

Getting to know ... Pest Detection Dogs



Time to go home after a good day's work

We are familiar with sniffer dogs employed worldwide in the detection of drugs, bombs, fugitives and even pirated compact discs/digital video discs. So why not pests?

John Elder sharing his knowledge and experience



At the Rapid Solutions Risk Management Conference held in the Gold Coast, Australia, John Elder overawed his audience of some 500 participants with a demonstration of what his canines can do in the detection of bedbugs and termites.

Swabs obtained from contact with bedbugs and termites were concealed in 6 different locations before his canines were brought into the auditorium. Without any hesitation two-year old Ruby, a beagle, walked her round and correctly detected the 3 bedbug swabs.

Next to go on stage was the six-year old harrier, Ellie. With the confidence of a trained technician, she correctly detected all 3 termite swabs.

Both canines and of course, John received a standing ovation.

John is the owner of Elders Pest Control, Australia and is a qualified international detection dog trainer. He offered some interesting insights into how he selects and trains his canines.

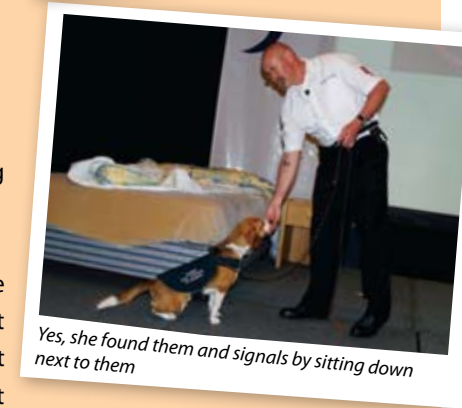
A canine with scent detection will not be successful unless extensive training is provided. There is no specific breed or sex but not all canines will qualify. Having high drive and the correct temperament are important. The ability to understand English is not a criterion because it recognizes our body language and behaves accordingly. So if the handler is having a bad day, it can sense that and both will end up with a bad day.

To successfully perform to high standards, it has to be well maintained. This calls for comfortable housing and bedding, high quality food, regular bath and grooming. It has to be motivated usually with praise and food. Sounds like what we would do to prime humans. But unlike us, it has also to be de-sexed to improve its work performance.

What is the cost of such a developed canine? From AU\$ 15,000 to 20,000 each. This explains why John guards his canines closely because one was indeed stolen while on transit.



Ruby sniffing for bedbugs



Yes, she found them and signals by sitting down next to them