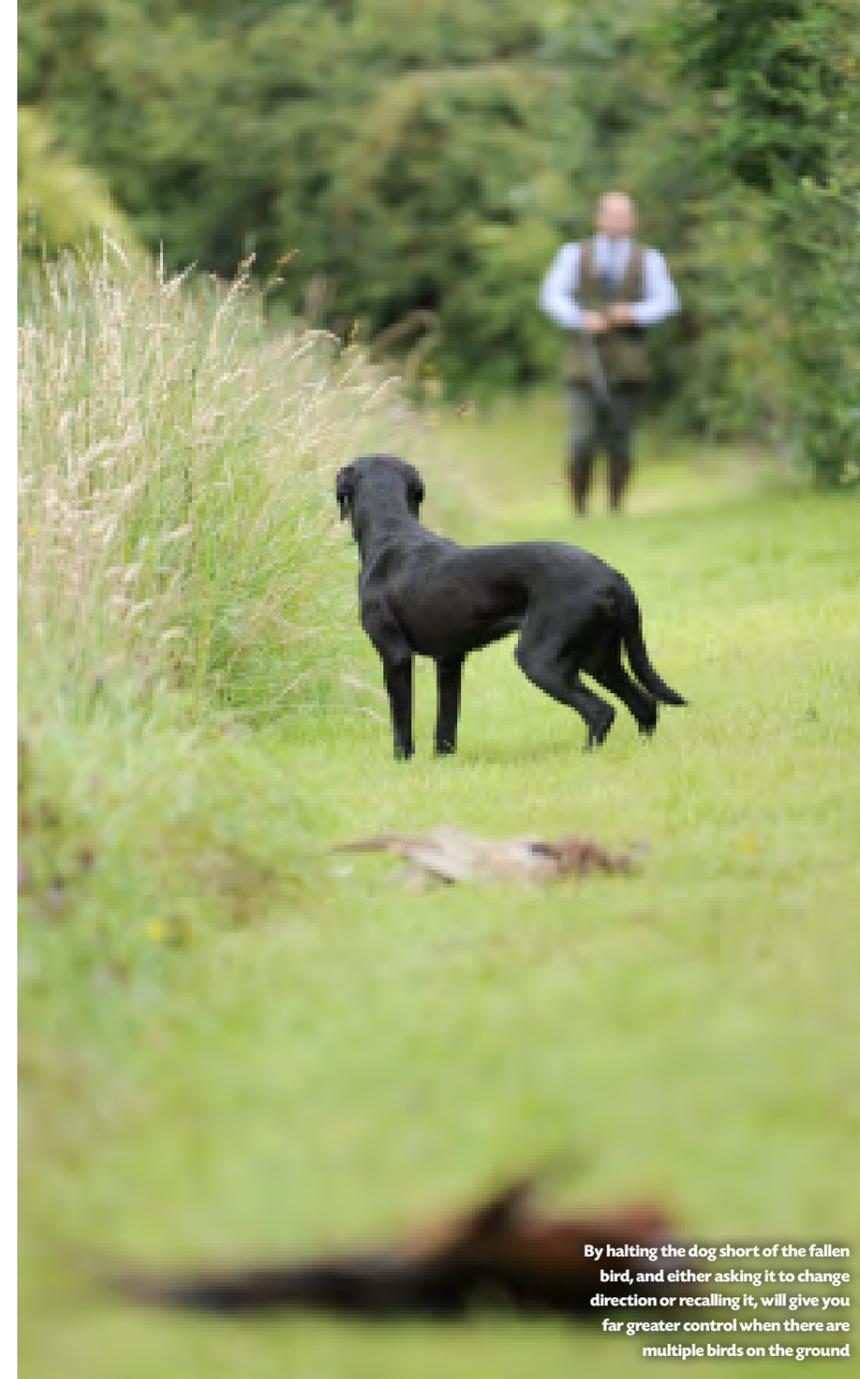




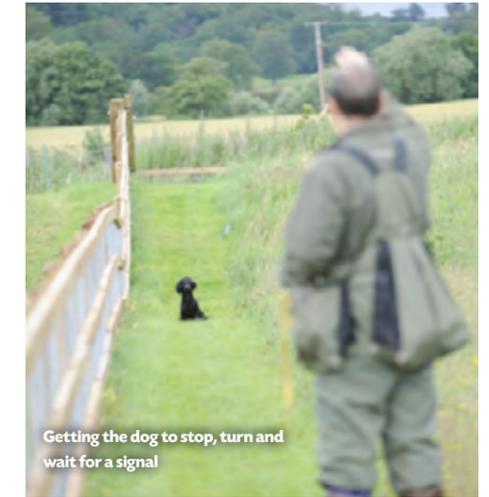
Although the dog has seen where the bird has fallen, it must learn restraint and not automatically assume that it will be asked to make the retrieve



The dog must wait patiently for the cast out command to be issued before it is allowed to make the retrieve



By halting the dog short of the fallen bird, and either asking it to change direction or recalling it, will give you far greater control when there are multiple birds on the ground



Getting the dog to stop, turn and wait for a signal

and reaffirm the importance of straight-line handling. I use a .410 and place cold game along the lanes, either firing the shotgun or using a starting pistol. I then line the dog up and cast her out.

By this stage she has learnt to believe me and continues with speed and pace and picks the first bird. She is then lined up again and re-sent for the longer blind. If she does go wrong, she must be recalled and start again.

Once my dogs are totally confident at this I try stopping them on the way to the bird and if my training has been followed correctly, the dog should stop, turn and wait for a backhand signal or redirection or recall. This is where your control and the dog's trust will be tested. By sending the dog out and then stopping it when the bird is in full view, then giving the 'leave' command and calling her back to you (or directing her in a different direction for another bird), will give you a greater level of control with picking-up when there are multiple birds on the ground.

# GETTING READY FOR GAME

PHOTOGRAPHY: BOB ATKINS

FROM 12-18 MONTHS

In the **fourth** of his five-part series, gundog trainer of the year Ben Randall shares his advice on introducing your dog to live game.

**I**n the last instalment of this series, we focused particularly on heel work and retrieving, so by the time your gundog reaches 12-18 months, you should have all the foundations in place to advance your training program in readiness for the shooting field.

## BLINDS USING COLD GAME

Again, as with the memory retrieves (covered last time) and close blinds, I continue using the retrieving lanes to assist the dog's direction

