

# George Hickox's Field Training Tips

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

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## **Lay a Solid Foundation in the Yard First - Offer Quality Training Sessions to Allow Your Dog to Mature**

Once the yard work is completed, we are ready to assemble the building blocks in the field. Our yard-training program takes months to complete. Remember it is quality sessions not quantity sessions. By taking time, being patient, being consistent, and letting the dog develop and mature, we will have a dog that will be ready for advanced field work. We will have to use a lot less pressure in the field on birds by laying a solid foundation in the yard. So will you. And remember, no dog looks better and more stylish by receiving more pressure.

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## **Alternating Bird "Plants" Rewards Your Dog Every Time**

When I take the four-legged student to the bird field for training exercises, I will alternate bird "plants" to the left and right of the direction line I am traveling. If I want a dog to quarter twenty yards to my left and twenty yards to my right, I will plant a bird twenty yards to the left of my travel line, and further up twenty yards to the right. I will continue planting alternate sides up the field. This will prevent the dog from running straight down the field. He will be rewarded for running a left to right and right to left pattern by finding birds. And birds are a bigger reward than a biscuit or praise.

Let's say I plant six pigeons in the bird field. At least three of the planted birds will be "pick-ups" - birds the dog can actually catch. A locked-wing pigeon works great, or you can wrap a rubber band around the bird's flight feathers (the long primary feathers), preventing the bird from flying off. If you are training with pheasants, guinea fowl, or other birds that will run out of the country, hobble their legs, restricting their ability to leave the area entirely.

You can use these pick-up birds over and over, assuming your dog is not hard mouthed. Your bill for purchasing birds will go down and your dog will be more inclined to flush flight birds to the air quickly. A win—win situation every time.

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## **Teaching Your Dog New Training Exercises and Drills**

When advancing a dog's training and development, it is imperative that we understand how a dog relates to new training exercises, commands, and drills. We, as teachers, must realize that if a training exercise is not an exact duplicate of a previous snapshot in the dog's mind, it is brand new for the dog. *Dogs Do Not Understand Concepts!* Therefore, it is imperative that trainers progress in very small, gradual steps and not expect the dog to grasp what we may view as a minimal change to what has already been taught. No matter how small a difference between a new drill and one that has already been taught, that slight change is brand new to the dog.

For example, if a dog has been taught to heel only on the left side, you still need to teach him to heel on the right side. Otherwise, it is a new concept for the dog. If an owner pats the dog on his right side and commands "Heel," the dog will not understand what is expected of him - the snapshot in the dog's memory shows heeling on the left side; there is no snapshot showing heeling on the right. If the dog is corrected for not heeling on the right, he will not understand why he is being corrected.

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## **Senior Sporting Breeds at Risk if Allowed to Become Overweight (Low Fat Nutrition and Daily Exercise - Keys to Their Good Health)**

All dogs eventually get old and the aging process is inevitable. However, the aging process may be accelerated prematurely by two years in overweight dogs. In discussing old age and the symptoms, causes, and effects in canine sporting breeds, with Lyle Christiansen and Heather Cox (D.V.M.'s at Cedar Animal Hospital in Richmond Hill, GA) obesity ranks at the top of the disabling list. Dr. Christiansen and Dr. Cox felt that 40% to 50% of the sporting breeds that visit their clinic are overweight. That strikes me as a hard-to-understand reality. We are talking about athletes here. Most often obesity is induced by owner ignorance or lack of understanding. Owners certainly are not purposefully attempting to shorten their dog's lives. Well, ignorance can be solved through education. Now stupidity – that is an entirely different kettle of fish.

