

Speaking Squawkish  
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### Sensory Bubble

So what the heck is Umwelt? Umwelt is the sensory bubble (anatomical and physiological) that animals in a particular habitat with a specific niche have evolved to live in their ideal wild world. Sharper minds may wonder about the number of senses and functional anatomy that animals possess, but recognizing their uniqueness is imperative to help to create either life in captivity worth living or the wisdom of letting them exist in their naturally evolved habitat and niche. After reading the book *The Immense World* by Ed Young, the inclusion of animal umwelt should become a part of our consciousness of the welfare of our patients. It is a 13-chapter book that details exceptional senses. The book forces thought and rethought into our assumptions of what and how a particular unique anatomy and sense function in nature for a given species. The introduction illustrates animal senses as a house with nine windows, each window being a sense the animal may possess. The animal's perspective on the garden would be unique according to the characteristics of their (size of the window) individual senses. To enrich our patient's lives, we must ask, "How does that animal's form explain how the animal's functional use?". The resonance of this book in our field should be an epiphany for how we can better serve their medical and welfare needs. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGWCtpZ1L44> Lastly, perhaps the quest to understand animal umwelt will help us connect and resonate with our fellow humans gifted or challenged with Autism. Understanding how autistic children sense and perceive the world may allow us to appreciate and benefit from their often incredibly talented Umwelt. We should begin to engage and challenge our clients through their lens that the pets they keep should be viewed as tiny autistics, and it is our responsibility to appreciate them for what they are and are not. They are furred, feathered, and scaled autistic beings; we are responsible for finding their sensory connections.

### Ben's Story

I want to start with a story about a talented 24-year-old boy named Ben, whom I recently became inspired by. He is the son of Matt Kredich (my son's university swim coach) and Kim Kredich. Ben has a twin (Miles) and a younger brother, Coleman. He plays many instruments and is a musical savant and professional musician. Ben earned a college degree from the UT and lives independently near the campus in Knoxville, Tennessee. Ben also happens to have Autism and was diagnosed at a relatively young age. He loves animals, speaks to them like friends, and interprets what he feels they are saying in various accents. He tells his family they can't understand dogs because dogs speak in "Barkish." His family and friends describe him as inclusive, kind, wondrous, happy, and perhaps odd in intriguing ways. Ben learns something every day, and that makes him happy. Whenever Ben hears a new word, he says, "That is a new one." His brother Coleman says Ben sees more beauty in a blade of grass than most couldn't see in a sunset. Miles, his twin, and Ben have synesthesia, which is when one sense is activated, and an unrelated sense gets activated. A note on the piano might activate his brain to see orange or







