

The Dog in Wolf's Clothing?

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Conjecture on the origins of the domestic dog is something of a cottage industry that employs a diverse set of data and interpretation to divine the past history of “man’s best friend” (Coppinger & Coppinger, 2001; Parker, et. al., 2004; Serpell, 1995). Just about all the extant theories place some sort of wolf-like ancestor in the pedigree. Similarities in morphology and genetics certainly would seem to bear out this relationship.

The presumed evolutionary conservation of social behavior has had a pervasive impact on our understanding and interpretation of dog behavior. This can be seen in a variety of materials and methods developed for dealing with canine behavior problems by veterinary behaviorists (Beaver, 1999); applied animal behaviorists (Hetts, 1999); and dog trainers (Dibra, 1999). The commentary that follows (van Kerkhove, 2004/this issue) raises some interesting questions regarding the application of the wolf dominance–hierarchy model when addressing problems with interdog aggression. We have asked three well-respected practitioners, representing the spectrum of those working in applied companion animal behavior, to read van Kerkhove’s commentary and share their thoughts about this topic.

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