Don't allow your dog to become fat! As your dog's calorie needs become less, feed less. That does not mean feeding an inferior food that does not adequately support the dog's nutritional demands. Unless your vet prescribes a low protein diet for an abnormality, feed a high protein diet, but a lower fat diet for the less active senior canine is ideal. Understand that weight (in metabolically healthy canines) is a function of calories *in* versus calories *out*. If a dog is ingesting more calories than he burns, he gains weight. If the dog expends more calories than he digests, he loses weight. Fat is higher in calories per gram. By reducing the percentage of fat rather than the protein in the dog's diet, weight gain can be kept under control in the less active dog. During the hunting seasons and periods of higher activity, the percentage of fat in the diet should increase.

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### **Ideal Hunting Companions - Sound Genetics and Reputable Breed Play a Major Role**

With any luck, and a whole lot of planning, a dog should give you a decade plus of tremendous enjoyment. By examining your expectations, both around the house and in the field, purchasing sound genetics, and buying the right breed for you from a reputable breeder or trainer, luck will be less of a factor.

A bragging rights hunting companion must have the right genetics from birth. Since all dogs are not created equal, buy a dog with the best pedigree you can find and afford. The pedigree that reads like a who's who in the field trial hall of fame is the best guarantee of ensuring you have a pup that has the genetics needed to allow the dog, with proper training, to become the hunting companion you dream of. These dogs are easier to train, develop quicker, are more forgiving of training mistakes, and have superior hunting instincts.

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### **To Be Effective - Introduce Your Dog to a Bark Collar Before Opening Day**

If a dog is barking while staked out or crated in the vehicle, he is burning glucose and depleting his energy. The dog will have less stamina when put on the ground to hunt and is likely to be less responsive to commands. A bark collar is a great investment to prevent the dog from yipping his energy away. It is advisable to introduce the dog to the bark collar before opening day.

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### **Shallow Water is Best When First Teaching Retrieving Training**

Make sure you have properly introduced your dog to water before expecting Fido to make a brilliant retrieve on a grouse that tumbled down into a beaver pond. I like to take the dog to a shallow pond or slow moving creek on a hot day. I want the footing to be solid, not mucky. Run your dog on a warm day and bring him to the water. You might walk in to cool yourself off, while offering him confidence at the same time. If your dog retrieves, throw him a short retrieve in the shallow water. For the first few retrieves, throw the retrieving object no farther out than the point where the dog's feet can just touch bottom.

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### **Line Steady - Bring the Bird Back to Your Dog**

When line-steadying a dog or teaching a pointing breed to be steady to the flush, bring the bird back to the dog. Line steady means the dog remains by the handler's side before releasing upon command to retrieve. We often hear that a dog needs the reward of the retrieve. The problem is that when teaching a dog to be line steady or steady to flush, we are teaching him to stay put. If the dog is sent on the retrieve, he is being rewarded for leaving. I prefer to throw or launch a bird (I use clip-winged pigeons, but a retrieving buck will suffice in the beginning) and reward the dog for staying by, bringing the bird back to the dog.

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### **Remote Electronic Collar Work**

Do the initial remote collar work for "Whoa" with the electronic collar on your dog's belly. For all of my yard work, I place the electronic collar on the dog's neck for "Kennel," "Here," and "Heel," and I reserve the belly for all of my "Whoa" work. The reason is that I don't want the dog to be at all confused about whether he is supposed to come to me or stop. Also, when working "Whoa" for having a dog hold point, be steady to flush, or stop on a volunteer flush, if the collar is on the belly, it's less likely the dog will associate stimulation that is coming from his rear with the bird that is out front. Because the dog is place oriented, the place he associates the stopping is his belly.

In addition, an electronic collar on the belly helps make the dog stand rather than sit. The stimulation occurring on his underside normally will discourage the dog from sitting, making the teaching of "Whoa" easier. Do the initial "Sit" or "Hup" work with the remote collar on your dog's back. This way, the collar has the tendency to push down your dog's rear when stimulation is given. I use the collar on the dog's neck for commands associated with "Kennel," "Here," or "Heel." The collar on the back is only for commands associated with "Sit." Once your dog is reliable on all commands, remove the back collar

and use only the neck collar.

