

# Got a Bird Dog? Hunt it!

a panel presentation by club members



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## Hunting, the early stages

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- **How young is old enough?**
  - Age isn't an issue, *exposure* to birds and gunshot should be the determining factors.
    - Keep in mind your dog's age when deciding to take him/her hunting. Don't keep the young ones out too long.
    - Your dog can learn a lot by hunting with an experienced hunting dog. Be aware though, an inexperienced dog may behave "rudely"—make sure the other dog can handle it.
    - You don't even need to worry about shooting birds for your young/inexperienced dog in her/his first season. Wild birds can teach a lot. Consider taking your dog hunting on wild birds without a shotgun (don't recommend pen-raised unless they are strong flyers and your dog won't catch them).
    - Only take your dog hunting if you have control over him/her (STRONG recall).
  - You can start teaching puppies basic obedience commands ("Here", "Whoa", "Heel", "Kennel")
    - These commands are the foundation of a bird dog's skill set.
    - Should be taught away from birds—this is "yard work"
    - Instill a strong desire to retrieve (more yard work). Play, play, play retrieve games with dummies/dead birds. Huge praise every time your dog carries/holds something (if an inappropriate object, don't scold, just replace with a suitable object).
    - Don't go overboard with the retrieving games or other yard work. Keep your training sessions short and *always* end them on a positive, happy note.
  - Let your puppy BE a puppy—don't apply more pressure than s/he can handle.
    - Remember, your pup is a baby with a short attention span. Too much pressure can turn a young bird dog off or diminish his/her desire to hunt/retrieve.
    - Be creative in your training—keep it fun!
    - **SOCIALIZE! SOCIALIZE! SOCIALIZE!** A confident, well-socialized pup will make a much better hunting companion but, most importantly, a good canine citizen.
- **Conditioning your dog to hunt**
  - Regular, off-leash exercise will keep your bird dog in good condition.
  - Regular examinations from a vet will help determine if your dog can hold up physically, to the rigors of hunting (look for hereditary/congenital defects).
  - Don't expect your "couch potato" bird dog to hold up during hunting season.
  - Keep your dog at the correct weight (do the rib check—see attachment).
  - Optimal nutrition + proper conditioning = endurance
  - Swimming is an excellent way to exercise/condition your dog.
  - Introduce your dog to a variety of different cover (start when s/he is young!).
  - Teach your dog to drink from a squirt bottle.
  - Keep your dog's nails trimmed.
  - Be mindful of your dog's feet and pads (toughen those pads!).

- If your dog only ever runs in soccer field type grass, his/her pads will be soft.
  - Multiple days of hunting can make your dog's feet/pads very sore. Keep an eye and don't push it. You should always carry a pair of dog boots case you get into goat-head stickers/cactus. Make sure your dog learns how to wear the boots. Use vet wrap and duct tape to keep the boots on your dog's feet.
- **Introducing your bird dog to birds**
  - A bird dog needs birds!
  - Be patient! Each dog will react differently when first exposed.
  - The more birds a dog catches, the less s/he will want to point.
  - Be careful when introducing birds (can make dogs bird shy).
  - Pigeons are good for training (harder for a dog to catch).
    - Learn how to plant pigeons (go to, <http://link.brightcove.com/services/link/bcpid1454928966/bctid1478199318>, for a demo). If working your dog on loosely planted birds, use a check cord.
    - Consider using wire cages or launchers.
- **Socializing to gun shot**
  - Properly socialize your dog to gunshot *before* taking him/her hunting.
  - Do not EVER take your dog to a shooting range in order to socialize him/her to gunshot.
  - Introduce your dog to a starter pistol first.
    - Start from a distance of 100 yards away.
    - Fire the starter pistol when your dog is in full chase of a flying bird and running away from you.
    - Close the distance SLOWLY.
    - Watch your dog for *any* reaction to the gunshot—if s/he reacts you've probably moved in too quickly.
  - Once your dog is comfortable with the starter pistol, introduce (from a distance and slowly) a 20 ga. shotgun.
  - Take your time with this process! Do NOT rush it—fixing a gun shy dog is a ton of work.
  - This process is thoroughly covered in Perfection Kennels, “The Perfect Start” DVD.
- **Resources to get started:**
  - Pointing Dog Journal, <http://www.pointingdogjournal.com/>
  - Gun Dog Magazine, <http://www.gundogmag.com/> (lots of great articles/videos online for *free*)
  - Point!: Training the All-Seasons Birddog, by James B. Spencer
  - The Perfect Start, <http://www.perfectionkennel.com/>