

## *Animal Helpers*

Cadette *MEdia* badge

Animals have always provided humans with food, clothing, and transportation, but today they're also trained to help people with disabilities, find people who are lost, and even discover tumors. And, of course, animals offer us companionship, love, and sheer joy. In this badge, look at how animals help humans. (Researchers say the love of an animal can improve our emotional health!)

### *Steps*

1. Explore the connection between humans and animals
2. Find out how animals help keep people safe
3. Know how animals help people emotionally
4. Check out how animals help people with disabilities
5. Look at how animals might help us in the future

### *Purpose*

When I've earned this badge, I'll know how animals help humans, and how to keep help them keep it up.

*"Chimpanzees have given me so much. The long hours spent with them in the forest have enriched my life beyond measure. What I have learned from them has shaped my understanding of human behavior, of our place in nature."*

*-Jane Goodall, anthropologist and primatologist*

## TIPS BEFORE TAKEOFF

Check out these organizations for experts, information, and tours to help you earn this badge:

- Organizations that train assistance animals
- Animal shelters
- Veterinary offices
- Nature centers or zoos
- Dog-trained facilities
- Wildlife-rehabilitation or exploration centers

If you're interested in a career working with animals, take this opportunity to do some networking! And, whenever you're working around animals, **always use caution!**

## WILD VOCABULARY

DOMESTICATION, or taming, is the process of making an animal species less "wild." Domestic animals are comfortable sharing space with humans and being trained by them.

# Step 1 Explore the connection between humans and animals

The lives of humans and other animals have been linked for thousands of years – and the connection keeps getting stronger!

## CHOICES – DO ONE:

Find out how views of animals have changed over the centuries. People used to think animals had no feelings, and they didn't always let cats and dogs sleep on their beds! Find 10 examples of how and why the human-animal connection has changed over time, then, share what you've learned with friends, classmates, or a group of younger girls.

OR

Watch a documentary series on the human-animal connection. Then host a screening party about it. Come up with five topics or questions to discuss. For instance: how are certain animals, such as dogs and cows, viewed and treated in different parts of the world? Why?

OR

Show how animals helped at key points in history. Where would humans be if we hadn't begun to use oxen to plow fields? What would have happened in 1776 if Paul Revere hadn't been able to ride his horse? Pinpoint five moments when animals took a role in human history, then share one – or all – in a skit or video show for friends and family.

**Dolphins** lift drowning humans onto their backs and up to safety. They rescued a young boy who fell into a marine show aquarium tanks, and carried a woman 200 miles through the Indian Ocean to the nearest buoy after her yacht exploded. Dogs, **sea turtles**, and even **pigs** have carried out brave water rescues.

**Dogs** seem to instinctively know when humans need warmth. Three days after a 10-year-old boy got lost in the Ozark Mountains in freezing temperatures, police dogs zeroed in on his location. But it was two stray dogs who had kept him alive by lying on top of him to keep him warm and stealing food from rescuers' packs to bring to him!

A **horse**, during a 3-ring circus act, broke formation and race into another ring to save a falling trapeze artist who had tumbled off her wire – and she had been working without a net.

A **gorilla** saved a 3-year-old boy who fell into her enclosure at the Brookfield Zoo outside Chicago. The boy had been knocked unconscious. Binti-Jua, carrying her own gorilla baby on her back, picked up the boy, cradled him in her arms, and took him to the door, where zookeepers came to get him.

## Step 2 Find out how animals help keep people safe

If you're ever in danger, an animal may truly be your best friend. Fire departments still use canine units to find fire victims. Police work with dogs (and sometimes pigs and ferrets) to detect drugs, bombs, and unexploded mines. And, in disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, or explosions, animals often help find survivors.

### CHOICES - DO ONE:

Check out a safety team that uses animals. You might visit a fire department, police department, or search-and-rescue team. How do the animals help them? What special skills do people need to work with these animals?

OR

Talk to a trainer. Find someone who trains animals to work with firefighters, police officers, or search-and-rescue teams. Which animals are best for this kind of work? How are they trained? What kind of educational background would you need for this career?

OR

Read stories about animal heroes. Even animals that haven't been trained to save people often rise to the occasion. Cats have alerted sleeping families to house fires. Dogs have carried children out of collapsing buildings. Find five animal-hero stories and share them with others.

**FOR MORE FUN:** Find out if there are any animal heroes in your own community.

**More to Explore** Pretend you're a Girl Scout in 1930. As girls did to earn their Land Animal Finder badge, write a story about the way animals have helped humans in agriculture, food, clothing, and by their heroism in peace and war.

### The Dickin Medal

Maria Dickin, founder of a charity called the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals, created the Dickin Medal in 1943. The medal is awarded to animals that bravely help the military, often during a war. The first medals went to three pigeons that helped find pilots who had been lost during World War II. In early 2002, three dogs that helped look for survivors of the September 11 attacks in New York City were given the medal.

## Step 3 Know how animals help people emotionally

Studies show that just being around an animal can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and make people feel happier. Find out more about the mood-boosting effect of animals!

