

Q. When will my Munster start showing signs of being sharp-on-fur? He spends a lot of time in the woods and is always tracking. He tries to catch squirrels but they always get to the tree first.

Today 2 odd things happened: 1) My dog found a dead deer that had been found by coyotes, but still had plenty of meat left. 2) I spotted a raccoon hanging around the base of a tree, which was very odd. I know raccoons are around in good numbers, but I've only spotted one raccoon on over 100+ runs in the woods (probably because they are nocturnal). I can hardly believe the abundance of tracks in the snow by critters. The raccoon was behaving very strangely: out during the day, wasn't afraid of me, didn't run when I threw a stick at it, wasn't afraid of the dog. He must have been sick. The raccoon was big and fat and my dog sized it up and backed away after getting within about 8 feet of him. The most he would do was bark. Raccoons are ferocious, so I really didn't want an encounter, but I'm curious when Munsters start to exhibit sharpness on fur? My dog is so small, would he even consider attacking a raccoon?

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A. Your dog's actually exhibiting this trait with his barking, which is called "Laut." Barking at furred game and/or the track they leave is actually a breeding requirement in Germany. The killing behavior doesn't usually start until a dog is about 3 years old. It can start earlier if the dog's in a pack (like our dogs) and the older, experienced dogs engage a critter. One-on-one the dogs usually haven't developed the boldness to attack a bigger furred critter like a raccoon until they are older. Usually the first thing they do is "mouse." All good bird dogs mouse. They'll catch and eat mice in the field. Then they might go after ground squirrels. If a squirrel they are barking at comes down from the tree, they'll chase it, but a single dog has a heck of a time catching a squirrel unless there's deep snow on the ground. Often the next things are baby bunnies followed by bigger bunnies. Some dogs never become sharp, probably because of a lack of opportunity but sometimes because of temperament.

Even though your dog is a small male, if he becomes sharp, he'll take on anything. Size won't matter. A raccoon isn't dangerous to a dog, except one-on-one in the water. Your dog would get bitten and scratched, but in the end he'd prevail or the raccoon would get away. It takes multiple encounters for a dog to become proficient at killing a raccoon without getting beat up. So you may have some vet bills in your future. Just goes with the territory of owning a Munster.