

## **Deaf Dogs**

Animals learn using all their senses and by combining all the clues, consequences and feedback they receive from their environment they are able to learn effectively.

Signals can be either through visual, scent or audible means and we give these to our dogs everyday of their lives, and sometimes without us even knowing about it. Dogs can detect some of the most imperceptible changes in our behaviour and interpret these changes dependant upon their consequence to the dog. It is only when you become aware that a dog has a particular sensory loss, which you begin to wonder how you might be able to communicate effectively to your pet. Consequently deaf animals learn to adapt and refine their remaining senses to their advantage. Deafness can occur in dogs for a variety of reasons. Congenital deafness has been associated to certain breeds and colour types, with other breeds being highlighted as prone to the disability.

However, the adaptability of dogs is quite remarkable and it is only the training of the owner that is required in order for the dog to leave a happy, contented and normal life. Owners require practice at utilising their own dexterity and imagination to overcome the obstacles of training. A dog's eyes are built and designed to detect movement rather than detail and colour. Therefore signals need to be exaggerated, definite and consistent when considering training. Clear practiced visual arm and hand signals can be given as instructions to dogs with the aid of white gloves assisting with clarity. The safety of the dog should always be paramount and the dog should first be trained the commands in a safe and secure environment, possibly the garden. As the training progresses the various stages can be developed to outside situations where there are likely to be more scent distractions. The use of food rewards is a good motivator, utilizing the dog's very sensitive nose to keep his attention. Various vibrating training collars are available for deaf pets that can be use to get the dog's attention and used to teach recall. Remember that deaf animals cannot hear approaching threats including other animals, people and traffic and the element of surprise behaviour is greatly exaggerated. Always supervise a deaf animal closely whilst outdoors.