequently or sometimes ('psychic owners') with the answers given by owners who said they had never had psychic experiences ('non-psychic owners'). For all questions, and for both dogs and cats, psychic owners gave more positive responses than non-psychic owners (Table 4). Most of these differences were statistically significant, with the notable exception of Question 3, about pets anticipating homecomings. The most significant differences were in response to the questions about telepathy with present and past pets.

In brief, more psychic owners said their pets were psychic than non-psychic owners.

8. HOW RELIABLE ARE THESE FINDINGS?

As in other surveys based on questionnaires or interviews, the answers may have been subject to a variety of biases. Here are three possibilities:

1. The way the questions were asked may have encouraged respondents to give positive answers in an attempt to please the interviewer. Conversely, people may have been reluctant to give positive answers about their pets and about themselves when they were talking on the telephone to a stranger. Nevertheless, these possible sources of bias cannot account for the striking differences in answers about dogs and cats.

2. People who are very fond of their pets may have exaggerated their animals' powers, or been victims of wishful thinking. Conversely, people who pay little attention to their animals may not have noticed their perceptiveness. And animals may respond less to people who show scant interest in them. But again, these possible biases cannot explain why the reports about the behaviour of dogs and cats were so different.

3. People who believe in psychic phenomena may be more likely to say their pet is psychic. Conversely, people who disbelieve in psychic phenomena may be less inclined to notice seemingly psychic responses in their pets. This possibility is supported by our finding that 'psychic' owners generally gave more positive responses to questions about their pets than 'non-psychic' owners, and most of these differences were significant statistically (Table 4). Nevertheless, the general pattern of responses by both groups was the same. More dogs than cats were said to know when their owners were about to return, about to leave, and to be telepathic. And even among 'non-psychic' owners, 45% of dogs and 23% of cats were said to know when their owners were about to return; 39% and 28% respectively were said to respond to thoughts and silent commands, and 42% and 25% were said to be telepathic with their owners.

Table 4. Comparison of the responses of psychic and non-psychic pet owners to questions 3,5,6,7 and 8 about their dogs or cats.

Numbers (and percentages) of people giving positive responses, and the statistical significance of differences between psychic and non-psychic owners.

A. DOGS

	Psychic	Non-psychic	Significance (p)
Totals	25	38	
Know when arriving	16 (64%)	17 (45%)	NS
Know when leaving	22 (88%)	24 (63%)	<0.05
Silent commands	12 (48%)	15 (39%)	NS
Telepathy	21 (84%)	16 (42%)	<0.001
Telepathy: past pets	18 (72%)	11 (29%)	<0.001

B. CATS

	Psychic	Non-psychic	Significance(p)
Totals	38	57	

Know when arriving	9 (24%)	13 (23%)	NS
Know when leaving	23 (61%)	22 (39%)	<0.05
Silent commands	20 (53%)	16 (28%)	<0.02
Telepathy	19 (50%)	14 (25%)	<0.02
Telepathy: past pets	20 (53%)	18 (32%)	<0.05

Nevertheless, in spite of such possible sources of bias, the general pattern of results was quite consistent, and leads to two main conclusions. First, perceptive pets are common. And second, more dogs than cats are responsive to their owners' intentions and anticipate their comings and goings.

How repeatable are these findings? Fortunately, we can answer this question by comparing the results of this survey in London with previous surveys carried out in very different physical, social and cultural environments, and conducted by different interviewers.

9. COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS SURVEYS

This survey in London complements two similar surveys in Ramsbottom (Sheldrake and Smart [1997]), a town in Greater Manchester, England and in Santa Cruz (Brown and Sheldrake [1998]), a university and beach town in California, USA. In most respects, the surveys are in remarkable agreement. Summaries of all three are shown in Tables 5 and 6. These are their principal features:

1. Many owners said they had noticed perceptive behaviour in their dogs and cats about their impending returns and departures (Table 4). Between 45% and 52% of dog owners and between 14% and 31% of cat owners said their animal anticipated the arrival of a member of the household.
2. Between 42% and 59% of dog owners and between 25% and 35% of cat owners said that their pet was sometimes telepathic with them (Table 4).
3. These claims about perceptive behaviour nearly all concerned dogs and cats. No hamsters, goldfish, gerbils, stick insects, tortoises or chickens were said to show any of these kinds of responses. Taking all three surveys together, four birds out of a total of 30 were said to anticipate their owners' arrivals (a parrot, a parakeet, a cockatoo and a cockatiel), one rabbit out of 32, and a ferret.
4. At all locations, dogs were said to be more responsive than cats to their owners' impending returns (dogs, 45-52%; cats, 14-31%) and departures (dogs, 65-73%; cats, 32-47%). In most cases the differences between dogs and cats were very significant statistically. But cats may not be less sensitive than dogs; they may merely take less interest in their owners' comings and goings, owing to their more independent nature (Hart [1995]).
5. In relation to thoughts, silent commands and telepathy with their owners, once again at all locations dogs appeared to be more responsive than cats.
6. About half the people who currently own pets in all three locations said they had known telepathic pets in the past (Table 6). Among people who do not currently own pets, the proportion who said they had known telepathic pets in the past ranged from 31% in Santa Cruz to 55% in Ramsbottom.
7. At all three locations, significantly more 'psychic' pet owners said that their pets showed perceptive behaviour than 'non-psychic' pet owners. Nevertheless, the general pattern of response from non-psychic pet owners was similar to that of psychic pet owners; but the percentages were lower (the London data are in Table 4).

Table 5 Comparison of surveys in London, Ramsbottom and Santa Cruz
Percentage of positive answers to Question

	1 households with pets	3 know when returning	4 >10 mins before	5 know when going out	6 silent commands	7 telepathy
DOGS						
London	16	52	21	73	43	59
Ramsbottom	31	46	16	69	53	54

Santa Cruz	35	45	19	65	46	42
CATS						
London	25	23	19	47	38	35
Ramsbottom	24	14	23	32	23	25
Santa Cruz	42	31	22	37	41	34

Table 6 Comparison of pet owners and people without pets in London, Ramsbottom and Santa Cruz

Percentage of positive answers to questions:

	8 Past pets telepathic	9 Own psychic experience
PETS NOW		
London	46	39
Ramsbottom	53	54
Santa Cruz	49	64
NO PETS NOW		
London	36	38
Ramsbottom	55	-*
Santa Cruz	31	40

*non-pet owners were not asked this question in the Ramsbottom survey.

10. THE NEED FOR EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS

The results of these surveys do not necessarily imply the existence of a 'sixth sense' or telepathy in animals. But they certainly show that many pet owners say that their animals are telepathic.

Some of the seemingly mysterious phenomena discussed in this paper may ultimately be explicable in terms of the impressive sensory range of cats and dogs, combined with subtle cues of which their owners are unaware. However, some may be due to influences at present unknown to science. Experimental investigations are needed to tease apart these possibilities.

In the case of a dog that appears to anticipate his owner's arrival, experiments have already shown that this response does not seem explicable in terms of routine, the sounds of familiar vehicles or other auditory cues, or knowledge by the people at home when the owner will return (Sheldrake and Smart [1998]). An influence currently unknown to science may indeed be at work. These investigations are continuing.

There has so far been almost no scientific research on the seeming ability of some dogs and cats to pick up their owners' thoughts and intentions. This subject has been ignored by biologists and by parapsychologists alike. No doubt some of the animals' perceptiveness can be explained in terms of gross or subtle cues, including people's unconscious body language. But can it all be explained like this? The only way to find out is to separate the pet and owner, so that communication by sight, smell and hearing can be ruled out. Can the animal still respond to the owner's intentions, even at non-routine times? No one knows. This is a virgin field of research.

11. IMPLICATIONS FOR BIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

If some pets do turn out to have unexplained powers, there would be several far-reaching implications. First, the boundaries of scientific explanation would have to be widened, for example by hypothesizing a new kind of field connecting pets and owners, or another kind of interaction at present unknown to physics, or by extending the idea of non-locality and non-separability already present in quantum physics (Sheldrake [1994]; Sermoniti [1996] and Sheldrake [1996]). An extensive discussion of these possibilities has recently been published in German (Dürr and Gottwald [1997]).

Second, if present in pets, similar forms of perceptiveness may play an important role in communication between animals in the wild, and on farms.

Third, if animals have a 'sixth sense' or telepathic powers, then the evidence for such phenomena in human beings (e.g. Radin [1997]) would take on a new significance. These phenomena would no longer be seen as peculiarly human, but as rooted in our biological heritage. They may be widespread and better-developed in many species of animals than they are in people. And perhaps civilized people have lost them more than most.

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[Top of Page](#)

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