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### **Introducing Guns & Birds**

Properly introducing a dog to guns and birds is of paramount importance. A dog that blinks birds, turns off at the flush, or heads for the truck at the first shot may indicate he is simply predisposed to gun-shyness and flush problems by virtue of his temperament and/or lack of field experience in his bloodline. By the same token, just because a pedigree reads like a "Who's Who" of bird dogs, there's no guarantee that a pup won't develop a problem with guns and/or birds if he has been improperly introduced to them.

Gun-shyness is a very serious problem. A gun-shy dog isn't much of a gun dog. Err on the side of caution and assume the dog will have a problem with the gun. The proper window of time to introduce a dog to the gun is not a question of age. The benchmark I use is: when the dog is questing for game confidently, he has been introduced to birds and is aggressively chasing birds. The birdier the dog - the stronger his desire to hunt and chase - the less likely he will be to blink birds or become gun-shy. Therefore, I introduce the dog to birds prior to and separately from the gun. It is very important that this initial experience be a positive one, as dogs learn by association, and a negative encounter is readily imprinted. If the dog is not a bird maniac, I don't introduce the gun.

The first step in introducing a dog to birds does not involve a flush. In my building-block approach to training, the process has been broken down to a series of subparts: first a bird that does not flap, then a bird that does, then a less-innocuous flush (guaranteeing the dog won't be caught unaware) and finally the flush of a pheasant.

I begin by using a clip-winged bird. Wrap a rubber band around the flight feathers (the long primary feathers) on the wing of a pigeon or chukkar. Tease the dog with the bird and then throw the bird. The bird will fly 20 to 30 yards before coming down. The dog will be in full pursuit. The dog's whole focus should be on the bird. Just as the bird is about to touch down, have an assistant fire a .22 crimp pistol from 75 to 100 yards away. A .22 crimp makes a low, piercing sound. If the dog shows signs that he heard the gun by taking his attention off the bird, I stop.

I then go back to more birds without the gun. I next use a harnessed quail. I use a bamboo pole with a piece of clothesline attached to it that is in turn attached to the quail harness. A five- or six-foot length of line works great. The quail can fly around but not away and I'm simply introducing the dog to flapping, flying birds. I then progress to fly-away birds.

Once the dog is bold and confident and aggressively chasing birds, I reintroduce the gun. I have my assistant move closer over a period of days until I can fire the crimp from my side with the dog showing only focus on the bird(s). I then repeat the entire procedure with 209 primers, then a .410, then a 28-, a 20- and finally a 12-gauge shotgun. After that, I'm ready to shoot birds in the field that flush in front of the dog. Now we are well on our way to developing a gun dog and can progress in our training program with confidence.

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### **Knowing the Difference Between Correction and Reward**

A dog must know why he is being corrected or rewarded. In other words, he must have been taught the meaning of a particular command or know what kind of behavior is expected from him before corrections or rewards are meted out for compliance or non-compliance.

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### **Place Oriented**

A dog is extremely place oriented. He will associate a particular action with what has occurred at a particular place within a close proximity of time. Whether you are correcting a dog or rewarding him, the negative or positive consequences must occur at the place where the response occurred within 1.3 seconds of the response. That's why it's inadvisable to correct a dog at 8 a.m. for having messed on the floor at 6 a.m.

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### **Incessant Talking to Your Dog**

Dogs weren't born understanding the King's English. Incessant talking to a dog only teaches the dog to tune you out. It's sort of like the little boy who cried wolf. "Over here, c'mon boy, that's a good dog, let's go, and hop in the car." This is a bunch of rhetoric that the dog can't possibly understand. You might as well say, "Go get the keys and start the car."

Habits are hard to break, but constant yakking at a dog won't result in a dog that responds to commands with reliability. Before you can expect an effort, the dog first must be taught what a word means.

