

What are Conservation Dogs?

By Comfort for Critters

Our companion animals continue to amaze us with their abilities and in the ways they improve all of our lives. "Conservation dogs" are a great, and unique, example.

These are highly trained dogs, who canvass for animals, scat, rare plants and invasive weeds, working alongside biologists. Much of what they search for is easily missed by humans, with our far-inferior noses.

These detection dogs have been used to sniff out invasive predators, such as snails and snakes in Hawaii and Guam. They've tracked snow leopards in Vietnam ... moon bears in China ... and cheetahs in Kenya. Believe it or not, they can even track (by smell) whales as perch on the bow of a boat.

What they actually track (especially with the whales) is "scat" (poop) which offers biologists lots of information on a species, or a particular animal. It can indicate how populous a species is in an area, and how healthy they are.

These dogs are said to be twice as good as finding scat on roads as humans, and seven times as good in vegetation, where it mainly lies. They are trained to look for specific types of scat and they know to "lay down" when they find their prize - without touching it.

These are highly motivated, smart, high-energy dogs. They will work all day for their reward at night - usually their favorite ball, and hanging out with their trainer. Common working breeds are typically used, including border collies, Labrador Retrievers and German Shepherds. They are not purebreeds though, and they often come from shelters. Clearly it's the personality, and not the pedigree, that matters!

The dogs live and work with their trainers, where strong bonds are formed. Once the dogs are too old for the rigors of work, they get to retire with their trainer, as a member of the family. Clearly another impressive example of dogs helping us, in an unexpected way!

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