

Unconditional Animal Friends

Miriam Leatherman, WVU Extension Agent, Hardy County

Jean Woloshuk, Ed. D., WVU Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Agriculture

Shanna Nicodemus, WVU Extension Agent, Jefferson County

Companion animals have a special relationship with humans . . .

Have you ever had a pet? Do you remember your first pet's name? How did that pet make you feel? Have you ever had an unexplainable bond with an animal?

Companion Animals

Throughout history, animals have played an important role in the lives of individuals and families. Many have provided food, fiber, security, and transportation for humans. In our increasingly urban society, however, the role of the animal has changed considerably – to being a companion.

Companion animals, also called pets, include dogs, cats, cage and aviary birds, “pocket pets”, and sometimes large animals such as horses, goats, sheep, swine, and cattle. “Pocket pets” is a term describing small animals such as hamsters, gerbils, rats, mice, guinea pigs, and rabbits.

Companion animals are those species that have a special relationship with humans, are partially or totally dependent on them, live in proximity with people, and go a step further than exotic pets in bonding with their owners. The term “companion animals” has come to mean those animals that have a special association with their owners. There is a mutual or reciprocal action between animal and owner.



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Differences among Animals

- Service animals are legally defined such as guide dogs, signal dogs, or any other type of animal that has been individually trained to perform a task to benefit a disabled individual. While dogs may be the best known service animal, many other types of animals are trained to assist people. Service animals are not considered “pets.”
- Companion animals are not legally defined and are not individually trained to perform any specific task. Instead, their principal service is providing companionship.
- Therapy animals are not legally defined by federal law, but some states have laws defining them. They are not limited to working with people who have disabilities. “Social/therapy” animals likewise have no legal definition. They are often animals that did not complete service training because of health, disposition, trainability, or other factors. They are made available as pets for people who have disabilities. These animals may or may not meet the definition of service animals.

Pet Therapy in Your Hometown

- Intermountain Therapy Animals (ITA): This nonprofit organization brings animal resources to human needs. An affiliate of the Delta Society, ITA provides animal-assisted therapy in the areas of physical, occupational, speech, and psychotherapies, as well as special education. Its mission is “enhancing quality of life through the human-animal bond,” and its motto is “Pets Helping People.”

How to Volunteer

To volunteer with the ITA, you may make a monetary donation, become a member, or become a Pet Partner. To learn more about ITA or to discover further volunteer opportunities, please contact the organization.

Mailing Address:

Intermountain Therapy Animals
P.O. Box 17201
Salt Lake City, Utah 84117
801-272-3439

Delta Society: Are you interested in becoming a Pet Partner? If you meet the following prerequisites, please contact your county’s WVU Extension Service office for further details.

Prerequisites for Humans: The person handling the animal must be at least 10 years old. Handlers younger than 16 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian and must have written permission from a parent or guardian to participate.

Prerequisites for the Animals: All animals except birds must have lived in the owner’s home for at least six months. Birds must have lived in the owner’s home for at least one year. All animals except “pocket pets” must be at least 1 year old at the time they are evaluated. “Pocket pets” (e.g., guinea pigs, rabbits, rats, etc.) must be at least 6 months old at the time of evaluation. Dogs trained to aggressively protect and/or encouraged to actively bite people may not be Pet Partners. Only domesticated animals may become Pet Partners.

Contact your county’s WVU Extension office, animal adoption centers, or a veterinarian for more suggestions about volunteer activities.

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