

Empowering Pets to Heal Themselves Through Self-Medication

Zoopharmacognosy is the study of how animals self-medicate in the wild, and now you can learn to bring this natural healing power to your own pet.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Caroline Ingraham is the founder of Applied Zoopharmacognosy. Zoopharmacognosy is the study of how animals self-medicate in the wild
- In Applied Zoopharmacognosy, Caroline and other practitioners bring remedies to animals that don't live in the wild, providing them with a wide range to choose from to bring themselves back into health
- Caroline provides multiple examples of dogs she has helped heal through self-medication, and offers insights into why a particular animal might select a particular remedy
- Empowering animals to self-medicate often results in a swift and complete cure
- Caroline's latest book will be a step-by-step guide to communicating with dogs through aromatics, which is their language, helping to bring them back into physical or mental health

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Today I'm very excited to be talking with Caroline Ingraham. Caroline is the founder of Applied Zoopharmacognosy and has spent three decades researching and observing how animals heal themselves.

Caroline has experience with both wild and domesticated animals, and her work has been featured in many scientific journals as well as magazine articles. She's the author of several books, has appeared on television in the U.K., and has also been a featured guest at the Hay Literary Festival.

Zoopharmacognosy is the study of how animals self-medicate in the wild. The word comes from the Greek word "zoo" (which means animal), "pharma" (pharmacy), and "cognosy" (which means "knowing"). Zoopharmacognosy refers to the innate ability animals have to self-medicate.

"What I do, though, is Applied Zoopharmacognosy," says Caroline, "which is where we bring remedies to the animals, such as plant extracts, clay, algae, and Dead Sea mineral mud — plant extracts and plants they've evolved with in their evolutionary history. If the problem is physical or behavioral, then they have a wide range of remedies to select from to bring themselves back into health."

Horses Are Amazing Teachers

Caroline was introduced to the field when she began studying essential oils for humans. She was suffering with cystitis, and her father had diverticulitis, and essential oils cleared both conditions.

Then when she adopted a colicky dog from the Battersea Dogs Home, she was able to use essential oils effectively on her pet, as well.

"But it wasn't really until I moved to California that the learning really began," explains Caroline. "That was with horses. They were the most amazing teachers. They were very clear with what they wanted."

If horses were wounded, they would select yarrow. If they had allergies, very often they would select German chamomile. For separation anxiety or if they lost a member of the herd, they would select neroli."

At this point, Caroline was absolutely fascinated and as she puts it, "a passion began to evolve." She explains the next step in her evolution:

"My dog was bitten by a rattlesnake, and I rushed him to the vet. There was nothing they could really do for him, because he hadn't responded to the drip. He was sent home the next day really to die. He wasn't conscious enough to do the self-selection process with."

Rattlesnake venom causes death from internal bleeding. Caroline's dog was bleeding from the nose, so "I took the information from the horses," she says, and selected carrot seed essential oil to treat internal bleeding.

"I put it in a capsule," she explains, "with a little bit of fatty oil, because I didn't want to irritate the mucus membrane. Basically, I put it in a non-gelatin capsule. He managed to swallow it, and the dripping blood immediately subsided. It went from fast drip to slow drip."

This continued through the night at four-hour intervals, with me giving more capsules. The following day, he was pretty much back to health with just traces of blood around the kitchen floor."

Caroline began to do deeper research into how animals behave in the wild. What remedies do they select to bring themselves back into health? She began to apply her knowledge to dogs, and was absolutely fascinated by the results.

Stone-Eating Dog Is Cured in a Single Afternoon

Over the last 30 years, Caroline has helped people give their companion animals the option to self-medicate. She has learned that people tend to proceed gradually in learning to trust their pets to self-medicate.

"If the dog didn't have the ability to self-medicate," explains Caroline, "it would never have survived its evolutionary history. With that innate ability, it would take generations before it became extinct. I've never seen a dog not be able to self-medicate. The dogs that eat socks, the dogs that eat stones, I love working with them, because it's fascinating to see what they select."

Caroline offers an example:

"I had a dog come into my classroom. He eats pens, toys, notes, and stones, so much so that he's had operations to have stones removed from his stomach. He came to the classroom. He was desperate for spirulina, barley grass, rose hip powder, and licorice root.

He took a lot of these powders and afterwards just plunked down onto the floor in a deep sleep. Previously, he was really anxious. This is a dog that has quite an intense behavior. He never relaxes. He barks all the time in the car. After these remedies, there he was on the floor, fast asleep."

