

ORCA Newsletter

ORCA's Mission is to enhance the lives of animals and their guardians through behavior analytic research and to inform the public about the discoveries.

Issue 1, Fall 2011



Upcoming Events

November 24-27, 2011 UNT- closed: Thanksgiving Break

December 24, 2011- January 1, 2012 UNT- closed: Winter Break

March 10, 2012 Date for Next Art and Science of Animal Training Conference!!



Wicked Minds Conference: A Success!

February 19, 2011 marked the 3rd annual Art and Science of Animal Training Conference. The conference, organized by ORCA member Rachael Shrontz, was a terrific success with over 150 trainers, students, and behavior analysts attending the conference. Seven speakers, a mixture of animal trainers and behavior analysts, presented throughout the day on Saturday, with a surprise presentation by Bob Bailey to finish out the day.

Laura Coulter, past president of ORCA, stated, "the conference was a great success. The speakers wowed us again, for the third year in a row. ORCA is so grateful for the support, interest, and enthusiasm the attendees showed for our organization."

Rachael Shrontz, the conference organizer, remarked "It was a real treat chairing a conference that I've gotten to be a part of since it's initiation by April Becker three years ago. Each year we seem to make it better, and that's every bit thanks to the team efforts of ORCA and outstanding foundation originally laid.

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Register NOW!!! For the next conference... visit our website for more details!!!



Current Project Highlight

What Are We Clicking: Punctuated Events or Behavior Cycles?

Mary Hunter & Jesus Rosales-Ruiz

Often during shaping, the clicker is thought of as marking a punctuated event, rather than reinforcing an entire behavior cycle. However, trainers often end up with unwanted behavior that will not go away, even though they are not clicking for these behaviors. This investigation aims to increase our understanding of whether the click functions reinforce a "snapshot" of a particular behavior or the whole chain of behavior since the last click.

A dog was initially taught to touch a small stool and the touch was marked with the sound of a clicker. Later the click was progressively moved to other parts of the initial behavior cycle, such as clicking when the dog was halfway to the stool or halfway back to the trainer. We observed how the history of reinforcement and placement of the click influenced new behaviors offered, as well as resurgence of old behaviors.

Results from this project will hopefully lead to recommendations for how to choose approximations for effective shaping.

For further information on this project please contact Mary Hunter at mehhunter@gmail.com



Trainer Tips

Animals termed "stubborn" usually just have a harder time learning (like children with ADHD). It could be because of the breed, species, or their susceptibility to distractions in their environment (e.g. - basset hounds and SMELLS). Whenever I have a dog that is having an "off" day, I go back to basics. If the dog suddenly "forgets" how to lay down, we go back to a hand lure (hand with food), and do several (5-10) repetitions in a row. Usually by the 10th time, the dog "remembers" what to do. Sometimes, you just have to give the animal a refresher course...

-Tip courtesy of ORCA member Becky Kunkel



What is “The Art and Science of Animal Training” Conference?

Newsletter writer, Katie Rossi, caught up with ORCA’s advisor, Jesus Rosales-Ruiz to ask some probing questions about ORCA’s annual conference...

K: What is the purpose of “The Art and Science of Animal Training Conference”?

JRR: The purpose of the conference is to disseminate concepts, innovations, applications, and research about animal training. The conference begins with a keynote speaker who presents about a general topic related to the theory and technology of animal training. This is followed by presentations by some of the world’s top trainers who share strategies and tactics that extend the principles of behavior to particular species or particular behavior. At past conferences we have learned about a wide range of topics, from the history of animal training to using errorless learning to improve shaping to training dogs to help rescue sea turtles after hurricane Katrina. The conference ends with a panel discussion of questions from the audience. I am happy to tell you that at the upcoming conference, ORCA’s research will be part of the program as well.

K: Who is the conference for?

JRR: The conference is not just for animal trainers. Anybody interested in how behavior works, from pet owners

to professional trainers, will find value in attending the conference. The speakers are world experts on training and tailor their presentations so that the presentations will be interesting and useful for all who attend the conference. The beginner, the knowledgeable, and the expert will all find the presentations instructional, thought provoking, and even inspirational. You cannot lose with such a stellar lineup.

K: How did the conference come about?

JRR: The idea for the conference came about from conversations between Kay Laurence, Steve and Jenn White, Ken Ramirez, Alexandra Kurland and me. The six of us would get together in the evenings at ClickerExpo for productive and stimulating conversations. Kay even nicknamed our group “the wicked minds.” However, although we had some great conversations at ClickerExpo, we agreed that we needed more time and a more relaxed format to continue to exchange ideas and talk about general issues in animal training.

