

Dog factfile

It is generally accepted that the common ancestor of the domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*) is the wolf [1,2].

Domestication of the dog began around 15,000 years ago and during this process, humans selected for particularly desirable traits such as coat colour and leg length [3].

This selection process has resulted in over 400 different breeds of dog [4]; 209 are recognised by the UK Kennel Club [5].

Looking at the world from a dog's point of view can help you to understand your pet better, so check out our top ten dog facts!

1. Dogs have highly developed senses

- Dogs have an incredibly well-developed sense of smell, far superior to humans [6].
- At certain frequencies, dogs can detect sounds up to four times quieter than humans can hear [7]. Dogs can also hear in ultrasound, which is sound with a frequency greater than the upper limit of human hearing [8].
- Dogs can see better than humans in dark and dim light [9].

2. Dogs are diverse

- Dogs are extremely diverse in both size and shape [10]. For example, there is over a 110-fold difference in weight between the Chihuahua (1kg) and the St Bernard (115kg) [11].

3. Dogs use a range of methods to communicate

- Communication is very important in helping dogs form and maintain social groups [12].
- To transmit scent information, dogs use urine, faeces and secretions from special scent glands [13].
- Dogs produce a range of sounds, often in complex combinations, including whines, whimpers, growls, barks and howls [14].

- Many dogs can use their body, face, tail, ears and limbs to communicate with other dogs [15].

4. Dogs are athletic

- The fastest recorded speed for a greyhound is 42 miles per hour, similar to that of a mounted racehorse, which can reach speeds of around 43 miles per hour [16]!

5. Dogs are naturally inquisitive

- Dogs actively seek information about their surroundings and will spend much time investigating and exploring [17].
- Feral dogs will naturally roam for great distances in search of food [18].

6. Dogs are omnivores

- Dogs eat both meat and plant food, so are called omnivores [19].
- Dogs' teeth are adapted to this diet. Whilst dogs do have teeth designed for tearing meat, compared to other carnivores dogs have more molars, which are used for crushing and grinding plant food [20].

7. Dogs are highly social

- Many dogs enjoy the company of other dogs, but they will also form strong social bonds to humans, becoming very attached to particular individuals [21].

8. Dogs are intelligent

- Dogs can learn the names of their toys. For example Rico, a border collie, has learnt the names of 200 toys and can reliably fetch the correct toy when asked to. Rico's word learning ability is better than that of a chimpanzee [22]!

9. Dogs are playful

- Dogs use special signals to show they want to play. When inviting others to play, a dog crouches on its forelimbs, remains standing on its hindlimbs and

may wag its tail or bark. This behaviour is called the 'play bow' [23].

10. Dogs really are man's best friend

- In addition to companionship, some dogs help their owners in really special ways. Assistance dogs can help blind, deaf and disabled people, whilst some dogs can even help alert owners before an epileptic fit starts [24].
- Dogs can be trained to detect drugs, explosives, termites, and even some diseases such as cancer and diabetes [25].