

Wells DL, Hepper PG. 2001. The behavior of visitors towards dogs housed in an animal rescue shelter. *Anthrozoos* 14:12-18.

Abstract

The behavior of visitors towards dogs housed in rescue shelters has been subject to little research. This study explored the behavior of 76 visitors to a rescue shelter in Northern Ireland as they toured the dogs' kennels. The number of dogs that visitors stopped to look at, the nature of all interactions that visitors initiated with dogs and the outcome of the visitors' tour of the shelter, were examined. The influence of the visitors' sex and the size of the group touring the kennels, on the visitors' behavior was also explored. On average, the visitors stopped to look at 29% of the total number of dogs available for purchase. Dogs housed in cages closest to the shelter entrance were most likely to attract attention from the visitors than those housed further away. When they stopped to look at a dog, visitors spent an average of 70 seconds in front of the animal's cage. Thirty-one of the visitors initiated an interaction with a dog, which lasted for an average of 20 seconds. Three visitors purchased a dog at the end of their tour of the shelter. Individuals who purchased a dog spent significantly more time standing in front of their future pet's cage, and engaged in more interactions with this animal, than dogs they did not purchase. The size of the group touring the shelter was significantly related to the visitors' behavior. Individuals touring the shelter alone stopped in front of more dogs' cages, spent more time in front of the dogs' enclosures, initiated more interactions, and purchased more dogs, than those visiting in pairs or groups. The visitors' sex was unrelated to their behavior. The findings suggest that visitors to a rescue shelter only show an interest in a small proportion of dogs available for purchase. Elucidating exactly what factors influence visitors' perceptions of, and behavior towards, sheltered dogs may further our understanding as to why so many animals are overlooked for purchase every year.

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