

Q. Would like to run some things by you about my dog's 1st real wild bird hunting trip, which was for ruffed grouse and woodcock. We hunted for two days with my friend and his 7-year-old GSP. My dog seemed to be hunting for everything, not necessarily for birds, although he did have 2 very nice points on woodcock. The GSP would pick up a scent from the trail, enter the woods and search, then return when done to keep hunting. My dog almost never seemed to pick up the same scent as the GSP. If he did pick it up, he would just keep on going down the trail rather than enter the woods to search. I started sending him into the woods where the GSP was hot on scent, hoping he might watch or pick up the scent and search himself, but he didn't (except near the end of the trip). Many times, both dogs would pick up the same scent at the same time, but my dog would keep going down the trail, while the GSP would go into the woods and find birds. It was almost like my dog didn't want to hunt birds. I saw this many times over. My dog began to equate the pointing hawk scream on the GSP's collar with "something is about to happen" and he would show excitement, but rather than pursue it he would watch from the trail. I'm uncertain what is up with my dog not pursuing the scent both dogs picked up. I know he has a nose and smells the birds, along with tons on new critter scent (bear, wolf, porcupine, etc.) because he is tracking the whole time we hunted.

A. The short answer to your concern is - you are overthinking/over-analyzing things. He is simply behaving like any young dog out on his first real, wild bird hunt. Believe me, he's taking it all in and is learning. Even though you might not be able to visually see him paying attention to the other dog, he is. He's not honoring that dog nor showing other signs of hunting "with" him, but that's because he wasn't raised in a pack and doesn't know how to. He has to learn that behavior. He has to figure out it's in his best interest to do so. The fact that he picked up on the association between the dog's collar making a hawk scream and birds flying should tell you he's paying attention. Dogs learn to hunt *only* in two ways - trial & error and emulation. Trial & error takes longer than emulation, but he hasn't had another hunting dog to emulate, so he has had to learn on his own (and will continue to do so) through trial & error. We can't teach or train our dogs how to hunt. Most dogs are at their peak hunting ability from ages 5-8, because they've had enough time in the field to have learned a lot and because they are still young enough to have the physical ability to cover the ground easily. In short, keep your expectations realistic. He'll improve with each hunting trip, but it will take a lot of hunting trips for him to become proficient.