

(Question)

A couple people in my area sell pigeons. How should I entice my 3-month-old puppy to find and retrieve them?

Is retrieving something I need to work on, or maybe wait until he is older? What are your thoughts and steps I should take?

(Answer)

It's great that you are able to expose him to pigeons. You should not be expecting, nor encouraging, him to retrieve birds at this point. What he needs more than anything is to find birds that will fly away from him - birds he cannot catch. While he is running after a flying bird, you have the perfect opportunity to introduce him to gunfire. There are very soft/quiet poppers that are suitable for this. You can buy them here: <http://www.gundogsupply.com/fiocchi-12-gauge-primer-poppers-.html>. If you purchase any other type of popper/blank, be sure to test it well away from your puppy first. Some poppers are louder than the real thing! Next, fire a light gun, such as a 410 or a handgun, then work your way up to the shotgun. Stand many yards away from the puppy when you begin shooting and work your way up to shooting closer to him.

You do not ever want to set him up to catch live birds of any kind. Pigeons are generally very good birds for training, because dogs can rarely catch them. You'll want to hide the pigeon in some cover, then start the puppy downwind and let him find it. After he does this a time or two, you'll notice he will start getting very careful on his approach and soon he will be pointing and then later holding the point until you come and flush the bird.

For fetch play, use any type of inanimate object. It doesn't matter what it is, but it shouldn't squeak or crunch when he picks it up. Otherwise, you run the risk that he will get used to mouthing what he is retrieving in order to get it to make noise. Since you don't want him mouthing your birds, it's best just to avoid this possibility by playing fetch with things like socks, gloves, balls, and such.