

Barking problems solved: Examples of successful management of barking problems in the urban environment

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ABSTRACT

Barking annoys many people in the urban community and is the most frequently reported problem to many local councils. There are many causes of excessive canine barking including excitement, boredom, disturbances, anxiety and pain. There are also many potential solutions to reduce the noise pollution including changing dog behaviour, human behaviour and use of products. Examples of successful management of barking problems are discussed.

Introduction

Barking annoys many people in the urban community and is the most frequently reported problem to many local councils. Dogs housed in shelters also tend to bark a lot, annoying both shelter workers and surrounding neighbours.

As a continuation of the Urban Animal Management conference 2004, where the causes of barking behaviour were discussed (McGreevy 2004; Seksel 2004; Righetti 2004), this paper will recap causes, discuss typical barking problems (Righetti 2005) and case studies of successful (and not-so-successful) barking problems will be presented. In addition a variety of products and services that aim to reduce canine barking will be discussed.

The causes of barking problems

Barking is a natural canine behaviour and one that most dog owners value, when given as a brief warning of a stranger's approach. When dogs bark excessively, however, it becomes nuisance behaviour. Levels of barking can reach such levels that they are potentially capable of causing deafness!

Solving barking problems generally requires an understanding of why the dog is barking. Typical causes of excessive barking include excitement, boredom, disturbances, anxiety and pain. These are not always easy to identify and sometimes require some investigation, by observation and keeping diaries, by both owner and council.

There are numerous methods of reducing the amount of annoying canine barking including training, exercise, mental stimulation, medication, change of routine and anti-barking devices. Depending on the cause of the problem and the commitment of the owner, these will have varying success levels.

Working with the dog owners is essential for a successful outcome. For instance suggesting that the owner trains their dog for 30 minutes every day will be too demanding for the typical pet owner. Purchasing an anti-barking device and using it for 6 months may be too expensive for many owners. The solutions must fit in with the owner's commitment level, as well as be suitable for solving the individual's problem.

Table 1 lists a number of commonly available services and products for barking problems in our communities. As with the quick fix paper (Righetti 2005a), these are considered by several criteria, including whether the product or service satisfies (i) ethical concerns and the animal's natural drives (ii) the ease of use for the owner (iii) the cost involved for the owner and (iv) the extent to which this product or service offers a quick fix for the problem concerned.

This table features a selection of products and services available to reduce or stop canine barking. This list is not intended to be a complete guide to products and services available but many are commonly used by dog owners and others are newly designed products.

The assessments given here are the opinion of the author, based on experience and design and application of the product. Products and services are continually evolving and current status of products and services should be checked before recommendations are given to pet owners.

Examples of barking problems solved

Several groups of people were asked to share case studies of barking problems and their resolution. These included scientific internet discussion groups, vets, dog trainers and councils.

Several examples of successful, and not-so-successful resolution of the barking problem will be discussed during the paper. These include:

- Understanding and addressing cause of barking eg. boredom, separation anxiety
- Use of music and calming scents
- Use of medication
- Training dogs to be quiet
- Use of anti-barking devices including The Husher, citronella collars and static pulse bark control collars*
- Dealing with difficult dogs and difficult owners

References

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Table 1: A comparison of products and services available to help with the barking problem (over the page)

(For Key to this table see previous paper 'A Quick Fix? Solutions for Animal Behaviour Problems in Urban Animal Management')

Table 1: A comparison of products and services available to help with the barking problem

(For Key to this table see previous paper 'A Quick Fix? Solutions for Animal Behaviour Problems in Urban Animal Management')

Problem: Noise pollution				
Product/Service	Does it meet animal's needs	Ease of use for owner	Cost	Quick fix of problem
Shouting at the dog	-	✓✓	✓✓✓	x
Training to be quiet	✓✓	-	-	✓✓
Exercise/Play	✓✓	✓	✓	✓
Relocation of dog (in yard/house)	-	-	✓✓	✓✓
Purchase another dog	-	-	xxx	xx
Barking booklet	✓✓	✓✓	x	✓✓
The Husher	-	✓	xx	✓
Citronella collar	x	✓✓	xxx	✓
Scentless spray collar	-	✓✓	xx	✓
Static pulse collar*	xx	✓	xxx	✓
Vet medication (if appropriate)	✓	-	xx	✓
Debarking*	xxx	-	xxx	-
Complementary therapies	✓✓	✓	xx	-
Music therapy	✓	✓✓	✓	-
Sound therapy eg. Sounds Scary™	✓✓	✓	xx	-
Bark analysis	✓	✓✓	xxx	-
Bark machine eg. Treat & Train™	✓✓✓	✓✓	xxx	✓✓
Animal behaviourist consultation	✓✓✓	✓	xxx	✓✓

*Some procedures and devices may be illegal