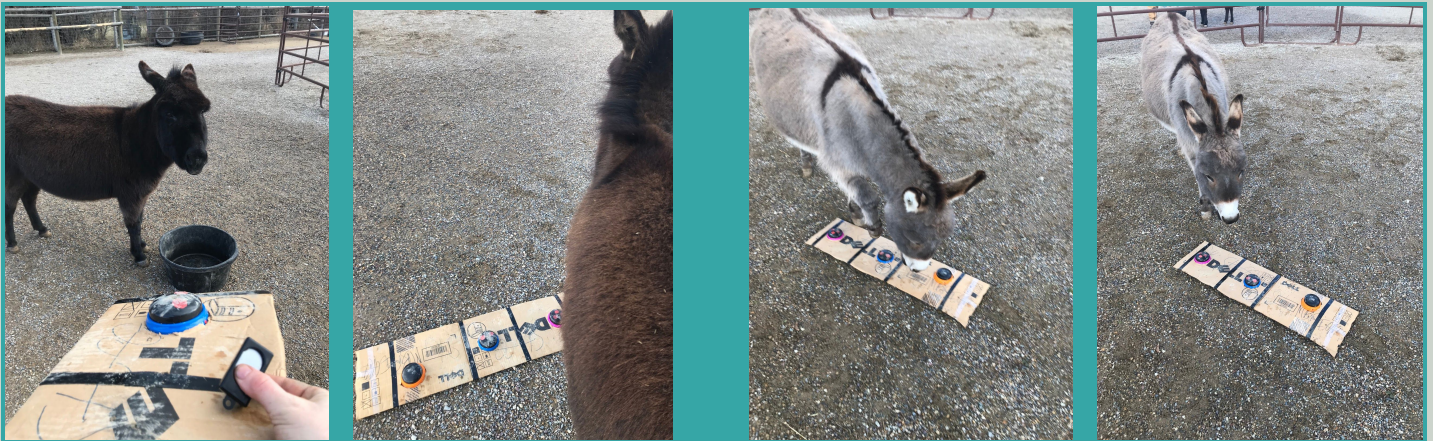# CLICKING WITH MACKENZIE

This will be our last session with the DIVAS for a couple of weeks as we break for the holidays. I'm very excited about how far we have gotten in a relatively short number of training sessions and look forward to what we might achieve when we come back!

As I mentioned last week, my goal has been to demonstrate that the donkeys can use words to communicate. We have started creating a correspondence to treats and buttons by playing recordings when the donkeys press them. This relationship is a flicker in Gertie's eye, while Maude is so gentle with the buttons that she hasn't been able to trigger the sound yet. They are a funny foil to one another – Gertie so rough she breaks the buttons; Maude so gentle she is hesitant to even touch the buttons, and when she does it's more of a brush than a push.

Still, the training has gone progressively better each week. We've begun to create a real (and adorable) conversational game that uses visual and verbal cues to communicate with the donkeys. Next steps: improve their accuracy and expand their fluency and words.

Introducing the buttons was rather overwhelming at first. The system turned out to be a bit more complicated than it seemed. Still, these DIVAS have shown an eagerness to learn. They just need to cement the first few connections between the buttons, the sounds they make, and real-world things. Once a point is made, they'll be given an opportunity to process and apply the new information to more complicated scenarios.

They've already started to show their intelligence. This is just one of many step-by-step training processes, and their salience of the task will cascade into other situations. That process, in turn, can have a huge impact on an animal's capacity to learn.

As I mentioned last week, there are many different ways that multiple individuals of a species may talk to one another. And there is much reason to think that certain species, including humans, can learn forms of nonhuman language. We know this from

observations of seals, which are adept at mimicking human speech by producing guttural sounds. Elephants, many bird species, and even orcas and dolphins have been shown mimicking human language. I'm looking forward to adding our DIVAS to the list of animals using human words to better get by with their partners.

A QUICK RECAP OF WEEK 4

We continued with our previous goal of working on three words: CARROT, GRAIN, and APPLE. Compared to the debacle that ensued when I tried to introduce the buttons on week 3, we had a much better go of it last week.

We are dialing in on a better system to hold the buttons. Though Gertie still managed to knock one of them into glitching, she did work out which button signified apples and returned to it several times, expressing both the association and a preference!

It was helpful to have an assistant, Michal, there as well to help train and generalize the behaviors. Our other goal of diminishing the resource guarding and mouthiness is going great, with no instances of resource guarding that we noticed, and much-diminished mouthiness, both in degree and number of instances!

Also, I could tell the buttons' consistent location helped Gertie map which one led to what food. Over the break, I hope to come up with a better system!

WEEK 5 GOALS

We continue this week with a few tweaks that should help keep the buttons from falling apart during training, and we will try to end on some more fun training since we wore out their brains with a little too much button work last time!

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! Thanks so much for all your support and enthusiasm. We're making it happen together.

Broadcast Date:_____ **Time:**_____

Location:_____