## PATIENCE TRAINING

As an understanding of obedience and patience has already been established through food training and advanced food training (i.e. allowing some dogs to eat while others sit, watch and wait calmly), I progress this to multiple birds landing around my young dogs with shots fired. Once the dog is steady, I as pack leader will pick the birds myself. This obedience and restraint can be further instilled by allowing the dog to approach a fallen bird before issuing the 'leave' command, followed

# GUNDOG TRAINING

by the recall command and then once again picking the birds yourself.

All my dogs, when picking-up, on the peg or rough shooting, should see and mark a shot bird but be thinking: 'It may be mine, however it may not. If I sit calm, dad may let me have it or he may direct me to another bird or recall me in.'

Unfortunately many dogs see a bird shot and think: 'I'm having it, it's just a matter of time.' This is the spoilt dog that will become too hot to stay calm in the shooting field.

As we did in the earlier stages with food, I often reaffirm this principle of hierarchy by

sending other dogs for shot birds whilst making my youngsters sit and watch.

## CONTROLLED GAME TRAINING

Once I have established all of the commands and therefore have the foundations in place, I will start to introduce my young dogs to live game. This can be walking them at heel whilst feeding the ducks/chickens or speaking to a local gamekeeper about helping with feeding the poults or dogging the birds back to the pens.

I must emphasise that, like everything else we have done so far, this must be done in a calm,

controlled training routine. I personally don't let my dogs ever chase game, right from their very first introduction to live quarry. If they do chase game and are allowed to get away with it, it is something they will never forget. Remember, instinct dictates that a dog's five goals in life are to find it, chase it, catch it, kill it and eat it.

I walk them towards the birds, rabbits etc. and use the well established 'leave' command and continue walking. If the foundations are fully established, then 'leave', 'heel' and recall should all be obeyed.

