

**Marking Enhancement**  
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Among the most valued skills of a retriever is the dog's ability to effectively mark fallen game. A waterfowler desires a dog that continuously scans the sky for birds, marking the location of downed game and, when sent for the retriever, drives out enthusiastically straight to the fall area, hunts the area closely, quickly picks the bird and returns directly to the handler uninfluenced by distraction with an undamaged bird.

A retriever's marking ability can be greatly enhanced by addressing the individual component skills necessary for effective marking. These skills include:

concentration/focus	negotiating obstacles
steadiness	lining
memory	nose/hunting cover
distance estimation	ignoring diversions

Future articles will address each of these individual factors and their influences on marking. Actually these skills are also necessary for running accurate blinds. Throughout the series, please remember that marking exercises should play a very small part in the early stages of training a retriever.

Marking drills are used only intermittently in a variety of locations and environments, throughout the entire Wildrose basic retriever curriculum. The ability to mark is a natural instinct among quality retrievers. All that is necessary is to enhance the gifts proper genetics has provided. Dogs with weaker natural skills can benefit from properly formatted marking exercises.

More emphasis should be placed in early training experiences on memories, steadiness and handling skills. Excessive marking can promote unsteadiness with the excitable pup and often results in a self-employed dog, that is a dog over confident in getting the job done on their own.

Handling and memory exercises, on the other hand, promote interdependence between the handler and the dog. The young dog will rely to some extent on the handler, thereby remaining both under control and confident, a much more cooperative relationship. Periodic, meaningful marking activities will not interfere with this relationship as long as the dog is kept calm and marking is not over done in each session. **REMINDER: NEVER NEEDLESSLY OVEREXCITE** a pup with repetitive, meaningless marks...unless the pup has a motivational problem.

To be continued next month... Concentration