Taking a young pup to the field and commanding "Here" or "Get over" only teaches the dog to ignore you. Never issue the command in the field if you have not taught the dog the command during yard training. It is counterproductive and only will

ensure that you eventually will have to put more pressure on the dog in the field. More pressure is never better than less pressure. Do the training in the yard first.

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### **Teaching to Hold Point**

When teaching your pointing dog to hold point, bring your dog in perpendicular to the bird's scent cone. This way, you can tell exactly when your dog smells the bird. If the dog doesn't turn his head, he hasn't smelled the bird. To prevent creeping, once the dog knows "Whoa" in the yard, command "Whoa" as soon as you see your dog smell the bird.

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### **Apprehension in the Canine Student**

Apprehension in the canine student leads to the pupil being afraid of giving an effort. A dog who does not "try" is extremely difficult to train. Early obedience training incorporating poorly timid discipline is a major contributor to apprehension. Far too often owners think their dogs understand English. The owner commands "Here" or "Come" expecting their dog to understand what the command means. It is important to teach your dog the meaning of a command before expecting him to comply. Do not shortchange the rewards for success. Discipline as the sole modus operandi is not a sound training program.

However, spoiling a dog, letting him get away with non-compliance, or giving indiscriminant praise is not advisable. If your dog perceives he is higher in the pecking order, he will out-perceive the owner as leader of the pack. He will then do what he wants, which is often at odds with the owner's desire.

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### **Selecting a Pup**

The number one criteria for selecting a pup is genetics. Don't shortchange yourself by accepting anything less than the best family tree you can find. It is really true that when it comes to dogs, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

If the breeder doesn't have a bird pen with training birds, be suspicious - highly suspicious. A shooting instructor has shells, a bird dog breeder and trainer should have birds. Genetics + Training + Nutrition = Glory days in the field.

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### **Save That Rubber Band - It May Come In Handy!**

Carry a rubber band with you in your field vet kit. If your dog cuts his tongue and is bleeding profusely, you can stop the bleeding by wrapping a large heavy-duty rubber band around the tongue. Once the bleeding is stopped, seek veterinary help.

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### **Tips for Protecting Your Dog's Feet**

If your dog's feet are sore or hurt, your canine's hunting performance will suffer. Protecting your dog's pads, toes, and the area between his toes is a good preventative strategy.

Ensure that your dog's toenails are kept clipped. Unduly long nails may catch and cause damage to Pupster's toes.

Sand spurs, cockle burrs, foxtails, and cactus are but a few of the dangers lying in wait to ambush your dog's feet. Snow and ice can shut your dog down in a foot beat. Booties are a great measure to keep your hunting buddies working hard. Before the initial hunt, make sure your dog is used to running with booties on by letting your dog wear them in training or while running in the field.

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### **Keep Your Dog Hydrated in Extreme Temperatures - In Any Season on Any Given Day**

When the temperature is hot, your dog needs plenty of water to prevent overheating and to keep his body temperature down. However, hydration is also critical in colder weather. Your dog's ability to recover from strenuous exercise is handicapped when the mercury falls. Make sure your dog is offered ample amounts of clean water to ward off the effects of cold weather. Water aids your dog's internal cooling and heating systems and allows him to recover faster, allowing for more hours in the hunting fields.

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### **Calories Needed for Energy When Temperature Drops**

Your dog's calorie needs will increase as your canine friend exerts more energy questing for birds. Also, as the temperature drops, your hunting partner's nutrition needs will escalate. As a guide, 7% more calories are required for every 10-degree drop in the thermometer. This is on top of his increased needs due to rigorous exercise. A top tier food with 30% protein and 20% fat is a good guide for a working dog's needs.

For health reasons, it is advisable to not feed a dog any sooner than two hours before exercising or within an hour after exercise. A dog does not benefit from a "He-man's" breakfast before embarking on a day of hunting.

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### **Bottled Water Ideal for Hunting Trips Far Away From Home**

With hunting season upon us, many of you will be taking your dog away from home. Supplying bottled drinking water for your dog's hydration needs may save a hunt.

