WHAT IS APPLIED ZOOPHARMACOGNOSY?

Zoopharmacognosy is the study of how animals self-medicate with medicinal compounds; the term is from the ancient Greek 'zoo' (animal), 'pharmaco' (remedy) and 'gnosy' (knowing). The term is typically applied to vertebrates (pharmacophagy is used for invertebrates for historical reasons), encouraging and allowing the animal to guide its own health by enriching its environment.

Unlike their wild counterparts, captive and domesticated animals rarely have the opportunity to forage on medical plants. Applied zoopharmacognosy works on the principle of giving back to animals the medicinal, non-food range of remedies, similar in their chemical make-up to those they would naturally seek and use in the wild. These include a variety of essential oils, absolutes, plant extracts, macerated oils, tubers, clays, algae, seaweeds and minerals. The powerful secondary compounds found within many medicinal plants often have a biological activity that can be both medicinal and toxic in nature. Whether such substances end up being toxic or medicinal has a great deal to do with dosage and the physiological requirements of the animal. Plant oils are normally taken in small quantities by an animal when it needs a plant's specific medicinal properties. Once the animal has selected its remedy, it will then guide the session by inhaling it, taking it orally or by rubbing a part of its body into it. When the condition has cleared or improved, the animal will normally reject aromas that were previously chosen and enjoyed. If the condition is allowed to escalate and worsen then more potent remedies will be selected and just like the caterpillar study below, their choice will be specific to the bacteria, parasite, behavior or condition. External applications (as always with the consent of the animal), can be applied to specific areas; such as wounds, skin disorders and muscular problems.

In Applied Zoopharmacognosy it is important that animals are allowed to walk away from the remedies at all times and that they are not put into the feed; this ensures that they are not forced on to the animal. It is a practice that allows the animal to use its innate ability to select the remedies it needs and guide its dosage. It is this innate ability that is the key to its health and well–being and is a behavior that has been employed by animals since the beginning of time; a good testimonial for the long-term use of these medicinal compounds.