

Dogs chasing their tails on YouTube could be a sign of welfare issues and pathological conditions

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The assumption that tail-chasing is normal behaviour in dogs could be leading to welfare issues being left untreated according to new research from The Royal Veterinary College, London.

As the first non-clinical study into tail-chasing behavior the research analysed 400 videos on YouTube featuring tail-chasing [dogs](#).

Tail-chasing can simply comprise play or exercise, but can also be an indicator of [neurological conditions](#), [physical discomfort](#) or a reaction to externally triggered welfare problems –including lack of stimulation, insufficient exercise or a reaction to stressful situations – in otherwise healthy dogs.

According to comments from owners accompanying the videos and expert observation from the researchers, one third of all dogs featured showed clinical signs of problematic tail chasing - including habitual (daily or all the time) or perseverative (difficult to distract) performance of the behaviour.

Clinical signs appeared virtually unrecognized by the [video](#) owners and commenting viewers, and laughter was captured in the video in 55% of cases and encouragement recorded in 43% of the videos. User comments on the videos also reinforce the perception that tail-chasing is ‘normal’ with 46% of posts describing the behaviour as ‘funny’ and 42% of posts

describing it as ‘cute’. Dogs who exhibited signs of clinical tail-chasing were six times more likely to be described as ‘stupid’ or ‘funny’.

Dr. Charlotte Burn at the RVC - who led the research – commented: “Searching for ‘dog chasing tail’ on YouTube returns over 3500 hits. The huge viewing figures that YouTube attracts suggest that without effective intervention and education the perception that tail-chasing is normal and can be encouraged will be further reinforced.

“The findings indicate a gulf between public perception and the reality of poor welfare in some tail-chasing dogs. Many pathological tail-chasers may go untreated, and the behaviour is widely assumed to be normal and amusing. This behaviour shouldn't be encouraged and veterinary advice, or in some cases behavioural therapist advice, should be sought.

“These videos provide a new opportunity for insight into tail-chasing in non-clinical contexts.”; continued Dr. Burn “For the first time, a large sample size is rapidly available and economically feasible. Furthermore, the videos reveal environments and contexts in which tail-chasing occurs, often together with audible and written responses of human observers.”

The highest proportion of perseverative tail-chasing was observed in toy breeds (56%) followed by cross breeds (43%). Tail-chasing videos are significantly more often shot indoors and with a computer or television screen switched on.

The study “A Vicious Cycle: A Cross-Sectional Study of Canine Tail-Chasing and Human Responses to It, Using a Free Video-Sharing Website” was published in the journal *PLoS ONE* today.

Provided by Royal Veterinary College

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