



March 26, 2005

Which "Raw" Guru is right?

In the community of people who feed their dogs raw food, there are disputes and controversies between different belief systems that too often appear to do nothing but giving hesitant followers reason to go back to kibble...

Billinghurst or Lonsdale?

There are many people (including myself) who have made all kinds of contributions to responsible dog owners in regard to teaching them how to put together a healthy natural diet their dogs. But there are two that have "written history" more than any one else: Ian Billinghurst and Tom Lonsdale. I have a lot of respect for both, and they have some extremely valid points in their teachings. But I also disagree with some of what they do - primarily because both of them come from a different start point than I do - and they have different attitudes and ethics when it comes to prioritizing the goals and the ways of achieving them.

Billinghurst's main objective with his first book "Give Your Dog A Bone" (confirmed by himself in private conversation with me in 1998) was to *get people started* on feeding *something* acceptable. Acceptable to the dog and to the human mind. He worried less about being able to back up his recommendations, and he also worried less about the possible risks associated with the one-sided approach his recommendations easily could trigger - as they did! Although Billinghurst never recommended a "chicken only" diet for any dog, many of his followers have got that impression - and caused a lot of damage, particularly because chicken no longer is as rich in nutrients as it once was, particularly not when "chicken" really is nothing but "chicken backs, necks, and wings".... Also, Billinghurst's original recommendation of a very high bone/meat ratio is no longer supported by himself - but that is hard to change when it already is on print, and the publisher still wants to sell the books...

Lonsdale is obviously a warrior. But he fights a very difficult battle that does not have many chances of leading to victory. He fights the veterinary associations (and got expelled when his own association got enough!) and his own colleagues. As much as I agree with his intentions, and also referring to my own extensive military background, I seriously disagree with the focus of his strategy and tactics. His confrontational style creates more enemies than friends. And, just as Billinghurst, his basic philosophies, as they come out to the public, cause trouble that could have been avoided. Although Lonsdale is darn right about the benefits of raw meaty bones, his sworn followers are *not* right about raw meaty bones being *everything* a dog needs!

Education is the key...

My preferred approach is to educate a part of the public. Not everyone. Only those who are willing to learn. And I do not want to dictate to them what is right,

except for one thing: I want them to *think!* I am certain that they will never return to the "enemy", once they have experienced and understood the benefits - without running into those problems disciples of either Billinghurst or Lonsdale often experience. This way, we will move the boundary, one dog owner at a time, and one day we will celebrate the closure of that last kibble manufacturing plant!

The whole picture is *not* as simple as painted by the followers of Billinghurst or Lonsdale. There are many additional factors that deserve serious attention, and the great variety of individual dogs' needs and abilities to handle different foods, caused by either genetics or conditioning or poisoning, make either gentleman's approach (as interpreted by the respective followers) unnecessarily risky or troublesome.

The number of cases I know of where a dog has been outright malnourished by being given an over-simplified raw diet with reference to Billinghurst is disgusting. Although such cases truly are not to be blamed on Billinghurst, they are to be blamed on the perception created by many of his followers that feeding a raw diet is "simple"!

To Lonsdale's "whole prey model" disciple, I have seen MANY dogs (hundreds...) fare much better on *some* vegetables and fruits than none. That's too many for me to ignore. But I have *never* seen any dogs be worse off by being fed a moderate amount of vegetables in their diet. Even 30-35% for some dogs. My overall risk management attitude tells me that this is a better and more suitable start point than "no veggies", as it is more important to me what makes the dog thrive than what theoretically is "correct". Besides, wolves *do* eat vegetables and fruits, plus a lot of things most people don't even want to hear about... They most definitely do not live on meat and bones alone.

Nature never supports the extremes. Balance is always to be found at some distance from the boundaries.

Over-simplification *reduces* the truth, it does not enhance it...

Even "the whole prey model" comes short on logic. For the very few people who *can* access such foods for their dogs, there are several other factors that should be considered, including:

- 1) 15,000 years of domestication...
- 2) The fact that we really do not know what a wolf would eat... Nobody has any serious measure of the amounts of vegetables a wolf eats, except we know that it will eat *some*.... David Mech is often incorrectly cited for this by people who want to draw conclusions his observations do not warrant.
- 3) Wolves run their metabolism at a speed that is more than three times as high as our dogs' - they travel 16 hours a day, also in the winter - so they burn *a lot* of energy! Since they get most of their energy from *protein*, they go through a lot of food - which means that they can thrive on a much lower nutritional quality of that food than our dogs can!

The overall conclusion is that we need to feed our dogs *better* than what Mother Nature feeds the wolf.... My personal observations over the years clearly confirm that this is very true.

Understanding that "the big picture" is full of details...

Unfortunately, there are a lot of aggressive, non-compromising lists and forums out there that vehemently promote the idea that dogs are classified "carnivores", so hence they can eat *only* meat. The logic in this is completely unsustainable. The classification "carnivore" is *man-made*. It is a *model*; a way of describing observations. And all models are, per definition, *inaccurate* simplifications of a part of reality. But I know that, just as many people make incorrect assumptions on Billingham and Lonsdale, some will also use this against me and cite me for saying that dogs are "omnivores" - which is an outright lie, based on the assumption that everything in this world is divided neatly into two categories of species: omnivores and carnivores. This is a ridiculous over-simplification that makes no sense. Yet I have seen it many times...

There is no way to get to a point that makes sense *unless* we educate ourselves. Although raw feeding is simple, it is only simple when you understand a lot of specific details, so you can see "the big picture". "See the forest, instead of focusing on some of the trees".

This is not all done by reading posts in a newsgroup. There are too many important issues that simply take too much space to explain in a diligent way. My book "[The Wolf's Natural Diet – a Feeding Guide for Your Dog?](#)" is a clear example: I seriously tried to make that description so short that I could have used it as "just an additional chapter" to my the new update of "[Raw Food for Dogs – the Ultimate reference for Dog Owners](#)", but when it ended up mounting to more than 60 pages, I realized that it should be published on its own.... Further, when I got feedback from my first little test audience, I was requested to explain many things in more details, so the book grew 30%! So there went my bad feelings about it swelling so much....

The first thing we need to understand when trying to understand this is that *there are no shortcuts here*. There is a lot we need to know and understand before we can feel totally comfortable making the right decisions. Education is a journey, not a destination.

Mogens Eliassen

Mogens Eliassen holds a Ph.D. level degree in Chemistry from Århus University, Denmark and has 30+ years of experience working with dogs, dog owners, dog trainers, and holistic veterinarians as a coach, lecturer, and education system developer. He publishes a free newsletter "[The Peeing Post](#)" containing lots of tips and advice on dog problems of all kinds, particularly about training, behavioral problems, feeding, and health care.

For more information about Mogens Eliassen, including links to other articles he has published, please send a short e-mail to contact@k9joy.com.