

Purina Invests \$200,000 in Interspecies Communication Research Partnership with University of California San Diego to Help Give Dogs a Voice

Grant Expands on Research around Canine Communication with Augmentative Interspecies Communication Devices that Could Help Dogs Communicate with Words

SAN DIEGO, Oct. 15, 2024 /[PRNewswire](#)/ -- Tail wags, head tilts and puppy eyes – our pets say so much without using any words. And now, Purina is investing in groundbreaking research with the University of California San Diego to understand if pets can leverage Augmentative Interspecies Communication (AIC) devices, or audio buttons, to better communicate with humans.

The partnership includes a \$200,000 grant to the university's Comparative Cognition Lab, one of the world's leading labs for research studies on pet communication, to support research on the use of soundboard-based audio buttons to gain a deeper understanding of pets' cognitive abilities and help Purina understand the feasibility of future citizen science studies using the technology. The soundboards used for the research are equipped with buttons, which, when pressed, play a recording of a word, such as "outside," "play," "walk," or "potty." Through the research, [UC San Diego's Comparative Cognition Lab](#) and Purina aim to better understand to what degree pets can use the buttons to put words together to communicate their wants, needs and thoughts.

"What excites me most about this research partnership is the opportunity to give pets an actual voice in our research for the first time," said Dr. Annie Valuska, principal scientist on Purina's pet behavior team.

"Working with the UC San Diego Comparative Cognition Lab and thousands of at-home pet button users will allow us to explore new ways to better understand the needs and wants of our canine consumers."

In a [recently published paper](#), the Comparative Cognition Lab showed that dogs trained to use AIC devices pay attention to and respond in contextually appropriate ways to play-related and outside-related words. In an [earlier review study](#), the lab has shown that some animals can be trained to use AIC devices to make simple requests of their caretakers. New research from the Comparative Cognition Lab will build on those studies, looking into how and to what degree owner-trained family dogs can use these devices to intentionally communicate their needs and wants.

"This research can help us better understand our pets and what they want and need, which has the potential to improve their health and wellbeing in a variety of ways," said Dr. Federico Rossano, founder and director of the UC San Diego Comparative Cognition Lab. "Remotely conducted citizen science studies could be a critical tool for studying the large and geographically widespread population of pets and pet owners."

This is not the first investment Purina has made in the area of pet communication. Through the company's [Pet Care Innovation Prize Program](#), Purina selected the AIC-focused startup FluentPet as the 2022 grand prize winner. As the winner, FluentPet, a San Diego-based startup that uses cognitive science and academic research to make teaching, learning and communicating easier for pets and their people, received a \$10,000 grant from Purina and participated in a bootcamp accelerator experience at Purina's headquarters with Purina executives, business experts, industry leaders, pet experts and veterinarians to broaden their network, strengthen their business plan and access knowledge from across the pet care landscape.

Learn more about Purina's research and academic partnerships [here](#).

About Purina

Nestlé Purina PetCare creates richer lives for pets and the people who love them. Founded in 1894, Purina has helped dogs and cats live longer, healthier lives by offering scientifically based nutritional innovations. Purina manufactures some of the world's most trusted and popular pet care products, including Purina ONE, Pro Plan, Fancy Feast and Tidy Cats. Our more than 10,000 U.S. associates take pride in our trusted pet food, treat and litter brands that feed 46 million dogs and 68 million cats every year. More than 500 Purina scientists, veterinarians, and pet care experts ensure our commitment to unsurpassed quality and nutrition.

Purina promotes responsible pet care through our scientific research, our products and our support for pet-related organizations. Over the past five years, Purina has contributed more than \$150 million towards organizations that bring, and keep, people and pets together, as well as those that help our communities and environment thrive.

Purina is part of Nestlé, a global leader in Nutrition, Health and Wellness. For more information, visit purina.com or [subscribe here](#) to get the latest Purina news.

About University of California San Diego

At the University of California San Diego, a culture of risk-taking, collaboration and innovation emerged early on. Established in 1960, UC San Diego has been shaped by exceptional scholars who aren't afraid to push boundaries, challenge expectations and redefine conventional wisdom in order to make our world better. The only criterion our founders had for their campus was that it must be distinctive – and being experimental has been the norm since day one. Learn more at www.ucsd.edu.

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