If you are traveling far away for a hunt, a change in drinking water may precipitate gastrointestinal problems for your dog. If your dog is given soft water when he is not accustomed to it, diarrhea may result. Diarrhea will lead to dehydration, and your four-legged hunting partner's performance will be greatly curtailed.

For short trips away, take the drinking water your dog is accustomed to for his hydration needs. For more extended trips, spring for bottled water.

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### **Beginning Remote Collar Training**

Initial training with the remote collar begins by getting your pup accustomed to running with a non-live collar. By putting the collar on your dog when turning Pupster loose for happy time runs, your youngster will associate the collar with going to the field.

Always give your dog a chance to run a while with the collar on before starting the day's training session. If you start training the moment you put the collar on, your canine student may become "sticky" and reluctant to run at all in the field. If, for example, a dog is commanded "Here" and stimulated for non-compliance before being to run with a non-live collar, the dog may stick by the handler's side.

When commencing collar introduction training, start in the yard - not in the bird field. If your dog will not respond reliably in yard training, do not give the command in the field. Understand that your dog must first know a command before using the remote collar.

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### **Beginning Retrieving Training**

To achieve the best possible retrieving results, start training in the first few months of your pup's life. Make retrieving exercises fun and upbeat, and keep training sessions short; two or three retrieves per session should be sufficient (and fitting of your puppy's limited attention span).

Perform retrieving drills in a narrow corridor. Stake out snow netting or another sort of barrier to make an alleyway roughly twenty feet long and five or six feet wide. Or, simply use the hallway in your house. This narrow space helps prevent your pet from becoming distracted or playing "catch me if you can." Once your dog is retrieving reliably in the corridor, take him to a grassy area with low cover.

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### **Important Considerations in Selecting a Dog**

Before you bring a new dog into your family, carefully consider the following points to help ensure a happy, healthy hunting companion, as well as a pet you and your family can enjoy for years to come.

1. Is your selected breed statistically free of major hereditary health problems, such as hip and retinal dysplasia? Make sure both parents have the traits you want.
2. If you're looking for trainability and performance in the field, a strong background of field champions in your pedigree is the best safeguard you can have. Field champions have proven they are both trainable to a high standard of excellence and can get the job done.
3. Not all dogs are created equal. Do not expect a dog with show dogs in his heritage - regardless of breed - to have the same genetics of a hunting dog.
4. If you want a bird dog, select only a breeder with a pen of training birds.
5. If you buy an older dog, make sure your dog has the personality, trainability, and genetic traits you desire.
6. Confirm the breeder's warranty for hereditary and congenital health flaws. Check out references from other buyers.
7. Be cautious about "Expert Advice" from non-experts. If you need veterinary advice, go to a veterinarian.

When looking for a dog, be patient and do your homework. You'll have a much higher probability of finding that perfect pet and hunting companion.

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### **The Right Time – The Right Order**

I prefer to introduce our dogs to a check cord in the bird field. Once the youngster has been properly introduced to birds in the training field, the time is right to introduce him to the check cord.

We introduce our puppies to birds before starting a basic obedience program. The pupils are running on birds in the field at an early age, certainly by twelve weeks of age. Once the student is enthusiastically chasing birds, we introduce the check cord. We snap a four to five foot piece of clothesline to the pup in the field and let him run free - finding and chasing birds. At this age and stage of training, the pup will not be apprehensive at all. He owns the world and the rest of us live in it. He will associate the check cord with the field and having fun.

A trainer will need a check cord for more formal training down the road such as patterning, holding point, and steady to wing or shot. If the dog is taught to "Here" or "Heel" with the check cord first, the canine pupil may be sticky or reluctant to leave the trainer when a check cord is attached. Dogs learn by association. Make your dog's initial experiences with a check cord positive. The right order of teaching "Here" and "Heel" is after your pup has associated the check cord with something positive. Birds are the most positive thing in a bird dog's world.

