

New Study Demonstrates that Animals Can Learn to Communicate Using a Tablet

Pet cockatoo was taught to request food, beverages, and tablet games

JUPITER, FLA., USA, May 12, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A peer-reviewed study demonstrating that animals can learn to communicate using a tablet was recently published in the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Digital Library through the proceedings at the International Conference on Animal-Computer Interaction.

One of the study's authors, Jennifer Cunha, taught her cockatoo Ellie to use a CommBoard, an augmentative alternative communication device developed for nonverbal humans, to request food and beverages and to ask to play games and interact with other household members.

"The simple training protocols combined with the tablet-based communication program may help bridge the communication gap that exists between animals and humans and is now being taught to many other animals as well," Cunha said.

Cunha is the co-owner of Parrot Kindergarten, a company providing enhanced enrichment and communication training for parrot caregivers. She is an attorney, animal cognition trainer, writer and international speaker, focusing on animal literacy and communication.



www.parrotkindergarten.com



Parrot Kindergarten

Cunha's training manuals have been translated and distributed throughout Europe, and she's been featured in Bird Talk magazine, has twice written articles for the International Association of Applied Behavior Consultants Journal and is a frequent lecturer at science conventions and companion bird gatherings around the world. Cunha collaborates on animal literacy and communication projects with university researchers, including the University of Miami and the University of Western Oregon, and her research has been published in peer-reviewed scientific proceedings.

In teaching her cockatoo Ellie to communicate, Cunha taught her how to use the CommBoard by associating picture boxes with real-life outcomes, such as treats, foods and drinks, as well as toys and tablet games. Ellie also used the CommBoard to interact with her friends and family.

"She often asks for different kinds of foods or drinks, or to play games on her tablet," Cunha said, adding "She really enjoys playing different kids' apps."

After teaching Ellie to use the CommBoard, Cunha reported in the study that the research team observed her using it for 28 days. After Ellie selected a picture on the program, the team corroborated her selection by asking her follow-up questions to see if she was consistent in her answers and by watching her body language to determine if she engaged with the item or activity offered after she requested it.

Ellie's communication accuracy rate was 94 percent across 82 interactions, the study noted. In the couple of instances where she did not corroborate her initial request, Ellie was asked more questions and she chose something she did want – so she had a clear way to communicate with the humans in her environment with a high degree of accuracy.

"To our knowledge, she is the first pet to learn to use a tablet for communication with humans," Cunha said.

Cunha's birds, Ellie and Isabelle, have passed university-designed blind tests on phonics and reading comprehension skills.

Cunha's other published research papers include "Reading Comprehension Skills in a Goffin's Cockatoo," "Enrichment Through Learning," and "Advancing Communication with Parrots: Can They Learn to Read?"

To learn more about Ellie, follow her on [Instagram](#). For more information about Cunha and Parrot Kindergarten, and its tablet training course, visit parrotkindergarten.com.

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