

Upland Hunting with a Flushing Dog: Part I, Sit-to-Flush

By Jim and Phyllis Dobbs

Many people use their retriever for upland hunting as well as for hunting waterfowl. NAHRA and UKC include both quartering and trailing as a part of their hunt test programs. The UKC even offers an upland hunting retriever title.

Training a dog for upland hunting consists of three major parts: sit-to-flush, quartering, and trailing. We break these three parts into several sub-tasks in order to make it easier for the dog to learn its upland hunting lessons. In the first part of this series, we will discuss sit-to-flush.

Steadiness

To teach the dog to sit-to-flush, he must first be steady. Use a place board when teaching him that he has to wait until he is sent to retrieve. After the dog is steady on a place board repeat his steadying lesson without the aid of the board. We discuss in detail how to steady your dog in our article in the *Retriever Journal*, Feb/March 1996. You can also down load the article from our web page (www.dobbsdogs.com) by clicking on the retriever library.

Whistle Sit

The second subtask that the dog should understand is to sit on a whistle command. Assuming the dog already knows that one whistle blast means sit, we like to teach the dog to sit quickly. Do this by jogging with the dog and giving him a sit whistle as you quickly pull up on the lead. Immediately come to an abrupt halt. Repeat this a few times.

Then, repeat the procedure but instead of giving him a leash correction for a slow sit, use an e-collar correction. When the dog will consistently sit quickly remove the lead. With the dog off lead, use the e-collar to reinforce any non-compliance to the sit whistle.



Call the dog to you; as he is getting on the place board, release the bird, and give him a command to sit.

Stop Chasing Birds

To have a dog that is steady to wing and shot, he needs to understand that it is not correct to chase birds (even when you miss your shot and the bird flies away). To teach the dog not to chase birds, take a box of pigeons to the field. (We like to use "homers".) Tease the dog with a bird; then throw it low to entice him to chase it.

After he has chased the bird *about thirty yards*, use an e-collar correction to stop him. Use an intensity setting that is just high

enough to discourage him from continuing the chase. Call him to you and get out another bird. When he gets back to you, throw the bird. Repeat this procedure until he won't chase a bird when you throw it.

"Volunteer" Birds

In the next step, teach the dog to sit at the sight of a bird flying up off the ground, even though he hasn't smelled it.

Begin by leaving the dog on a place board. Stand behind another place board that is about twenty feet away from the dog. Call him from one place board to the other a few times.

Repeat this procedure but this time have a bird in a launcher that is positioned a few feet behind where you are standing. Call the dog to you, and as he is getting on the place board, release the bird and give him a command to sit.

If the dog gets off the place board, correct him and guide him back onto the board. After the dog understands that he is supposed to stop and sit when he sees the bird launched, try the same procedure without the place boards.

When training the dog to sit at the sight of a volunteer bird, be sure to have him approach on the upwind side of the bird. You do not want the dog to smell the bird!

If you allow the dog to approach from the downwind side of the bird, he is likely to start sitting when he smells a bird instead of going in and flushing it. This happens because he will chain the events together- scent followed by a flighted bird and the command to sit.

Since he is corrected if he doesn't sit when the bird flies, he will try to avoid the correction by anticipating it. Consequently, he will start sitting when he smells a bird instead of waiting to see it flush.

When teaching the dog to sit at the sight of a volunteer bird, it is important that you also have him hunt for, and catch, several wing clipped birds. This will encourage him to go in quickly and flush birds without hesitation when he smells them.

Sit on Gunfire

Leave the dog on a place board and stand about thirty feet from the dog. Call him, raise the gun in the air, shoot, and give one whistle blast. Repeat this sequence several times and the dog will anticipate the sit command because it consistently follows the shot.

From now on, only give the whistle sit if the dog doesn't sit when he hears the shot. Enforce the whistle command with an e-collar. The dog will learn to avoid the correction by sitting when he hears gunfire.

Sit-to-Flush

Now the dog knows all the subtasks that will enable him to easily understand to sit when he flushes a bird. Let's put them all together.

Take him to the field and have him hunt for, and catch, some clip-winged pigeons that you have planted. Then when he is coming across the field in front of you, throw a homing pigeon and shoot a blank gun as the bird flies away. The dog should sit at this familiar sight.

Next, plant a bird so that the dog will be close to you when he flushes it. Your presence helps maintain control and you are close enough to him to talk him into sitting if he is unsure. Gradually allow the dog to flush birds that are up to twenty yards away from you.

Coming in the Next Issue

Another important part of upland hunting is to have the dog cover the field in an efficient, bird finding pattern. In Part II of our series on "Upland Hunting with a Flushing Dog" we will teach the dog to "quarter".