

Q. We had our first wild bird hunting trip in the North Woods for Grouse and Woodcock. Hunted for 2 days with my friend's 7yr. old GSP that has hunted in that environment for 6 years. Not one bird was flushed by us. They all wild flushed. Many birds were located but not shot. I made sure my dog got to smell the shot Woodcock so he knew what I wanted.

My dog found one of the few grouse we encountered. My dog had beautiful points on two different occasions, but the GSP had at least 20 points. Last hour of hunting, the GSP goes on point, breaks and is birdy. I sent my dog in and he gets birdy, like he does when he is tracking scent (usually critter scent). I kind of ignored it because the GSP just finished searching and came up empty. The GSP was called out and my dog followed with a dead Woodcock in his mouth that he brought to me! The bird was warm and had been shot. We didn't encounter a single hunter our whole trip so not sure what happened, but my dog found this dead bird.

I also did some retrieve work twice with ducks my friend shot. Got him used to decoys and he did great swimming between them to retrieve the ducks I threw out.

My dog was enthusiastic, very obedient, very cooperative and worked independently most of the time. Temps rose to the low 50's with little or no wind. My dog kept up with the GSP the whole time. I'm thrilled with his cooperation and obedience. But I'm a bit paranoid his few prior bird blinking and sitting-on-point scenarios are evidence of a larger problem that causes him to not want to search for birds. He seems to be tracking almost 100% of the time and would continue tracking down a path when the GSP would break off and search.

A. Our breed is well-known for its extremely good tracking ability. In situations where air scenting conditions are poor, I'd totally expect to see my dogs tracking. My guess is Duncan's a far better tracker than the GSP, so while the GSP would track a bit, he'd give up sooner than your dog. Which is why your dog continues after the GSP has moved onto something else.

All hunting dogs are continuously smelling everything out there, dead or alive. They're hunting anything alive. Thru the repetition of hunting with you for something specific, which you then kill, they'll start searching/pointing what you are killing. Your killing of specific prey gets them to understand what you are after. In other words, they figure it out. They associate where you are hunting, how you are hunting, what you are wearing, etc. with the specific type of game you are hunting. They'll begin to ignore everything else, unless they get bored because they've been hunting for something a long time and can't find any. Then they will mouse and possibly chase rabbits and squirrels if they get bored.

Any time you take a young, inexperienced dog to a new venue, he initially won't have a clue why you are there or what you are hunting for. As far as he knows, you're just going for a long run. You can't expect your dog to know why you are in the woods or what you are hunting. He'll just run around and find stuff in a hit or miss fashion until he makes all the necessary associations. He'll learn more quickly if you hunt him with an experienced dog (emulation), so I'd continue doing that as much as possible for his first season. Of course you should occasionally take him out by himself so he doesn't start to over-rely on the experienced dog. You also have to

actually kill something. Your dog will never know what he's supposed to be hunting unless lead connects with bird a few times.

When a young, inexperienced dog is hunted with an older, experienced dog he doesn't know well, you should expect the youth to give deference to the other dog. He should pretty much stay out of his way. The youth will be watching him the entire time, but he shouldn't get into the older dog's space. That's just good manners and keeps the youth from getting into trouble. Over time they would start hunting as a team, but dogs belonging to different packs won't hunt in tandem for a long time.

As for the woodcock, my guess is it was wounded and flightless from a previous hunter. He tracked it, caught it and retrieved it to you, killing it in the process. Our dogs find cripples in our fields all the time and it's not unusual for the pheasant to die in the process. It is rare for a healthy wild bird to be caught by a dog, especially not a woodcock. We call the dogs who do that a lot, like KD, our vacuum cleaners. Because of their dogs' exceptional tracking ability, Munster owners almost never lose a cripple.

I wouldn't do any retrieve training with shot birds. The blood/wounds on the bird encourages the dog to chew, lick and generally mess with the bird. You need to buy and euthanize your training birds. There's a quick, humane way to euthanize ducks that I can pass along if you want to start doing that type of training.

Lastly, you need to stop worrying about his blinking/sitting when you were training. Those behaviors are reactions to pressure. Hunting during his first season should be nothing but fun. Therefore, avoid the temptation to give him direction on where or how to hunt. For instance, don't send him into where another dog is birdy or pointing. Let him figure it out in his own way and in his own time. You should, however, pay attention to the dog on point and shoot the bird. If your dog's off screwing around somewhere else, ignore him. That will help your dog make the correct associations, which will probably come much more quickly than you imagine. Every time your dog goes hunting for something he will improve. Therefore, you need to take him grouse/woodcock hunting several times and pheasant hunting several times so he starts to make the necessary associations to become proficient at it. He'll need to do it more than once or twice to be any good at it. I wouldn't turn down any type of hunting trip, because they will all be fun and good for your dog.