

Love of Cats and Dogs Explored in TV Series

PBS special explores why people become so attached to their dogs and cats.

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What makes humans feel connected to their cats and dogs? In the spirit of Valentine's Day, a special episode of the PBS Nature series entitled "Why We Love Cats and Dogs" explores the relationships that humans have with their four-legged friends.

In the PBS Nature series episode, producers get personal with pet owners and animal behavior experts to find out why people are so attached to their cats and dogs. Viewers can expect to see in-studio pet owner interviews, and the result is a variety of stories that are insightful, heartwarming, and funny, said Fred Kaufman, executive producer with Thirteen productions.

The show includes a segment about the "Meet Your Match" adoption program, developed for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals by Dr. Emily Weiss, animal behaviorist. Weiss speaks about how the system improves the way shelters match adoptable pets with their ideal owners.

Filmed over the course of several days in the summer of 2008 at the Humane Society of Boulder Valley (HSBV) in Boulder, Colo. – an adoption center that uses the match system – the segment chronicles the adoption stories of several Colorado residents. These adopters were given the opportunity to have their experience enhanced by the adoptions staff at HSBV and have Dr. Weiss participate in some of the introductions.

"We are thrilled to be a part of this upcoming episode of the Nature series," said Ed Sayres, ASPCA president and CEO. "One of the greatest gifts we can receive in life is the unconditional love from a pet, and we are proud to be a part of this project which celebrates that unique bond."

"Meet Your Match" includes research-based behavior assessments that determine the "Canine-ality" and "Puppy-ality" of dogs and puppies, as well as the "Feline-ality" of adoptable cats, and matches them with the best owners based upon their lifestyle and expectations. The animals are assigned one of nine canine-alties or feline-alties, which fall into three categories. These categories are color-coded purple, orange, and green respectively, and the descriptions are added to the animal's kennel card. Examples include the relaxed and laid back "Couch Potato," the affectionate and loving "Secret Admirer" and action hero-type "Go-Getter."

In addition to Weiss, the episode also features the following animal experts: Sarah Wilson, author and animal behaviorist. Wilson's work centers on understanding the human-animal bond. Marc Bekoff, evolutionary biologist and professor emeritus at the University of Colorado. Bekoff explains his theory on the attraction to animals based on "mirror neurons." Nicholas Dodman, DVM, of Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. Dodman reveals that cats, often viewed as independent animals, can be as responsive and trainable as dogs.

The episode premieres nationally Sunday, Feb. 15, at 8 p.m. EST on PBS (check local listings).