

How Do They Know?

Treat time! Friday has endured her grooming session with customary good nature, and I head for the fridge to get her a reward. The dishwasher's rhythmic thumping and sloshing merrily masks the air conditioner's contented hum as I open the fridge door. I gently lift out the slice of baked liver in its plastic sandwich bag.

But before the fridge door has closed, there's the unmistakable padding of Beardie paws in the hallway, and an instant later several sets of eager eyes are optimistically focused on me and the liver in my hand. How do they know? Crispin was three rooms away, sleeping on my bed, and Glynnis was in the bathroom two rooms distant, snoozing in the tub.

Even if they heard the fridge door open over the noise of the dishwasher, it's not like I don't open it a dozen or more times a day. After all, it's where I keep my stash of chocolate. But somehow they always know when I've extracted liver. But how do they know?

It's essentially the same scenario when it comes to dog biscuits. Those treats are kept in a small walk-in cupboard off the kitchen that also houses such items as tea bags, rice, canned goods, and baking needs. Taking any of those mundane items out of the cupboard doesn't even rate the twitch of a furry ear. When I reach in to extract a biscuit, however, I might as well take out a handful, because the troops will come trotting in from near and far faster than you can say Milk Bone. How do they know?

Then there's Brett. He always comes when called—as long as I have a piece of the aforementioned liver. I don't have to wave it at him or even let him see it. He just seems to know whether I have it or not. No liver, no Brett. How does he know?

Crispin is the self-styled boss of the premises, but he's a benevolent dictator. A scowl and a low growl is all he uses to show his displeasure. He has a quirk where Gigi, the Briard, is concerned, however. If he's outside and she goes out, he waits for her at the door and as she exits, he gives a loud *Woof!* in her face. It's as if he's letting her know she's only allowed outdoors by the grace of his generous nature—and don't you forget it!

The catch is that my house has a front door and a back door. And Gigi can leave by either one. But whichever one she chooses, that's where Crispin will be waiting. How does he know?

Some years ago, my mom noticed their Beardie always parked herself by the front door about five minutes or so before my dad came home from work. Since dad didn't always come home at the same time, she wondered how Cocoa (a chocolate-brown, of course) knew when to await his arrival. Dad ventured she might know the sound of his car and, as an experiment; he turned off the engine a block away and coasted down the street.

Didn't matter. Cocoa was still waiting at the door five minutes before his arrival. So another night, he parked one street over and walked home—only to be greeted by Cocoa, who had been patiently waiting for him. On another occasion he rode home with a coworker who dropped him off. And Cocoa had been sitting at the door waiting for him. How did she know?

Are Beardies into mind reading? Or are they just so tuned in to us that they pick up on subtle hints of which we're unaware?

OK, I'll let you in on a secret: At an obedience trial, I called my Beardie on the recall exercise, and she didn't move, just sat there, staring at me. Instantly closing my eyes, I pictured her getting up and trotting to me. When I opened my eyes, she was on her way in, just as pictured. Do you suppose an obedience judge would consider the mental message a "second signal"? —*Alice Bixler*; alicejb@att.net; *Bearded Collie Club of America website: bcca.us*