Later that evening, the dog got up and was quite playful, but showed no interest in eating stones. That was about six months ago, according to Caroline, and the dog continues to display no further interest in eating stones.

"His owner now offers him remedies such as barley grass and spirulina," says Caroline. "Obviously, something's going on with his stomach. There was some nutrient that he needed.

There was another dog I worked with, this one ate socks, who walked into my room with the remedies," says Caroline. "They said, 'I think he's just going to eat you out of house and home.' This dog only selected German chamomile and hadn't selected anything else, not even coconut oil. German chamomile helps protect the lining of the stomach.

One may ask the question, is that individual eating anything and everything because he needs to alleviate stomach discomfort?" Caroline continues. "I do notice that the 'eat-all animals' mainly select stomach remedies, or nutrients. What I also find really fascinating is dogs that can't tolerate raw food seem to select a lot of antibacterial and stomach oils together, which is really fascinating."

Ben Indicates Where He Wants an Oil Applied

Caroline says her work with Applied Zoopharmacognosy can give clues as to what's going on with a dog's behavior. She divides behaviors into two categories, the first of which is behavior born out of a hidden physical problem. "The dog might become insecure," according to Caroline. "He might become irritable."

An example she cites is a dog named Dylan. "Dylan hid in a cupboard a lot of the time, more or less for 10 years," Caroline explains. "He didn't really like to go out for a walk, and urinated inside the house so much so that his guardian couldn't put any floorboards down. The bedding was always drenched. It wasn't **incontinence**; it was Dylan cocking his leg and urinating in the house."

Dylan's guardian brought him to Caroline, concerned that the dog would either bite her or spend his time under a chair. Dylan selected three main remedies: one was ginger for his stomach; one was thyme, an antibacterial; and the third was German chamomile.

"German chamomile, he wanted it applied on his stomach," says Caroline. "This was the first time in nine years that anybody had been able to touch his stomach. He was soothed by the touch. German chamomile is a world-renowned anti-inflammatory and helps protect the lining of the stomach.

Ginger, he spent a lot of time with ginger and also thyme essential oil. This was in January this year, and three months later Dylan still hadn't urinated in the house. He goes out for walks. He's a completely different dog.

The problem was he obviously felt vulnerable. Urinating outside brought a message for all the dogs in the area that would tell them his condition — not only who he is, what he eats, but also his health. Not many dogs want other dogs knowing that they're weak. Hence, he would urinate inside the house."

Hidden Problems Create Behavior Disturbances

"I also found that dogs who are yanked on their leash may have pain in their neck," explains Caroline, "since after they select pain relieving remedies such as wintergreen, behaviors as diverse as separation anxiety, irritability and nervousness are resolved or greatly reduced."

"If an individual is in some kind of pain or discomfort, they're going to feel more vulnerable, so they may be clingier and need 'mum,' or they may be more irritable. They're not usually going to walk into the world with confidence.

There are so many hidden problems that wouldn't be obvious to anybody unless you ask the dog. One way you could ask the dog is with our common language of aromatics. They will tell you exactly what they need and where they want it applied by their body language. It's absolutely amazing.

Dogs who are afraid of fireworks often have a physical discomfort associated with it. When the often 'hidden' problem is treated, it's almost like you just turn the noise volume down. When individuals are in discomfort, everything is louder."

Treating Trauma-Induced Behavior Disturbances

"Then you've got the other side of behavior where something's actually happened to a dog. Perhaps it's a man, perhaps the dog has been beaten. In this case, I work with calming remedies to calm the dog's mind. They would choose which one is the most soothing to them.

Some of the remedies will work specifically on increasing gaba, which helps inhibit glutamate (excitatory neurons). Others work with glutamate directly. Other remedies will work with adrenaline. The effects of these remedies have been scientifically researched, studied, and documented.

Remedies are selected to match the individual. A little bit like certain painkillers match certain individuals more than others. With these you bring the dog into a really calm state before you introduce the trigger. In this case, if it's a man, you spray calming aromatic waters. Then apply some linden blossom, which is often selected for trust, to the man's hands, as well as perhaps valerian, a well-known calmer, and maybe some hops.

What happens is the man, the trigger, walks into the room slowly. At this point, the dog will become a little bit more alert. When he becomes alert, you then offer the dog selected oils, and that calms him. Now, he's actually looking at the trigger, feeling pretty relaxed and pretty calm.

You're changing his perception of the man. He's actually no longer a threat. He's something nice, because the dog is feeling good while he's looking at him at a deeply subconscious level.

