



IT'S COLIN REID

IT'S MONDAY

# A paw man's guide to doggy talk . . . !

WHAT are we to make of a claim that two dogs have been taught to 'talk' to people, using an alphabet of taps with their paws?

And not only talk in constructed sentences, but also speak English and German; solve complicated equations, do square roots and expound on their own reincarnation and the nature of death—a soft dark mist with eternal genuine lustre, remarked a Poodle poet called Elke!

That many strange and

wonderful things go on in the animal world I am prepared to admit—but this?

The claim is seriously made in a book called 'The Talking Dogs' (Macmillan, £5.95), and I confess that my first thought was to chuck it at the cat and say: 'Oh, come on, come on! Next we'll be asked to believe that little dogs laugh (pax Fred Bassett) and cows jump over the moon.'

But I didn't. I began to read it again. There was something creepy about it.

The author, Maurice Rowden, visited the dogs

—Belam, a Saluki, and Elke the Poodle—at their home in Southern Germany where they live with their teacher, Fraulein Dorothy Meyer.

In painstaking detail he documents the paw-tapping interviews on many subjects over many months. Each letter of the alphabet is given a specific number of taps and the dogs communicate by tapping their thoughts into their teacher's hand.

A Swiss TV producer tried to persuade them to use a large, doggy typewriter instead of their teacher's hand (and the

same test occurred to suspicious little me), but they wouldn't buy it. Which did nothing to dispel doubt.

That the dogs tap answers to questions seems certain (so have many circus animals—there was even 'a tapping horse' in Shakespeare's day, as mentioned in 'Love Labour's Lost'), but how does one explain the tapped thoughts of Elke and Belam?

Involuntary signals from the teacher to give the required number of taps? Or could it be telepathy? Can our domestic pets read and

(oh, creepy thought!) even influence our minds?

In a riveting essay at the end of the book the author argues that 'our claim to superiority over animals rests on our having developed the brain more than any other species. But is reason necessarily intelligent? Is intelligence necessarily mental?

'The western (chiefly 19th-century) view of the human organism as a physical apparatus governed by the brain, supplied with sense messages by the nervous system, seems to have taken us

far from nature (including our own nature).'

With our minds carefully circumscribed by reason, he asks, have we blocked out other areas of consciousness, other energy fields of an invisible world still intact in the animal kingdom?

'Western man is still perhaps waiting to reach an adequate animal level in spiritual and psychic powers, while deceiving himself that the cultivation of the brain puts him far beyond the animal kingdom.'

Psychic powers? Invisible worlds? I began to think of the way our

old cat Smokey would suddenly stare alertly at seemingly empty spaces in the room (what on earth is going on there?); and the way she could send telepathic messages from her empty plate in the kitchen. I would rise and open a tin without knowing why.

Suddenly, I tell you, goose pimples began to rise on my neck. I decided not to chuck the book at her after all. I went over to her, stroked her head and said: 'Now then, Smokey, are you all right? Is there anything I can do for you at all? Just send me a message.'

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