



**JAYNE COLEY**

Jayne Coley is a labrador and retriever expert and top level field trialer. She has been both a competitor and a judge at the very pinnacle of the sport, the IGL Retriever Championship. In 2012 she came third with FTCh Waterford Ganton and competed again in 2013, once again making it through to the final day.



**BEN RANDALL**

Ben Randall runs Beggarbush Gundog Kennels and Ledbury Lodge Kennels, where he breeds and trains dogs for the shooting field. He is also a two-time winner of the Cocker Spaniel Championship and was the 2013 Gundog Trainer of the Year.

# CANINE QUANDARIES

Our panel of gundog experts answer your questions.

**Q: When I send my dog for a retrieve, she quarters the ground where I have marked the bird but I struggle to get her to keep her head down. I'm worried she's running straight over game. How do I combat this?**

**JAYNE:** If she is young and this is her first season, she may well be rushing about through excitement. I assume you have trained her to a reasonable standard using dummies i.e. she stops on the whistle, takes hand signals and you have taught her the "hunt" command. There are several exercises you can do to encourage her to put her head down and hunt an area.

Sit her up in a field. Cover her eyes with your hand and throw a ball a few yards in front and into the wind. Although she has not seen it, she will have heard it. With her by your side, put your hand forward and give her a command to hunt. Use one word only – for example "hilost", "there" or

"steady" and quietly keep repeating it. Praise her once she finds the ball and then repeat the exercise until you feel she has confidence in your command.

Next, sit her up and cover her eyes again, throwing the ball a yard or so from her. Leaving her sitting, step back a dozen paces, then put your hand up and blow the stop whistle, before lowering your hand to the ground and giving the hunt command. When she does this confidently, build up the distance between you and her.

The next step is to send your dog to the corner of a field where you have already placed a ball or a dummy.

Using a corner naturally confines her to an area. Stand facing the corner, with your dog at your side, and put your hand out and send her to the corner. Once she gets there, give her the hunt command. Gradually build this exercise up so you can send her



into the middle of a field and she will hunt when you ask her to. If she is very fast, stop her first when she gets to the area, then quietly and confidently give her your hunt command. This may take weeks to perfect. It is all about working as a partnership.

**Q: My friend has recently invited me over to use his rabbit pen for training my young cocker spaniel. She is yet to be introduced to game. What are the first steps I should be considering when making use of such a facility?**

**BEN:** Before entering any rabbit pen or introducing your dog to game, you must ensure that all training leading up to this has been properly completed, with perfect control on dummies. Start your introduction to game on the lead, with the dog walking to heel. When a bird/rabbit is flushed, give the "sit" command, followed by the

whistle. Keep practising this, over as many sessions as it takes, until you are happy that when a bird is flushed the dog sits on command. The next stage is to take off the lead, and then repeat the same scenario at heel. Only after this would I recommend moving on to having the dog hunting whilst flushing game.



**Q: I'm due to go on my first day's picking up on my local shoot very soon. Could you please explain the etiquette surrounding the picking of Guns' birds, when to leave them for the Gun to pick, and when to definitely pick them myself?**

**JAYNE:** If the Guns have dogs, always let them pick their dead birds. They usually only want to pick a few, and derive as much pleasure from doing that as they do shooting the birds. Sweep up around the pegs when they have moved off.

As a picker-up, you will be stood

well back from the Guns and during the drive be picking any runners which come your way, if it is safe to do so. It is your job to pick and dispatch wounded game as quickly as possible but, unless in exceptional circumstances, resist the temptation to send a dog towards the Guns for a runner whilst the drive is still on, because it is inevitable that another bird will be shot and your dog will go for that – dropping the wounded bird for another one. Then another shot bird comes down and it goes from bad to worse...

**BEN:** On a shoot day, the etiquette should be explained by the headkeeper or head of the picking-up team. I would typically introduce myself to the Guns and ask if they have any requests specific to what they'd like left for their own dogs. I then plan around this – once the Guns have picked what they want, we get to work.



**Q: During the season, what do you consider essential kit for picking-up on a shoot day. What should I have in my game bag?**

**JAYNE:** In my game bag I carry a couple of leads, a priest, game carrier, a handful of strings for tying birds, wire cutters and a small flask of coffee. Additionally, in my vehicle, I always make sure I have plenty of fresh water so I can offer my dogs a drink after each drive. A spare whistle, a first aid kit, dog leads, Easidri towels, and flapjacks for the dogs when we stop for lunch. I also have a spare coat, spare hat, fingerless gloves, a wool scarf and a cotton towelling scarf, a flask of coffee and cold drinks. Sloe gin and Kings Ginger never go amiss when it's cold, either!



**Q: At what age should I introduce my puppy to livestock and how do I go about it?**

**BEN:** I would recommend introducing your dog to livestock

during its foundation training stages, once it has learned to walk to heel and sit on command. Introduce your dog to a range of animals, from sheep to chickens and always in a controlled

manner. If the dog pulls after livestock, give it a sharp tug on the lead, followed by the sit command. The dog will eventually learn that livestock are something to ignore completely.

## GUN DOGS



**Q: How can I encourage my dog to present a retrieved bird to me with its head up, in the favoured position?**

**JAYNE:** To ensure that your dog has a nice delivery when presenting game, from a puppy, always encourage him with your hands to come into you with his head nice and high, before you even think about training him! Always praise him when he does this correctly. Once he has got this right, have him sitting facing you and calmly place a dummy in his mouth, gently lifting his lips up so they are not trapped between the dummy and his teeth. Say “hold” at the same time. Have a command when you take the dummy from him (eg “dead” or “give”). Once your dog understands this, place a dummy in his mouth and, leaving him in a sitting position, take a few

steps back (quietly saying “hold”) and holding your hand up so he knows to remain sitting down. Go back to him and calmly give him your command to release the dummy.

The next step is to stand several paces away from your dog (with a dummy in his mouth) and call him to you. Slowly build this up – over several days or longer, only moving on when your dog is doing it correctly. Depending on the dog, this may involve an awful lot of patience on your part. To start with, use a confined space – in your house, garage or garden, away from distractions, so you and your dog can concentrate on what you are doing. Then, as you build the exercise up, eventually giving your dog a retrieve, go into a more open area. In the later stages, it would be worth getting hold of a brace of freshly shot birds and

using them in your training as a dog’s level of excitability will go up when retrieving the real thing, which can affect his delivery.

**BEN:** Before a dog can present a retrieve of any kind, it firstly needs to learn to present its body to the owner in the correct and desired way. Do this by simply practising the recall, and repeat until the dog is coming right into you and sitting with its head up every time. Then try a retrieve. If the recall is practised enough, once given a retrieve, the recall and sit will become second nature.

When moving on to dummies, try throwing the dummy in a straight line at 12 o’clock, and then step back to 6 o’clock. When the dog is making the retrieve, walk towards it, into its space. This gives the dog something to think about and can really improve delivery.

**Q:** The shoot that I am soon to go beating on has many hedgerows that run adjacent to roads. These often hold a lot of birds. Do you work your dogs in such a situation and is there anything I can include in my dog’s training regime to ensure that it stays well away from passing cars?

**BEN:** I wouldn’t even contemplate working my dogs alongside a busy road. In such circumstances I always advise putting your dog on a lead and tapping up the hedge with a stick – it’s simply not worth the risk. Hedgerows that are full of game can encourage a dog to take a direct line down the side of the cover, often leading to a dog that is over-excited and out of control. A definite no, no.

