

HUNTING SEASON - EARLY

With only a few days left before we get our faithful k-9 companions out in the field, there are still many things we should do. A complete physical is smart business and should be done every year. We want to make sure our dogs are sound in every way before hunting season starts. Make sure you have a stool sample analyzed as every dog can have parasites. Weight is another concern. If your dog has enjoyed too many summer cookouts it is time to trim him down. On the other hand if your dog has a high metabolism, increase the rations or go to a high protein formula of dog food in order to get him in condition for the upcoming season.

A point to remember in preparation for your gun dog is that just because you have Saturday and Sunday to go hunting, don't think that your dog can come off the couch, sleeping 16 hours a day into your gung-ho regimen of hunting the whole weekend. This train of thought is deadly to a gun dog. The alternative? Go with a friend and rotate dogs. Be in tune to your dog and the possible injuries that come from fatigue and over work. When you start hunting in September your upland dog can't take 8 to 10 hours of 70 and 80 degrees. Go early in the AM for a few hours, take a break and go back for a few hours in the afternoon.

Dogs do not teach other dogs good habits, they only make other dogs misbehave and not pay attention to you. The only one who teaches dogs good and expected behaviors (as opposed to natural behaviors) is a person. Remember this if you are hunting with your friend who wants to run two dogs at once. There are very few people who have dogs with the maturity, training level, and experience to hunt with other dogs competently and successfully. Hunt the dogs one at a time and this will give them the break they need to avoid injuries.

Another point to remember is that today there are drinks for dogs that are along the same line as sports drinks. I have not yet used them but my clients have said that these drinks make a difference.

If you have a nervous dog that has a hard time keeping weight on take rice cakes and cover them with Karo syrup and put them in a baggie in your vest. Bagels and cream cheese are great for this application as well.

Most importantly, use common sense. I have friends who hunt little covers right next to the highway, when I ask them if they think it is dangerous they say, "Ya, but there is always a bird or two under that apple tree." Or there are those who hunt the dogs in old farms with barbed wire everywhere or old dumps with sharp and broken glass and metal. These situations are open invitations to injuries. I always get the calls when a client or a friend's dog has sliced his pad or had to get 20 stitches across the chest, or worse has gotten run over or killed. **DON'T TAKE UNNECESSARY CHANCES!**

In the early season when it is dry I like to hunt where there is water, the dogs do better and the birds seem to be near by. We are all guilty of going to the same old spots. Now is the time to be adventurous and to explore. Take your dog and go for walks, look for new covers or marshes that hold ducks. Remember, places don't hold birds or duck forever. Beaver ponds get old and are abandoned; orchards become overgrown or even house lots.

A common misconception is that grouse are always around the apple trees. Remember that the apple is only a minor food source for grouse and for a very short part of the year. Early in the season look around areas where there are berries. Try some new spots and you may be surprised.

Another subject many people tend not to think about is etiquette and sportsmanship. Be respectful to other hunters, landowners, and others you are sharing the woods with. If

someone is parked at a spot you want to go to, let them hunt it and you can go to another spot. Also, when hunting leave some seed, if you shoot a bird or two, move on to another cover. It seems the people who complain about no birds want to shoot every bird they see.

Today more and more land is being posted. September is a great time to go around and meet some of these land owners (without a shotgun in your hand), introduce yourself, tell them where you live, what you are doing, what vehicle you drive, and ask permission to use their land. People are a lot more accepting of hunters on their land if they know who they are and if they leave the land as they found it. Don't carry only your trophy birds from the woods, but pick up empty cans and wrappers you may come across. Someone will appreciate it.

So many people call me and want to know where to go hunting. No, I am not going to tell you my hunting spots. However, there are over 100,000 acres of land in wildlife management areas that you have paid for with license dollars. Find out where they are and start using them. No, they are not going to have an X to mark the spot for birds and waterfowl, but after all we are enjoying the sport we call Hunting.

Good luck and great hunting,

John

at Kirby Mountain Kennels
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