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Talk to a vet or psychologist. Find out how caring for a pet affects people's emotional and mental health, and read some of the research being done in this area. How are the studies created? How can someone put the findings to use in her own life?

OR

Visit an organization that uses animals to help people emotionally. For example, special horse-riding programs help people with autism or post-traumatic stress disorder. Other organizations take pets to senior centers, rehab facilities, or hospitals. Find out about the studies that were used to create these programs, how the animals are trained, and what volunteers have to know before working with the animals.

OR

Interview at least five pet owners. Ask how their pet helps them feel better, and capture their stories in writing, audio, or video. If you want to share their stories on a blog or in a short film, get their permission first.

## Animals Helping Each Other

Sometimes animal mothers care for orphaned infants of another species:

- Shelter dogs have nursed shelter kittens
- Goats have nursed foals

Animals sometimes find companionship in unlikely pairings:

- A juvenile polar bear made daily trips across an ice floe to play with a chained-up husky dog
- A hound dog is best friends with an orangutan
- A snake in a Japanese zoo became friends with – instead of eating – its hamster lunch

Animals have also been known to do extraordinary things to alert other animals to – or rescue them from – danger:

- A hippo took an impala from the jaws of a crocodile and pulled it to shore
  - A dolphin twice attacked a pod of killer whales to protect a sea lion
- A dog brought his own dinner, every day, to another dog caught in a steel trap.

## Step 4 Check out how animals help people with disabilities

Most people know about Seeing Eye dogs, which are trained to help people who are visually impaired live independent lives. Many other animals including monkeys, parrots, and miniature horses help people with physical disabilities.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

Talk to someone who trains assistance animals. It could be animals that help people with disabilities or health conditions like visual or hearing impairment, epilepsy, or paralysis. What's involved in training the animal? Why is that animal particularly suited to help people in a certain way? What kind of preparation is needed to go into this type of career?

OR

Speak to someone who has an assistance animal. How has it changed their life? How easy or difficult was it to learn how to work with the animal? If you can, meet the animal, too.

FOR MORE FUN: Take a video or audio of your interview and share it with other Girl Scouts.

OR

Research the pros and cons of training assistance animals. As more kinds of animals are being trained to help humans, some people are questioning how and why animals are selected. Look into different sides of this issue, and share your opinion in writing or artwork.

### More to Explore Be a trainer.

Train, or assist with the training, of a Seeing Eye dog or other assistance animal.

### Assistance Animal Organizations

For a complete list, check out [The Delta Society's website](#).

- [Autism Dog Services](#)
- [Guide Dogs for the Blind](#)
- [Comprehensive Pet Therapy](#)
- [Puppies Behind Bars, Inc.](#)
- [Assistance dogs International, Inc.](#)
- [Canine Companions for Independence](#)
- [Delta Society](#)
- [Great Plains Assistance dogs foundation](#)
- [Guide Horse Foundation](#)
- [Helping Hands: Monkey Helpers for the Disabled](#)
- [NEADS \(Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans\)](#)
- [Paws with a Cause](#)

## Step 5 Look at how animals might help us in the future

Scientists continue to work with animals, hoping to find new ways to use their special skills.

### CHOICES - DO ONE:

Get a sense of different animals' unique skills and abilities. Rats have an excellent sense of smell. Pigeons possess phenomenal eyesight. Goldfish are experts at detecting water pollution. Research the senses and abilities of five animals, and create a chart comparing them with humans. Can you think of a way to someday train an animal to use those skills to help people?

OR

Talk to an animal expert at a zoo or university. Ask about how researchers are finding new and different ways animals may help humans in the future. For example, bees are being trained to find land mines, rats are being taught to detect tuberculosis, and whales are being tagged to help collect data from the ocean. Find at least three more examples.

OR

Practice being a scientist. Conduct your own observation of an animal's behavior. Whether you're watching a raccoon in the backyard or your own pet, train your eye to notice details about the animal - how it moves, eats, and sleeps; how it reacts to humans; when it seems tired or energetic. Keep a log book of your observations for a week.

FOR MORE FUN: Ask an animal expert or scientist to review your work and talk to you about how a researcher could use your observations to set up an experiment with that animal.

**Children Against Mines:** Children Against Mines Program (CHAMPS) is an organization that lets kids in the U.S. "adopt" dogs that are trained to sniff out unexploded mines in war-torn countries. A trained dog can find mines up to 10 times faster than other tools used to find them. When a dog finds a mine, it can be safely removed. It's often children playing in mine fields who are harmed when a hidden mine explodes, so this program lets kids help other kids.

## Add the Badge to Your Journey

Earning this badge calls upon you to find a lot of different information about the connections between animals and humans. That makes it a great opportunity to practice monitoring media by carefully considering your sources and using all the other tips from *MEdia*. For example, can you find a story about animals that's been "dipped" through different layers of media? How do you decide what to believe?

### Not that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Helping a presentation for younger girls about how animals help us
- Organizing a food drive for a local humane society
- Volunteering for an organization that uses animals to help people with physical or emotional disabilities

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*I'm inspired to.*