The beggars, Poyarkov says, are excellent psychologists and know how to recognise a soft-touch passerby. ‘The dog will come to a little old lady,’ he told Sternthal, ‘start smiling and wagging his tail, and sure enough, he’ll get food.’

Wild dogs have even learned to cross Moscow’s now busy streets with pedestrians. Being colour blind, they wait for the walking-man signal at traffic lights. They’ve also learned how to ambush people eating fastfood – they really like shawarma – by sneaking up behind and barking at them.

According to Andrei Neuronov, an author and specialist in animal behaviour and psychology, though, there’s another, if tiny, specialist sub-group of 500 super-learners, called metro dogs, that now live in the Moskovskiy metropoliten stations and have learned to negotiate their way underground.

An even smaller sub-sub-group of about 20 fast learners now actually commutes using the metro. How on earth, or more to the point under it, have these 20 elite wild dogs learned how to ride the metro?

‘They figure out where they are by smell, by recognising the name of the station from the recorded announcer’s voice and by time intervals,’ Neuronov told Sternthal, but also ride only a few stops.

Typically, they take a seat, but sit on the floor if the carriage is crowded, which is why they usually go for the less crowded first or last carriage.

They also know how to avoid the station officials at the metro’s electronic turnstiles. Who taught these dogs? Well, they did, and whether they have a ticket or not, Muscovites kinda like them, and post photos at www.metrodog.ru.

This month’s Last Word was written by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher, and last year’s highly commended winner in the Best Columnist category of the Melbourne Press Club Quill Awards for the Last Word, following advice from Max, Jake, Buddy, Rocky, Buster, Duke, Maggie, Molly, Lady, Sadie and Missy.