

Block the dates for Social Meets, say pet owners

Pooja.Kulkarni@timesgroup.com

You may be a social animal, but have you ever realised that your pets also need to socialize and bond with their own breed? Pet Social Meets are the latest outings on the calendar for dog lovers in the city. Pet owners increasingly feel the need to take their animals out to mingle with other breeds, to ensure that their social needs are taken care of.

Priya Poduval, owner of Peppy Paws Pet Resort who conducts Pet Social Meets in the city, said, "We conduct these social gatherings for pets throughout the year, but during summer vacations we organise them every weekend. The basic intent is to bring together different dogs and let them connect and communicate with each other through games and other activities." She added, "Most pet owners treat their pets like part of their family. But in reality, they are animals who are cut off from their own clan at a very young age. So for healthy growth, it is mandatory that one allows them to mix with their own race from time to time."

The Pet Social Meets are organised with options like swimming, playing water games, doing agility and obstacle exercises and even walking. Some groups also organise pets' birthday parties and feasts or a ramp walk and pet fashion shows as well.

Shyju Mathew, an advertising professional who owns a labrador and attended one such event last month said, "Rainbow is six months old and it was the first time that met so many



dogs under one roof. From his behaviour we could gauge that he was extremely happy. It was an amazing experience even for us to watch him mingle and play with like-minded pups. It introduced us to the extremely playful and naughty aspect of Rainbow's personality, which otherwise is subdued when he is alone at home. Now we will ensure that he attends such events on a regular basis."

Not being habituated to mixing with their own clan, pets sometimes can take some time to adapt to such events. "It took one-year-old Boxer, a stray, three such events to be comfortable with other dogs," shared Pradnya Shirole, Boxer's owner. She added, "Boxer was feeling intimidated by other big dogs and would timidly put his tail between his hind legs, which is a sign of fear. It was only after I took him for three sessions in a row that he became comfortable in the presence of other dogs around him and started



Fashion show for pets

playing with them."

Shalaka Mundada, dog breeder and owner of Pet Sitters, who also conducts social events for pets and their owners, said, "Unlike humans, dogs do not form emotional ties with their own clan. But there are certain habits young ones pick up from senior dogs. Every dog has his own personality; while some are introverts and submissive in nature, others are extroverts and confident. So which dogs will gel with each other is difficult to say. Usually it's their body language that signals their state of mind. For example, growling is a way of politely saying 'I don't like you'. But they have to be taught the right ways of greeting and socializing with another dog."

Shalaka further added, "We insist that owners accompany pets, as their role is very important. Every owner has to pick up the body language of his pet. At times when pets are stressed, owners need to understand the situation and tackle it accordingly."

Priti Chauhan, pet behaviorist and therapist, explained, "The socializing window for most pets shut at five months. Post this, due to vaccinations and inoculations which follow, owners prefer not to take them out to cut out the risk of infections. Which means for about a year, which is roughly about seven human years, the pet is home bound. Apart from having a negative effect on their overall growth, this can lead to aggression in some cases. Others may become shy and a few might turn territorial, especially the guard dogs."

Priti also added, "We suggest owners start taking their pets for social events at two-and-a-half-years. It also gets difficult for dogs to become friendly with others beyond their family after a certain age."



A birthday party organised for pets