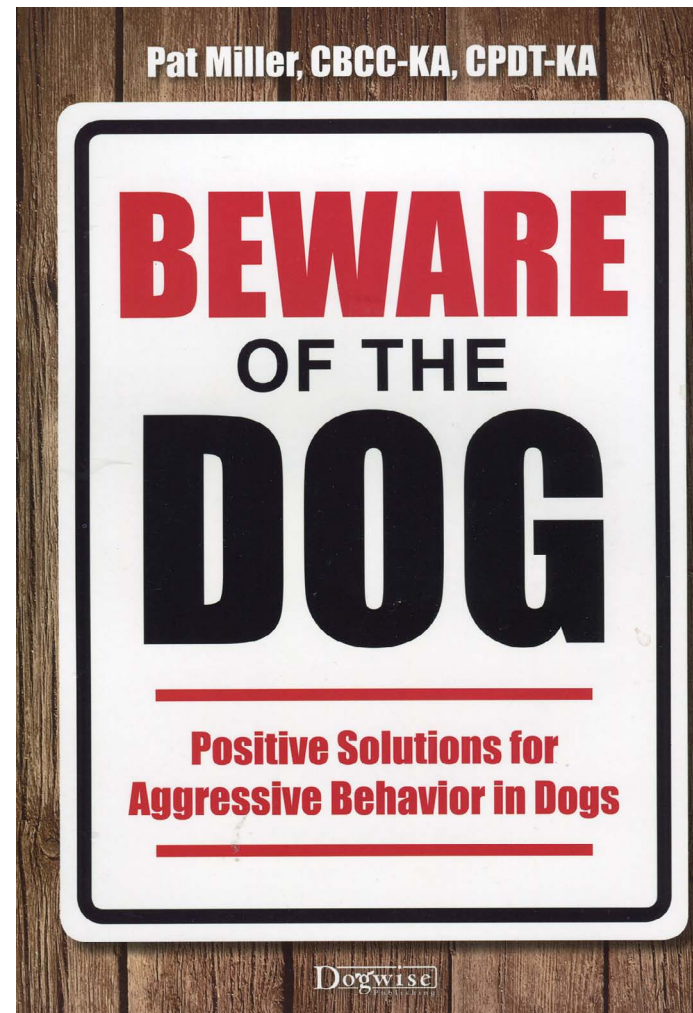


## Buy The Book

# Chapter 4 Alpha Schmalpha

By Pat Miller CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA

Buy The Book: Thanks to Pat Miller CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA we have an excerpt from her book *Beware Of The Dog*, 196 pages, \$19.95 from Dogwise Publishing [www.Dogwise.com](http://www.Dogwise.com), Copyrights 2017



The alpha myth is everywhere. Google “alpha, dog” and you get more than 85 million hits. Really. While not all the sites are about dominating your dog, there are literally millions of resources out there—websites, books, blogs, television shows, veterinarians, trainers and behavior professionals—instructing you to use force and intimidation to overpower your dog into submission. They say that you, the human, must be the alpha. They’re all wrong. Every single one of them.

### A history of dominance theory

The erroneous approach to canine social behavior known as **dominance theory** (two million-plus Google hits) is based on a study of captive zoo wolves conducted in the 1930s and 1940s by Swiss animal behaviorist Rudolph Schenkel, in which the scientist concluded that wolves in a pack fight to gain dominance, and the winner is the alpha wolf. Schenkel’s observations of captive wolf behavior were erroneously extrapolated to wild wolf behavior, and then to domestic dogs. It was postulated that wolves were in constant competition for higher rank in the hierarchy, and only the aggressive actions of the alpha male and female held the contenders in check. Other behaviorists following Schenkel’s lead also studied captive wolves and confirmed his findings: groups of unrelated wolves brought together in artificial captive environments do, indeed, engage in often-violent and bloody social struggles.

The problem is, that’s not *normal* wolf behavior. As David Mech stated in a study of *wild* wolves, “Attempting to apply information about the behavior of assemblages of unrelated captive wolves to the familial structure of natural packs has resulted in considerable confusion. Such an approach is analogous to trying to draw inferences about human family dynamics by studying humans

in refugee camps. The concept of the alpha wolf as a ‘top dog’ ruling a group of similar-aged compatriots... is particularly misleading.”

