Dogs sniff out an elusive cactus

The usefulness of detection dogs to our society continues to steadily increase. Such dogs have been trained to find explosives, illegal drugs, currency, gourmet fungus, human remains, contraband electronics, firearms, termites, and bed bugs, and to detect cancerous tumors, and low-blood-sugar emergencies in people with diabetes. And detection dogs perform these functions even if the scent has been covered up or scrubbed away.

A dog’s sense of smell can be anywhere from 10,000 to 100,000 times more sensitive than our own. One reason for this is that a dog’s nose has about 50 times as many olfactory receptors as ours does. Also, the part of a dog’s brain responsible for analyzing smells is proportionally 40 times larger than ours.

The most recent application of the dog’s superpower is ecological scent detection in the location

1. Bolt, the cactus-sniffing dog. Photo by Lauralea Oliver.

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