

Wildrose Training Newsletter
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Wing Shooting with a Stone

Seems as though quail and pheasant hunting is regaining enormous popularity and even attracting a new segment of the shooting public, especially after the attention our Vice President, Dick Cheney, favored the market with last year when he popped a friend (lawyer) with his 28-gauge quail gun. Wildrose saw this trend coming years ago and began dual training our game dogs for retrieving upland and waterfowl using some of our dogs for flushing, even pointing. Now, about 50% of our market is for the upland hunting dog.

This January, the Wildrose crew was treated to a great wing shooting experience on quail with Peter, Jones, a Wildrose client and owner of Calie, his pointing/flushing Tommy pup. Peter has a wonderful preserve of pine timbers, hardwoods and lakes just south of Atlanta, Georgia.

The first day's hunt was on Peter's plantation with pointing dogs handled by Bryan Jones and Wildrose client, Clay Bryan. Pictures of our hunts can soon be seen at http://www.uklabs.com/photos_wildrose_hunting.html. It was enjoyable to work our labs (Calie, Hamish, Kane, Daz and Beretta) along with very well-trained pointers. The teams did put birds in the air and when the guns did their job, they picked 'em for the bag.

The following day presented us with a unique, special treat. We hunted the Charlane Plantation in Dry Branch, Georgia, www.charlane.com with a **Stone**. This shoot was a tradition plantation affair with horses, jeeps for clients, fine dining and great guides. The surprise was the owner, our host and our horseback mounted point spotter, Chuck Leavell. Those familiar with great "rock-and-roll" bands should know him well. He is a member of the famed **Rolling Stones** on organ and keyboard.

After introductions, Chuck hit the timber on horseback as our party mounted aboard two well-equipped jeeps with high-rise seats and multiple dog boxes. Of course, the well-mannered Wildrose dogs were posted atop the boxes and inside the open topped vehicles as the kennels were occupied by teams of well-trained pointers.

We worked the dog teams in several different ways as the "Rock-n-Roll" legend observed the action high above the terrain on horseback. The following are the different scenarios we successfully ran that day (which, by the way, netted us 109 birds for the 5 hunters).

Team I – Labs at heel--Pointers doing their thing covering the ground with efficiency. When at point we approached them and placed all labs at sit as they backed the Pointers. After the covey flushed and birds were down, the pointers rushed away into the cover in

search of more game. Our party returned to our steady labs and picked the fallen game (most of which were blinds due to the dense ground cover and pines).

Team II – Same set up as seen with Team I except a lab became a “strike dog.” That is, one retriever was selected to “bust the covey.” You see, often the birds were pointed in very thick brush or cover with no way to get to them for a flush. Keeping the pointer steady is important so we just lined one of the labs for the target area, and then sent them for a retrieve.... The explosion followed! It’s a very important skill to have a dog steady to the flush to prevent them chasing the birds, then finding themselves in the pattern of a shotgun.

Team III – Our labs were used as the primary gamefinders for (a) singles after a covey flush as the bird dogs worked to locate downed birds as well, (b) locating the coveys themselves. We had several occasions when Hamish and Calie found birds before the pointers, locked on a point themselves, and the pointing dogs came in for the back. Now that was a special sight and we did get pictures! The labs proved in every case to be steady when game was located, great at putting reluctant coveys in the air (the flush), steady on the flush---no chasing on the wing and shot, then would find those downed birds.

Hunting retrievers with pointing dogs is a great experience and a very effective game-producing team. Each compensates for the shortcomings of the other. For instance, wide-ranging pointers cover more ground quickly, while the labs were much better retrievers of downed game and handle easily in thick cover.

Here are a few tips for those interested in starting your retriever on the path to becoming an upland game dog.

1. Impeccable heel work and steadiness – Your dog must honor other working dogs, remain steady with birds flushing about them and heel quietly as you approach dogs on point. Also, heel work is important as you attempt to negotiate rough ground. The unsteady dog is an unwelcome addition to any quail hunt.
2. Good disposition, no bad-dog attitudes – You will need a civil dog with a good nature. No fighting other dogs despite the close quarters they will be working in.
3. Under control – The upland hunter must respond well to the whistle even in the heaviest of cover, recall quickly, stop 100% on the whistle despite the distractions and cast easily or you won’t be able to maintain control with the excitement of the hunt or put them on a blind in thick cover. On a quail flush, quite often multiple birds fall in thick cover. You will need a dog accustomed to multiple retrieves, which will handle well to pick up these unseen falls.
4. Steady to wing and shot – a dog who chases the flush may well become a victim of a gunshot. You will need to put a great deal of emphasis on steadiness before your dog experiences quail hunts:
 1. Planted pigeons
 2. Tethered birds

3. Sport clays

5. Backing – on sight of a dog on point or, if not, at least you can stop your dog and he will remain steady honoring the dog on point as well as the flush. Here group work will pay off. Have your retriever honor dogs while sitting still in the field as other dogs run around them for retrieves. Flush some planted birds, shoot some clays, fire a couple of launchers. Work the dogs very close together involving a lot of excitement. The honor dogs (backers) must remain still and quiet, no whining, no creeping. Always return to collect your honor dog and heel him off sit, never call them forward on the hunt. Be consistent at reinforcing the importance of steadiness.

If you want to know more (and there is lots more to share), then join us March 3 and 4 at Wildrose Kennels in Oxford, Mississippi, for the most unique training weekend for upland dogs and their owners **The Upland Hunter Academy** – two days of hunting/training/shooting tips to ready you and your dog for any upland shooting experience: grouse, quail, pheasant and dove.

Instructors: **Tom Knapp**, Benelli's top gun and host of **Benelli's American Bird Hunter** (Outdoor Network, Thursday evenings) will provide the shotgun instruction and I do dog training work – one-on-one with you and your gundog (pointers, flushers and retrievers of all breeds welcome).

Imagine the opportunity not only to see Tom shoot but to receive one-on-one instruction from this world-renowned master shot.

Lunch is included and a very special Saturday evening is planned as well. The entire event will be filmed for the American Bird Hunter tv series and Mississippi Outdoors. Now is your chance to become a tv hunting star with your dog.