What we know now, thanks to Mech and others, is that in the wild, a wolf pack is a family, consisting of a mated pair and their offspring of the past one to three years. Occasionally two or three families may group together. As the offspring mature they disperse from the pack; the only long-term members of the group are the breeding pair. By contrast, in captivity unrelated wolves are forced to live together for many years, creating tension between mature adults that doesn’t happen in a natural wild pack.

But that’s all about wolves anyway, not dogs. How did it happen that dog owners and trainers started thinking all that information (and misinformation) about wolf behavior had anything to do with dogs and dog behavior? According to an article in the July 30, 2010, issue of *Time*, somewhere along the line the logic went something like this: “Dogs are descended from wolves. Wolves live in hierarchical packs in which the aggressive alpha male rules over everyone else. Therefore, humans need to dominate their pet dogs to get them to behave.”

Cesar Millan, the darling of the dominance crowd, is only the latest in a long line of dominance-based trainers who advocate forceful techniques such as the alpha roll. Much of this style of training has roots in the military—which explains the emphasis on punishment. As far back as 1906, Colonel Konrad Most was using heavy-handed techniques to train dogs in the German army, then police and service dogs. He was joined by William Koehler after the end of World War II. Koehler also initially trained dogs for the military prior to his civilian dog-training career, and his writings advocated techniques that including hanging and helicoptering a dog into submission (into unconsciousness, if necessary). To stop a dog from digging, he suggested filling the hole with water and submerging the dog’s head in the water-filled hole until he was nearly drowned. (Obviously *not* a technique I recommend!)

Fast-forward several years to 1978 and the emergence of the Monks of New Skete as the new model for dog training, asserting a philosophy that “understanding is the key to communication, compassion, and communion” with your dog. The Monks were considered cutting edge at the time, and were in fact responsible for the widespread popularization of the alpha-wolf roll-over (now shortened to the alpha roll), in a complete and utter misinterpretation of the submissive roll-over that is *voluntarily offered* by the less assertive dog, not forcibly commanded by the stronger one. They also advocated the frequent use of other physical punishments such as the **scruff shake** (grab both sides of the dog’s face and shake, lifting the dog off the ground) and **cuffing** under the dog’s chin with an open hand several times, hard enough to cause the dog to yelp.

Even the Monks’ most recent book (2007), while professing that “training dogs is about building a relationship that is based on respect and love and understanding” is still heavy on outdated, erroneous dominance theory. Immediately following their suggestion that “a kindly, gentle look tells the dog she is loved and accepted,” they say

“But it is just as vital to communicate a stern reaction to bad behavior. A piercing, sustained stare into a dog’s eyes tells her who’s in charge; it establishes the proper hierarchy of dominance between person and pet.” (*Author’s note: It can also elicit a strong aggressive response if you choose the wrong dog as the subject for your piercing, sustained stare.*)

Despite the strong emergence of positive reinforcement—based training in the last 20 years, the Monks don’t seem to have grasped that the “respect” part needs to go both ways for a truly compassionate communion with your dog. Perhaps one of these days...

### Enter the clicker

Just when it seemed that dog training had completely stagnated in turn-of-the-century military-style dominance-theory training, marine mammal trainer Karen Pryor wrote her seminal book, *Don’t Shoot the Dog*. Originally published in 1985, this small, unassuming volume was intended as a self-help book for human behavior, the author never dreaming that her modest book, paired with a small plastic device that made a clicking sound, would launch a massive paradigm shift in the world of dog training and behavior. But it did.



## State News You Can Use!

### IOWA

#### IOWA’S PHEASANT HUNTING SEASON OPENED OCT 28

An estimated 50,000 blaze orange-clad hunters dotted Iowa’s countryside at 8 a.m. on Oct. 28, for the opening of Iowa’s 2017 pheasant hunting season.

This annual event melds generations of Iowans who reconnect with their hunting heritage. While most hunters will generally only spend the first week or two in the field, those who venture out later will likely be rewarded with success.

“Hunters can expect to find similar bird numbers to last year, but the October rain has our harvest running behind schedule so opening weekend was not as successful as years past,” said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “However, a late harvest could lead to success later in the season.”

Results from the statewide August roadside survey indicate higher pheasant numbers were found in a line of counties stretching from northwest to southeast, but birds are available everywhere quality habitat is found.

Bogenschutz said he expects almost a repeat of 2016 pheasant season, where hunters harvested about 250,000 roosters.

#### Quail season opened Oct. 28

Iowa’s quail population is at a 30 year high and landowners report seeing quail in areas that they had not seen them in years but the bulk of the quail population is in the southern three tiers of counties.

