

Dog to be world's first whale poop expert

University of Washington scientists are training an Australian cattle dog for an unusual assignment: detecting whale excrement to help the endangered mammals.

Researchers believe analyzing the substance will give them needed information to help save the marine mammals, Sam Wasser of the university's Center for Conservation Biology, told the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

The dog, Gator, a dropout from drug-sniffing training (his gait was not acceptable), so far is able to identify heroin, marijuana and crack cocaine, as well as the droppings of such animals as grizzly bears, black bears, jaguars, wolverines, bobcats and cougars.

From the droppings, scientists isolate such substances as cortisol, various hormones and DNA to determine the animals' overall health.

Wasser says the center is building a training facility for wildlife scientists from around the world, the Post-Intelligencer said. The program has 11 dogs and has trained nearly 30 over the years. But Gator -- a 45-pound, unneutered 8-year-old -- might be destined for the record books as the world's first whale excrement expert.

Why isn't Gator neutered?

"It keeps his drive up," Wasser told the newspaper.

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