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### **Say the Command One Time**

The objective in obedience training is to teach your dog to respond to each command the first time you issue it. The goal is not to get your dog to eventually comply by repeating (and ultimately shouting) each command several times.

Let's say you give the "Sit" command at point A and your dog does not comply. You then command "Sit" at point B and he sits. You cannot reward him because he did not sit at point A. You cannot correct him because he just sat when you gave the command at point B.

To achieve training success, say each command once. If your dog responds, reward him. If he does not respond, put him back to point A. Without repeating the command, respectfully make your dog respond (for example, push down on his hind quarters to get him to sit). Be consistent (without being frightening or excessively forceful), and you will teach your dog that you expect him to respond to each initial command.

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### **Collar-Wise Dogs**

Before introducing your dog to an electronic collar, it is wise to let him run in the field with a non-live collar. If you immediately place a live collar on your dog, then start teaching "Whoa" or "Sit" commands, he may learn to recognize the collar as a cue to stop and stay put. Instead, put a "dead" collar on your dog initially and let him run in the field as soon as the collar is on. He will then associate the electronic collar with fun. This should simplify future collar training.

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### **Training with a Bird Launcher**

When using a bird launcher to teach your pointing dog to hold point or to be steady to the flush, do not put a scent bird in the launcher. Plant the scent bird with the use of a harness to prevent the bird from flying off. Place a flyer in the launcher about ten yards upwind of the scent bird. Once your dog is pointing a locked-wing, or harnessed bird, launch the flyer. If you are not training your dog to be steady to wing and shot, let your dog chase the flyer. If you are training for steady to wing and shot, do not let the dog chase. The flyer will keep your dog's attitude upbeat. A second launcher is worth much more than twice the benefits of one.

The launcher will not intimidate the canine pupil if kept outside the scent area and will not cover the scent of the bird you want your dog to point.

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### **Your Pup's First Sessions in the Field Should Be Fun**

Before teaching your dog to "Heel" or "Here" in the bird field, allow and encourage him to quest and chase birds.

Dogs are extremely place-oriented and associate very negative or very positive corrections with a place. Therefore, it is essential that your dog's initial exposures to the training field and birds be positive. If your pup's first sessions in the field are paired with discipline, he may be very reluctant to hunt. Your dog's beginning bird session should occur when he is in an

upbeat frame of mind. Be patient and make fieldwork fun.

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### **Complete Basic Training and Then Introduce Formal Training**

Formal training is the process of teaching a dog to respond with excellence to a command the first time the order is issued. Before formally teaching your pointing breed dog to handle and hold point in the field, he must achieve certain basic foundations. (Formal training for the flushing breeds includes sitting on command, hunting in gun range, and coming when called.)

Before commencing formal training in the field, complete basic obedience and electronic-collar conditioning in yard work. If your dog does not understand what is asked of him or does not comply in yard training, you cannot yet demand bird manners and control in the hunting field.

You must also properly expose your canine student to the gun and birds. Let your pup run dragging a short check-cord before teaching "Here," quartering, or hold point.

Think of training your dog as a series of building blocks, and train each "block" fully. That way, all the "blocks" will fit together nicely when tasks are combined in the field.

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### **Dogs CAN Overheat in Cold Weather - Keep Him Hydrated With Fresh Water At ALL Times**

When I first arrived in South Dakota the third week of October to start pheasant hunting, the temperature was 86 degrees. The next day's local paper relayed the heartbreaking news that more than one hundred dogs had died as a result of overheating – a real tragedy that could have been prevented.

It is now late November in South Dakota – the wind is blowing, snow covers the ground, and the thermometer seldom climbs above freezing. To ensure the health of my canine team, I must monitor the dogs' body temperature as often as I did when the weather was hot.

