

Some facts about human's best friend

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As a person who grew up with dogs, I have loved some of my quadruped family members with so much of my heart that I grieved deeply when they invariably passed on. Due to these bonds, it's no surprise that I've always been fascinated by everything about them. However, I'm not going to share common or sentimental facts that every dog lover probably already knows. I'm going to share some that I think are more scientific and less well-known (and okay, perhaps less interesting).

- 1 The dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*) is widely believed to be the first species of animal to be domesticated by humans for commensal purposes. Though the exact time period of the initial occurrence of domestication is not known, DNA analysis of a canid skull found in Siberia suggests taming of the species may have been well in effect as far back as 33 000 years ago. We know for sure that dogs and humans were laid to rest together in Germany about 14 000 years ago.
2. The prevailing theory surrounding the domestication of the wolves from which Fluffy sprang goes something like this: it probably happened by accident. Wolves likely began trailing our hunter-gatherer ancestors so as to snack on their discarded protein waste. After a while, the more docile (or amicable if you will) of the wolves were probably slipped extra scraps of meat/skin/bones when there was an abundance. These wolves produced offspring that learned from their parents how to best get humans to feed them, and so on. Genetic mutations over time led to the formation of gut enzymes that made these canids better able to digest starches. This, in turn, led to a greater affinity between them and humans. Eventually, the bonds of reliance and companionship were entrenched in both species to the point where their relationship grew into what it is today.
3. As a result of our long-standing relationship with dogs, they are now the most abundant terrestrial carnivores in the world. (Yes, even though they can eat and digest starches, they are still carnivores, just as even vegetarian and vegan humans are still omnivores – evolution is a slow process.)
4. The dog and the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) are sister taxa (sprouting from the same evolutionary tree branch and able to interbreed), but modern wolves are not closely related to the wolves that were first domesticated by our ancestors. This implies that the direct ancestor of our beloved pooches is no longer extant.
5. It is possible for puppies from a single litter to have multiple sires. This is because female dogs release multiple eggs during the ovulation cycle, and if matings occur in quick enough succession, just about every stud has a shot at becoming a daddy.
6. According to Guinness World Records, the biggest recorded litter of puppies is 24. Tia, a Neapolitan Mastiff in the UK, brought her litter into the world on the 29th of November 2004. They were delivered via Caesarean section to ensure that they could all have a good chance at life. Sadly, one was stillborn and three were too weak to live past the first week. On a lighter note: Caesar is the name of the pups' sire.
7. The oldest dog 'on verified record' was Bluey (7 June 1910 – 14 November 1939), an Australian Cattle Dog who lived and worked on an Australian cattle and sheep farm. He made it to the ripe old age of 29 years and 5 months.
8. The most intelligent breed of dog is not easy to define or agree on, but most experts concur that the title should probably go to the Border Collie. The reasons are as follows: they excel at herding (mainly sheep, though kids and cats are not out of the question); they easily learn voice commands and know more words than the average dog; and they are equally skilled at following whistle and hand commands. One caveat: due to their high intelligence and extraordinary energy levels they require early training and daily exercise.

9. The least intelligent dog breed is generally believed to be the Basset Hound. This is because they are difficult to train and seem to have a proclivity for eating stones large enough to cause life-threatening bowel obstructions (not the smartest idea). That said, they are also considered one of the gentlest and most affectionate breeds out there.
10. Just about every dog lover knows this one on some level, but it's worth mentioning as it has been scientifically verified on a number of occasions. Simply petting or gazing into the eyes of a dog you love and trust can help lower your blood pressure and heart rate if you are anxious. Researchers have shown that when humans and dogs interact, oxytocin (the hormone that helps facilitate bonding, trust and love) levels increase in both species. This increase helps lower excessive cortisol (stress hormone) levels.
11. The reason dogs generally curl up when they sleep is not merely to keep warm or look cute, it's an instinctive behaviour that many mammals have evolved to protect vital organs from attack while they are resting.
12. The reason dogs have wet noses is because it helps their olfactory system absorb scent chemicals. What's more, they have up to 300 million olfactory receptors in their noses. Humans have only about 6 million.
13. Though the results are still regarded as preliminary, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests dogs can be trained to detect a number of specific medically relevant changes in the human body. These changes include seizures, low blood sugar in diabetics, urinary tract infections, and here's the big one: bladder, colon, breast and skin cancer. What's more, dogs might, in fact, prove to be more accurate and reliable than current conventional tests.
14. If you have to leave your beloved pup/s alone for a few hours, it might be a good idea to leave them with an item of clothing that holds your scent. Being able to smell your aroma when you cannot be with them in person can help comfort them, thus relieving some of their separation anxiety.
15. Here's a fun one: researchers have found that dogs seem to align their bowel and bladder movements to Earth's magnetic field (north-south axis). This statement is based on empirical data gathered by German and Czech scientists who monitored 70 dogs from 37 breeds over a two-year period. The exact reasons for this seemingly instinctual preference are not yet definitively known, but research is ongoing.
16. Sticking to the topic: almost all service dogs are trained to relieve their bladders and bowels on command. The reasons are practical enough not to need explanation.
17. Lastly, experts say dogs are, on average, as smart as the average two-year old human child. (I'm not going to argue with the experts, but I am going to say that in my experience, dogs are so much smarter than we give them credit for when we take into account the seemingly inborn emotional intelligence they possess.)

Any way you look at it, dogs are indeed our best friends.