“Quail hunting is different than pheasant hunting. Quail are found in the shrubby patches near crop ground versus in fields of habitat,” he said. “Quail hunters will have less competition so if someone wants to give it a try, I would encourage them to knock on doors to get permission, don’t be shy.”

Iowa’s partridge season opened Oct. 14. Partridge hunting primarily takes place in the north-central counties.

### PLACES TO HUNT

The Iowa DNR’s online hunting atlas lists nearly 700,000 acres of public hunting land, including more than 20,000 acres of land enrolled in the popular Iowa Habitat for Access Program (IHAP) allowing hunter access to private land.

Each area on the atlas includes a link to a map with property boundaries, the size of the area, habitat type, species of wildlife likely found, if nontoxic shot is required and more. The map is available as a downloadable pdf that can be printed or saved to a smartphone.

To view the atlas, go to [www.iowadnr.gov/hunting](http://www.iowadnr.gov/hunting) and click on Places to Hunt and Shoot in the left column.

### ILLINOIS

#### ANNUAL YOUTH HUNT IS JAN. 14-15

Youth interested in participating in the annual Central Illinois Youth Goose Hunt, sponsored by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), may register now for the hunt scheduled for January 14-15, 2018.

To register for a drawing to participate in the hunt, youth hunters

must phone in to the IDNR at 217-785-8060 by the registration deadline of Friday, December 29.

The youth goose hunt will be held at private waterfowl hunting clubs in the Canton area in Fulton Co.

A lottery drawing involving all youth who phone in to register will be conducted on January 2, 2018, and youth hunters selected will be notified by mail. First-time applicants will be given a priority over previous participants in the drawing.

The hunt is open to youth ages 10-17 at the time of the hunt. All applicants must possess a valid Illinois hunting or sportsman’s license, have a Harvest Information Program (HIP) registration number, and have a 20 gauge or larger shotgun. Youth hunt participants must be accompanied by a parent or guardian who must possess a valid firearm owner’s identification (FOID) card.

To register for the hunt or for more information, call 217-785-8060.

### KANSAS

#### GLEN ELDER HOST YOUTH AND WOMEN’S PHEASANT HUNT

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) and sponsoring partners conducted the 2017 Youth and Women’s Celebrity Pheasant Hunt at Waconda Lake on Saturday, Dec. 9. The event began at 7:15 a.m. with breakfast in the Hopewell Church basement at Glen Elder State Park, followed by a pre-hunt safety program. Hunters, guides, and mentors will then spend the remainder of the morning and early afternoon hunting various limited-access refuge areas around Waconda Lake. Lunch was provided by the Waconda Lake Association.



#### KANSAS BIRD HUNTERS TAKE TO THE FIELD SECOND SATURDAY IN NOVEMBER

It’s a Kansas tradition to open the pheasant and quail seasons on the second Saturday in November. If you’re a bird hunter, you lost sleep thinking about opening day. The Kansas pheasant and quail seasons are Nov. 11, 2017-Jan. 31, 2018.

It’s a big deal, both to hunters and to the state’s economy. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, hunting pumps more than \$400 million into the Kansas economy each year, and while hunters find a myriad of game species to pursue in Kansas, pheasant and quail are high on the list. Year in, year out, Kansas will rank among the top three states in the nation for harvest of pheasant and bobwhite quail.

Based on the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Small Game Harvest Survey data, more than 80,000 hunters will hunt pheasants in Kansas this year, and while there is some overlap, more than 62,000 will hunt quail. Approximately 40,000 of those hunters will be nonresidents. If you don’t believe it, try to reserve a motel room in any small town in western Kansas on Nov. 11. Conservatively, nonresident bird hunters will spend more than \$150 per day on lodging, fuel, food and supplies while hunting in Kansas, adding much-needed dollars into the small communities that dot prime Kansas hunting regions.

Pre-season reports predict good hunting in many areas of the state for both pheasants and quail. Precipitation patterns in much of Kansas in recent years created ideal nesting and brood-rearing conditions, and hunters will find heavy cover this fall. The 2017 Upland Bird Hunting Forecast is available online at [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com), and provides details about expected bird numbers by region. The 2017 Kansas Hunting and Fur Harvesting Regulations Summary is also a must-have for hunters because it includes all season dates, bag and possession limits, as well as license requirements and fees. And hunters should also consult the 2017 Kansas Hunting Atlas, which has maps showing all state, federal and Walk-in Hunting Access (WIHA) pub-

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