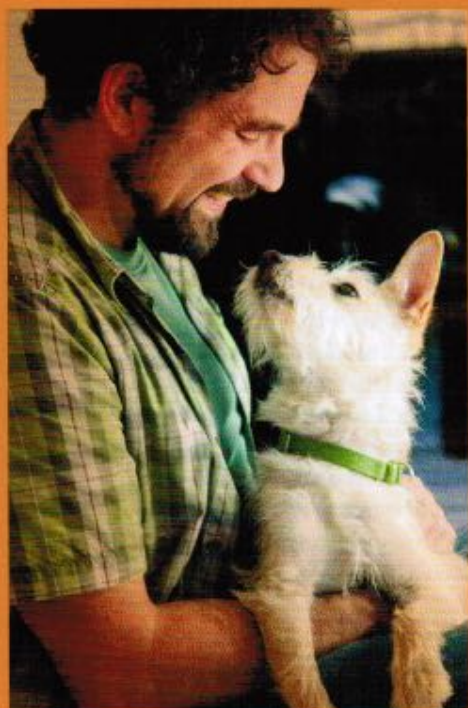


their appreciation for you.” Cristin says. “My Siamese cat Bear goes ‘hunting’ for us every night and comes back later to present us with one of his toys as a gift.”

Another way cats express the connection they feel for you is by doing what’s known as the “slow blink.” When your kitty slowly closes his eyes while looking at you, it shows he’s content, and it’s a gesture your cat may appreciate you doing in return. In fact, Lynn says she makes it a point to give the slow blink to every cat she meets. (While the people around you might find it curious, you can always explain what you’re doing.)

However, it’s not only the felines with whom we have ongoing relationships who express their gratitude, love and sense of connection. As anyone who works or volunteers in animal welfare can attest, even newly rescued cats have been known to express their own version of non-verbal fondness. When Cristin, who volunteers with Best Friends Animal Society and Kitten Rescue in Los Angeles, picked up a terrified kitten stranded along Interstate 405, she brought him straight to the shelter for a medical assessment. And it didn’t take that kitten long to make his appreciation known. “As soon as he came out of the carrier, he jumped in my lap and curled up,” Cristin says. “He was obviously thankful to be out of harm’s way and safe in someone’s lap.”

As for Sampson the mastiff, he still hasn’t gotten the memo that he’s not exactly a lap dog. Luckily, though, his family appreciates his snuggles and understands that his desire to stay close is simply his way of giving a great big non-verbal “I love you.” 🐾



GAUGING PETS' EMOTIONAL TEMPERATURE

BY KAREN ASP

Few people these days question whether animals feel emotions. Scientific studies aside, personal experience with animals is enough for most people to be convinced. Emotions are difficult to measure in people, let alone pets, but when it comes to love, scientists are getting closer to an understanding. “Animals can show love, but we have to be careful because love is a simple word with many different meanings,” says Gregory Berns, Ph.D., M.D., a neuroscientist at Emory University and author of *What It's Like to Be a Dog*.

To get a better understanding of whether dogs show love, Gregory put trained dogs through MRIs to examine specific pathways in their brains when they experience things humans like. The focus was on comparing the responses to food versus the responses to social

rewards like praise. Of the 15 dogs in the study, 13 showed responses to praise in the brain’s reward system that were equal or greater than their responses to food. “As a result, we can say with certainty that dogs value the social bond with people as much as the food — which I would define as love from a dog,” Gregory says, adding that it’s possible the same might apply to cats.

Nobody, of course, will ever be able to read the mind of a cat or dog, which is why examining behavior is our best bet. “Animals seem to be very much interested in pleasing and rewarding you if you do something nice, which could be seen as gratitude in a way,” says Alan Beck, Sc.D., director of the Center for the Human-Animal Bond at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana.

Because emotions are complicated, science still has a lot to unravel about what pets feel. But when it comes to love and gratitude, the proof may really be in the pudding — or in the petting or purring.