

Dogs not just man's best friend

BY JENNIFER MULSON
jen.mulson@gazette.com

What is it about dogs that humans can't resist?

Is it their undying loyalty, soulful eyes, fuzzy underbellies or goofball antics? Whatever it is, we love them and they love us.

"They've been part of our lives for so long; they were the first domesticated animal," New York Times best-selling

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author Jennifer S. Holland said. "They're intelligent — we found out they respond to the tone of our voice and understand more than what we used to think. ... They're such good friends. The unconditional love you get from them is unlike anything else."

Holland, a former senior staff writer for National Geographic who now freelances for the magazine, recently released "Unlikely Friendships: Dogs," the latest in her series of "Unlikely" books, which include "Unlikely Loves: 43 Heartwarming True Stories from the Animal Kingdom" and "Unlikely Heroes: 37 Inspiring Stories of Courage and Heart from the Animal Kingdom."

Her latest offering features 37 stories about canine compassion, courage and unusual relationships illustrated with abundant photos designed to make you go "aah." There's the two-legged chihuahua and the silkie chicken. The pug and the coyote. The Belgian Malinois and the pygmy owl. One of Holland's favorite pairings stars a cranberry chameleon and a yellow Lab.

"I've been a big fan of reptiles, and when I first saw the photo I had to find out what

the deal was," she said from her home in Silver Spring, Md. "It's hysterical to see this chameleon on this dog's head. There are a lot of stories of dogs that have helped somebody in a big way."

The interspecies friendships, such as the bond between Poppy the Maltese Chihuahua and Timone the meerkat, can be surprising and admirable.

"It seems animals are curious about other species and have a sense of difference," Holland said. "There are different smells and different body language. They certainly can see and realize this is not something I'm familiar with. They seem to get over that faster than we do sometimes."

And though science likely never will be definitive about what's going on in these relationships, we're understanding dogs better than ever.

"The research shows more and more that there is a lot of overlap with what other mammals experience in terms of emotions and what we experience," she said. "It's much

less taboo now to talk about animal emotion and certainly it appears a lot of animals are capable of empathy. Most of us thought it was just a hu-

man emotion before that."

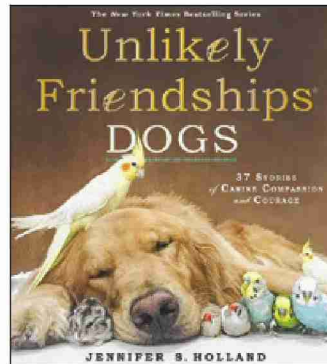
Holland's menagerie features three dogs, one sky blue python and more than 40 crested geckos.

After writing more than half a dozen animal books for adults and kids, she has a sense of why they do so well.

"There's a sense of badness about what seems to be out there in the world, so something that warms your heart is necessary," she said. "It's one reason people have gotten into the sweet animal stuff that is pouring out of us and filling the internet. It gives us some hope."

DETAILS

"Unlikely Friendships: Dogs" by Jennifer S. Holland; Workman (248 pages, \$13.95)



BARCROFT MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES

Poppy the Maltese Chihuahua and Timone the meerkat, as pictured in "Unlikely Friendships: Dogs."





TANJA BRANDT

A Belgian Malinois and a pygmy owl buddy from "Unlikely Friendships: Dogs" by Jennifer S. Holland.



FRANK HECKER, NATURFOTOGRAFIE

Laska, a Harzer Fuchs, and a deer from "Unlikely Friendships: Dogs."