A dog's normal body temperature is 101.2 degrees. When a dog's body temperature rises above 103 degrees, he is becoming overheated. Preventative medicine is better than the pain, hassle, and expense of surgery after the fact. Be sure your dogs receive lots of water while hunting. Think of water flowing through your dog as a heating and cooling system. While water cools in hot weather, it is also critical in cold weather. Water is also crucial to preventing dehydration.

Dogs in condition, exercised regularly, and fed a healthy diet can handle temperature extremes more effectively. If the owners of the dogs that succumbed to October's heat had conditioned and exercised their dogs, as well as regularly monitored body temperature, most of these dogs would be around for next year's hunting season.

Make sure your dog is in shape before hunting – do not ask for unrealistic performance. Also, provide him with a constant supply of fresh clean water to keep his body temperature control system functioning properly.

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### **Live Pigeons Come in Handy the Very First Time Out in the Field**

If you are going to the woods and fields with your puppy for the first time, carry a live pigeon in your vest. That way, if bird finds become infrequent and your pup loses interest or starts tracking chipmunks, you can regain his attention with a fly-away pigeon. Without your pup seeing you, plant the pigeon and bring him downwind of the bird so he smells it. Presto - a rejuvenated youngster!

The bird-in-the-vest trick also works well if your dog is ranging too far. Plant the pigeon near you and bring your dog around. After a few repetitions of the dog finding birds near you, the puppy will start checking back to see if there are any birds near Mom or Dad.

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### **Using the Wind to Your Advantage**

Whenever possible, hunt into the wind. Your dog will be able to find more birds if the wind is blowing their body scent to his nose. Otherwise, your dog will be in tracking mode. It is much easier for your dog to produce a bird by smelling its body scent than by tracking a moving bird.

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### **Introducing a Puppy to Birds and Guns**

You should introduce your puppy to birds and guns before starting obedience training. Obedience training started too early

may cause apprehension. And, an apprehensive youngster that lacks confidence is much more likely to exhibit a problem with the flush or gunshot than a bold and confident student. If you're not sure when to introduce guns, consider whether your dog is aggressively chasing birds. If he is not aggressively chasing, he needs more bird contacts before you introduce guns.

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### **Pup Advice**

At a recent one-day seminar for The Ruffed Grouse Society Chapter, I worked with a number of new owners and new puppies. Watching the proud parents and their canine youngsters brought a few tips to mind:

1. Until the pup has completed the recommended immunization schedule and is fully protected, do not bring the youngster to areas frequented by other dogs.
  2. Do not teach your pointing dog to sit before you teach "Whoa." It will only lead to difficulties when teaching the "Whoa" command.
  3. Do not teach "Heel" before introducing your dog to the field and birds. In the field, you do not want your new bird dog to stick by your side.
  4. Too much early obedience may create a lack of confidence in the new pupil. A bold confident dog is much easier to work with than an apprehensive student.
  5. Remember to provide access to plenty of drinking water in hot weather. Do not allow your dog to overheat.
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### **Introducing Your Dog to a Gun**

Before introducing your dog to a gun, be sure he is aggressively hunting for and chasing birds. If your dog is not aggressively pursuing birds, then he is not ready to be introduced to a gun. To prepare your dog, expose him to birds as often as possible.

Once your dog is aggressively chasing birds, begin the training process. You'll need an assistant who is familiar with guns and a pigeon with a rubber band wrapped around the long flight feathers on its wings. (The banded wings will restrict the pigeon's flight to twenty or thirty yards.) Ask your assistant to hold the gun and stand 75-100 yards away. Throw the pigeon with your dog in full pursuit. Just as the bird hits the ground, when your dog is all over it, have your assistant fire a .22 crimp. If your dog acknowledges the gun at any time during the process, go back to simply exposing your dog to more birds.

Have your assistant gradually move closer to you throughout the training process. When your dog has no problem with the gun from a close distance, repeat the process with a 410. Then, repeat the process with a .28 or .20 gauge. When you are ready to kill birds over him, fire one shot - and one shot only - for the next twenty birds.

