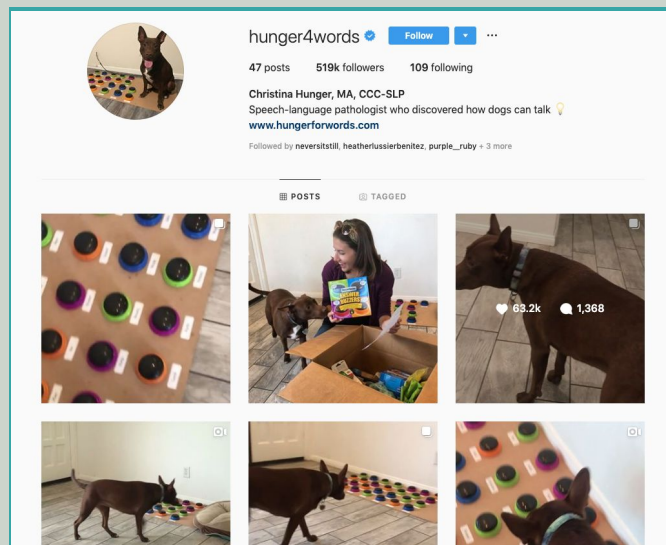# CLICKING WITH MACKENZIE

After a quick break, we are back with week 4 of donkey mayhem. Which, if you tuned in to week 3, you know is an accurate description!

My goal was simple: begin teaching these lovely ladies that words correspond to things by using foods they love and buttons that play recordings when you press them. Our training session quickly devolved into re*donk*ulousness, which I'll get into below. Before we dive into what could have gone better, let's talk about the plan and animal cognition.

Recently, many studies are showing that animals of all sorts are capable of complicated speech. We've known for decades that certain animals, not just humans, naturally exhibit different kinds of language. Crows have been documented passing on knowledge of masked humans who raided nests to members who did not witness the nest raiding. Other great apes have communicated with human scientists using sign language. And more recently, prairie dogs have even been shown to have descriptors for predators.

As researchers learn how to better teach language and observe its use, we're finding more and more animals are capable of representative communication. My question in working with the DIVAS was, are *they* capable of that? To answer it, I modeled my training on that of Christina Hunger's work with her dog, Stella. Stella uses buttons to "say" 26 distinct words, often adding words together to create short phrases. If you get a second, be sure to take a look at their work on *hungerforwords.com* or on Instagram!

My modest goal for our last training session was to start working on three words: CARROT, GRAIN, and APPLE. Having already introduced hitting the buttons in week 2, I was hoping to create a new association: certain buttons lead to specific rewards.

To do that I had to make sure the DIVAS could distinguish one button from another. At first, I was hoping that having different-colored buttons would be enough. But, it turns out, donkeys are dichromatic and can only see variations of two colors–blue and green. Most humans get three. So, to make up for the lack of color variation, I painted dots on the buttons, which will hopefully make them distinct for our DIVAS.

A QUICK RECAP OF WEEK 3

So how did my goals translate to our training session? Well, goals are goals. I arrived with 4 working buttons, grain, carrots, and apples. Over the course of our 30 minutes of training, Gertie worked on proving she could reach really far under the rails. Maude, for her part, was more interested in singing for her dinner than hitting buttons. And the buttons, it turns out, are not donkey-proof. Two were quickly rendered unusable by Gertie's whacks, bites, and knocks!

Still, Gertie seemed to be picking up the correlation between the button making a sound and food. Maude showed me that she prefers nosing buttons strongly over hoofing them. You can also see above that Gertie was able to ignore me while Maude worked on her training and was also able to successfully hit the buttons. Next time, my goal is to have a better button setup that can't be so easily knocked about, and a clearer treat delivery process!

SO, CAN DONKEYS TALK?

WEEK 4 GOALS

We're still a long way from the sort of talking that Stella the dog can do. This week, with some refinement, I hope that we can establish the buttons for CARROT, APPLE and GRAIN!

Be sure to check the calendar to catch the live broadcast and see how the DIVAS and I do in real time! And drop a line in chat if you have any questions! Join us as our story continues.

Broadcast Date:_____ **Time:**_____

Location:_____