You never leave it to the point that a dog goes above that threshold," Caroline explains. "You just catch them as they look anxious by putting the aromatics under the nose of the dog. You keep it there. You keep the oils there until the focus is broken and the dog looks away.

The man will then come a little bit closer, looking, say, in the opposite direction and maybe sit on a chair. When the dog becomes alert again, you do the same thing. Then it gets to the point where you hand the oils to the man. The man is now the healer. The man gets closer and the dog takes aromatics from the man.

I have worked with such dogs at Bath Cats and Dogs Home. The quickest one was within a couple of hours. That was a dog that would attack every in sight if he could. He had been there for six months. He was put in the home because he couldn't cope with men.

Another dog quite similar within 12 hours. It began in the afternoon and followed through the following day. He was rehomed to a family with a boy in the family that he became very close to. It's amazing what can be achieved."

Working with Primates

Caroline works with self-harming primates in the same way. "With primates, we can achieve that within an hour," she says. "With primates that have been in solitary confinement for six years. If they saw a human or another primate, they would self-mutilate. Within an hour, the female was presenting herself to the male. They could have cameras in front of them."

"It's great to be working with smell as a language, but what was so interesting was that the primates responded in a more similar way to other animals than human primates, homo sapiens. Why was this? I thought about my years in California with my children and working with the oils there. It was very successful with babies and children up to around 5 years of age.

Perhaps it's because babies and primates share a similar apparatus for smell, the vomeronasal organ. This declines as language takes over communication. Primates and young homo sapiens seem to have the same powerful response to the aromatics."

Empowering Animals to Heal Themselves

Caroline's examples cause me to stand in awe of the plant kingdom and its ability to provide endless resources that we can give our animals access to. Her work in allowing animals to self-medicate stands the traditional medical approach on its head, the approach that says: "I will prescribe for you," or "I will pick the herb for the patient."

What Applied Zoopharmacognosy does is empower the animal, knowing that she knows her body best, to make wise decisions for her own body. Animals know exactly what they need — we're just giving them the opportunity to fulfill their own needs. I attended one of Caroline's lectures recently, and she had many video examples of "hopeless" cases

— animals for which every possible healing protocol had been tried without success.

Once those animals were allowed to pick what they needed, there was often a swift and complete cure, and the animals were brought back to a state of balance. It's incredibly inspiring! If you'd like to learn more about Applied Zoopharmacognosy, you can visit Caroline's website at www.carolineingraham.com.

On the Horizon: A Step-By-Step Guide to Communicating with Your Dog

Caroline has a new book coming out shortly, and I asked her to talk a little about it.

"It's a step-by-step guide to communicating with your dog through aromatics," she explains, "through smell, through their language, their common language as to what do they need to help themselves by bringing them back into physical or mental health.

Is there a problem that they're unaware of? Do they need more nutrients, and if they do, how much and which? It's absolutely amazing when you get this communication with your dog.

*I'm also going to explain why a dog might poison himself, because that's probably one of the first questions. Most people would say if self-medication is so great, accurate, how come dogs poison themselves with anti-freeze or chocolate or **grapes**? It can be explained, actually.*

Anti-freeze, rat poison, chemicals are substances that they have not encountered with in their evolutionary history, so are not able to recognize them. Very often they're masked with sweeteners, so the animals will treat them as food. Chocolate is from the cocoa plant. Tropical plants also have not been in dogs in recent history, so again they can't detect or identify these plants, because their ancestors have never come across them.

But all the remedies that we work with have evolved with the dog. They will be able to identify the chemicals in all our essential oils. Grapes, I had a lot of difficulty understanding why a dog would poison himself with grapes, because dogs have evolved with them. I researched further, and I found the first grape poisoning wasn't until 1999. What happened in 1999?

Then I noticed that meerkats would get certain grapes and would roll them in clay. The other grapes were fine; they would eat them straight off. Parrots would peel the skin off some of the grapes. Perhaps a relatively new strain of fungus on the grape's skin is causing problems with some dogs. That's all explained in the book.

Both ways of working with behavior — whether it stemmed from a physical problem or a traumatic event in the past — will also be covered."

Caroline's book will be a great tool for any pet parent whose dog or cat has an unexplained repetitive behavior that is concerning to them. And for those of you with questions your veterinarian or animal behaviorist can't answer, the field of Applied Zoopharmacognosy may inspire you. Thanks very much to Caroline Ingraham for talking with me today about her exciting, enlightening work!