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### **Consistency is the Key**

When training your dog, you must be consistent with your commands. Choose a single, recognizable word and stick with it. For example, if you are teaching the recall command, do not randomly replace the "Here" command with "C'mon," "Over here," or "Let's go."

Remember, you must first teach your dog to recognize a command before expecting excellence. Your dog must know what "Here," "Whoa," or "Sit" means before you correct him for non-compliance. If your dog does not understand why he is being corrected, he will become confused, indignant, or apprehensive - making him much more difficult to train.

When training your dog, you should also resist the urge to talk constantly. This greatly reduces the chance of inadvertently replacing recognized commands with similar commands that may confuse your dog.

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### **Dogs are Place Oriented**

Because dogs are extremely place oriented, they should be either rewarded or corrected where an act occurs in order for training to be effective. A dog should also be rewarded or corrected immediately after the act occurs. In other words, it is counterproductive to correct your dog five minutes after he disobeys you.

A dog's place orientation can be used to your advantage when training with the e-collar. For "Whoa" work with the pointing breeds, I train all my initial "Whoa" work with the remote training collar on the dog's belly. This way there is no confusion with the "Here" command in the early stages of teaching "Whoa." Also, for the more advanced training session of teaching holding point, backing, or steadiness to flush and shot, the canine pupil is much less likely to associate stimulation from the rear with a bird in front.

For the flushing and retrieving breeds, I place the collar on the dog's lower back with the collar contact points located towards the base of the four-legged student's tail. The stimulation has the tendency to push the dog's rear down. For the pointing breeds, with the contact points on the belly, stimulation has the effect of making the dog stand, rather than sit.

Once a dog is fully trained, and complies with excellence to the "Kennel," "Whoa," "Sit," and "Here" commands in the field as well as in yard training, I do all my collar work on the dog's neck. However, I believe that placing the collar prongs on the belly or back (depending on whether I am teaching "Whoa" or "Sit"), makes the training process much easier for you and your dog.

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### **Find the Proper Level**

Before training with remote electronic trainers, first let your dog run with the collar on - but not live. Because dogs are very place-oriented and quickly affected by negative and positive events, you should not use the stimulation before letting your dog associate the collar with a carefree romp in the fields.

Once your dog has become accustomed to the collar, find the lowest stimulation level to which your dog responds. A ninety-pound Lab and a thirty-five-pound Brittany will likely react to different levels of stimulus. However, increased size does not automatically mean you should start with a high level of stimulation. Start at the lowest level and move up in levels to determine the lowest level your dog first feels. Perhaps he will look around curiously or stop wagging his tail when he initially feels it. If your dog reacts with panic, the level is too high. Use this lowest level as your benchmark for training any command. If you have to constantly go up in levels for compliance, perform more repetitions at a lower level.

Repetitions create habits, and that is what you're striving for - a dog who complies with your command the first time he hears it - each and every time.

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### **Introducing Your Dog to Electronic Training**

I have long been a strong advocate of training dogs with low-level stimulation. I believe it is easier for a trainer to understand the principle of the remote training and certainly easier on puppies than the archaic methods of yesteryear.

That said, I believe a dog should be properly introduced to the electronic trainer in yard training before using the collar in the hunting covers. For the pointing breeds, our yard training is the process of teaching "Kennel," "Whoa," and "Here" - in that order. For the retrieving and flushing breeds, our yard training, which is no more than basic obedience, involves teaching "Kennel," "Sit" or "Hup," and "Here" in that order.

By teaching "Kennel" first, where the dog has to leave us, the dog does not become "clingy" or reluctant to leave my side when I progress to teaching "Here."

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For training tips, articles, information about the George Hickox School of Gun Dog Training for Owners and Their Dogs, and Grouse Wing dogs, visit [www.georgehickox.com](http://www.georgehickox.com).