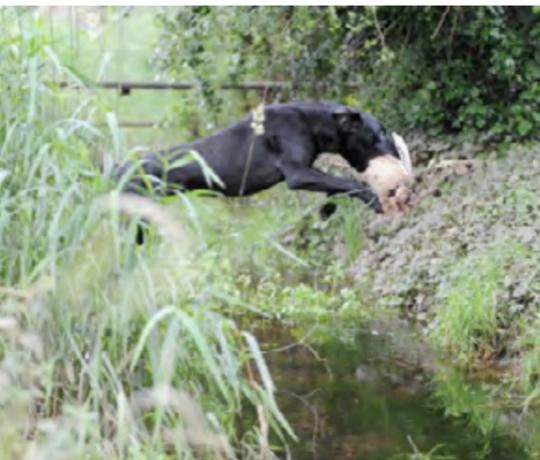
If I am happy my young dog is listening and is calm, I will sit it and walk the game past, not

## TERRAIN AND OBSTACLES

I like my dogs to experience all different kinds of terrain and cover and learn to deal with a range of obstacles so that by the time they are ready for the shooting field, they are as prepared as possible for all eventualities.



Send young dogs over different obstacles, building up the level of difficulty as they progress



Before progressing to double fences



Start with single fences...



The principle of hierarchy and restraint is reaffirmed by making young dogs watch others make retrieves

“Remember, instinct dictates that a dog's five goals in life are to find it, chase it, catch it, kill it and eat it.”

allowing the dog to move. Again, the less the young dog has at this stage, the better.

## HUNTING WITH SPANIELS

With shooting dogs, I try to get all my foundations fully into place because of the dog's five goals. I start hunting my young dogs into the wind in rough grass, using tennis balls and dummies to teach them the 'hi-lost' command. Every time they scent the retrieve, the 'hi-lost' (hunt there) command is issued, thus establishing an association with this command and finding something good in that area with your assistance. This establishes teamwork between dog and handler.

Free hunting and free play is a common mistake. I don't allow this often at all until I have the total control I need. A dog should be turned with one or two pips of the whistle and a hand signal whilst hunting a quartering pattern from left-to-right. I find that because the foundation recall with short continuous pips is in place, the two pips to turn comes very naturally.

If a dog starts to pull on (ignore the pips of the whistle and continue to follow a scent),

it is usually an indication that you have done something wrong – i.e. not established the commands thoroughly enough, allowed the young dog too much free range or introduced him/her to game too early or in an uncontrolled manner.

I find going back to re-establishing the foundations is the best way to overcome any issues that may arise. Also, if your dog does pull on scent, then silently run up behind it and pop it on the lead, give a little tug and use the 'leave' command followed by the turn pips and start again. Because the dog is approached silently, thus surprising the dog, it will soon learn not to ignore you as you could turn up any time without warning. Very soon, he will keep half an eye on you at all times. I then allow him to work near me at first, and with my close proximity, he is less likely to pull on.

Finding live game whilst hunting will be your next challenge. Once they find it, the foundations will again be tested. With a single blast on the whistle, ask them to 'sit', 'leave' and then recall. Settle them down and continue hunting. If a problem persists, then finding a professional with a controlled game pen would help, firstly getting

professional advice and secondly finding game regularly in a controlled manner.

## SUMMARY

By the time my dog reaches 18 months, I would like it to have experienced everything that we have covered thus far over the last four articles. The key things I expect from a dog at this stage include:

- Good controlled heel, on and off the lead.
- Sitting and staying with calmness and patience and a total focus and belief in you.
- Completing blind retrieves with total confidence in you and the commands that you issue.
- Relaxed with, and undistracted by, all types of cold game.
- Very good control with the stop whistle, recall whistle and leave command.

## NEXT TIME...

In the last instalment of this series, I will be combining everything we have covered thus far whilst focussing specifically on working on live shot game and working as part of a controlled team of dogs.

I will also look at a number of skills specific to the type of shooting you will be doing with your dog. I will also look at the possibility of competing in field trials with your gundog..