We thought it would be great to be able to meet every year and share what we were doing and thinking about animal training. Kay suggested

that ORCA organize an event to allow us to meet every year.

She pointed out that ORCA, as a university student organization, also had the resources needed to host a conference. ORCA loved this idea since one of ORCA’s missions is to disseminate the science of animal training. ORCA students were also excited about how much they would be able to learn by interacting with leaders of the field. Two years after this idea, ORCA held the first Art and Science of Animal Training Conference, largely thanks to the leadership of April Becker, who was the president of ORCA at that time.

Every year ORCA invites a scientist or a leader in the field of animal training as a keynote speaker. The keynote speaker is chosen because of the speaker’s expertise in behavioral research or animal training. The keynote speaker’s purpose is to discuss a concept, theory, or approach to animal training that is not widely known or understood. Following the keynote speaker are presentations by each of the wicked minds. In addition, every year ORCA also invites a guest

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trainer who is an expert on a topic or species not covered by the other speakers.

K: What is the wicked minds meeting?

JRR: *In addition to the public conference, the speakers and ORCA members meet for two additional days to exchange ideas, debate questions and discuss current projects. During this meeting each speaker is given time to present a particular topic, project, or concept for discussion and feedback. The meeting is invigorating and a great way to expand our knowledge and refine our thinking. In addition, ORCA students share their current research projects with the speakers for feedback and suggestions. This helps us refine our research and often raises new questions for future studies. For ORCA students, this is also an excellent experience in their education, as it lets them see how the principles they are learning in the classroom are being used by top experts in the field.*

The speakers leave the



weekend with plenty of new ideas that they are eager to take home to play with and incorporate into their training programs. The ideas that come out of our meetings are developed and refined into brand new training strategies and procedures, which often become presentation topics at our public conferences in future years. We have been thrilled so far about the outcomes of the conference and private meetings. Our interactions have been productive and rewarding and we look forward to continuing to get to the products of these discussions with you.

For more information on the upcoming *Art and Science of Animal Training Conference 2012* please visit our website at:

<http://orgs.unt.edu/orca/>



“Wicked Minds Conference: A Success” *Continued from Front Page*

Rachael continued, “I love working within this conference because of the familiarity with attendees and networking that continues to extend because of their interest. You know you are doing a good job with a conference when past attendees email you in order to get the conference date for the upcoming year, or they specifically request more detailed updates about the student research currently in progress. That sense of loyalty is what keeps us revved up and trying to outdo ourselves!

I also have to say that

the speakers are beyond amazing. Every conference they not only donate their time and effort to the attendees, but they also take a special interest in the research efforts of ORCA students. That makes every crashed computer and research mishap worth it! And of course where would our conference be this year without our advisor Dr. Jesús Rosales-Ruiz. He vigorously shaped us so that we could be proud of a student-run conference.

It’s been a great three years, and I am proud to have helped in the

lineage of the Annual Art & Science of Animal Training Conferences. I look forward to next year’s topics; I can only imagine what technical advancements and refinements the conference will be highlighting!”

With the end of the 2011 conference ORCA is currently preparing for the next conference. All members of ORCA hope to match the success of this amazing conference.



ORCA Member:	Project Title:
Katie Tucker	<i>Separating perfect and imperfect behavior through stimulus control</i>
Matthew Davison	<i>Using cues to reduce problem behavior in a dog</i>
Chase Owens & Sean Will	<i>Exploring Constructional Aggression Treatment to dogs that resource guard</i>
Mary Hunter	<i>What Are We Clicking: Punctuated Events or Behavior Cycles?</i>

ORCA Member:	Project Title:
Robin Beasley & Matthew Davison	<i>Turning an Aversive Noise into a Conditioned Reinforcer</i>
Matthew Davison & Robin Beasley	<i>Enrichment: Introducing Captive Animals to Natural Sources of Reinforcement</i>
Katie Rossi, Jeff Gesick, & Laura Coulter	<i>Comparing Methods of Generalization to Novel Trainers</i>
Laura Coulter	<i>Direct vs Indirect Reinforcement</i>
Kim Fry	<i>Iphone Application</i>

Thank You for Reading
Our Newsletter!!

To learn more about
ORCA please visit our
website at:

<http://orgs.unt.edu/orca/>



Current ORCA Members:

Mary Hunter (President)
Emilie Anderson (Vice President)
Kat Dignan (Secretary)
Robin Beasley (Treasurer)
Sean Will (Public Relations)
Kim Fry (Webmaster)
Laura Coulter (Conference Co-chair)
Katie Rossi (Conference Co-chair)
Laura Belcher
Katie Tucker
Matt Davison
Thomas Currier
Rachael Shrontz
Jeff Gesick
Chase Owens
Christina Nord
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