



USE OF DOGS (I)



Aim

The aim of this guide is to describe the use of dogs as an aid to deer management, in particular the use of dogs for finding dead deer and tracking injured deer*. This guide is linked to the “Reaction and Follow up” guide**, which should be considered essential companion reading.***

Why use a dog?

Deer dogs are most useful for two main tasks:

- ◆ Finding dead deer. Lethally shot deer may sometimes be hard to find depending on terrain, cover, or light conditions, a dog can easily locate recently dead deer by ground or air scent (“Hot tracking”).
- ◆ Tracking injured or wounded deer. After a car accident, or a shot that was not immediately lethal, a deer may travel some distance. Even after many hours, a dog will be able to track the deer and if necessary, it can be dispatched. (“Cold tracking”).

2 It is not essential to have a dog with you when stalking but all deer stalkers should have access to a suitable dog or be able to contact a dog and handler team, particularly for woodland stalking.

Suitable breeds of dog

Many breeds of dog of all sizes can be trained to work with deer.

It is recommended that a dog intended for working with deer is initially trained solely for that purpose.

Basic training

Discipline is essential in any working dog, they should be:

- ◆ Calm, confident, and reliable when recalled, especially in the presence of deer, game and livestock;
- ◆ Reliable when at heel
- ◆ Steady to the sound of rifle fire;
- ◆ Capable of staying in one place for extended periods).

Most dogs with this level of training should be perfectly capable of accompanying a stalker, of indicating the presence of live deer, and of hot tracking well shot deer.

For a dog to become efficient at tracking injured deer, including cold tracking, additional training is recommended.

Training dogs for cold tracking

A dog trained specifically for cold tracking is capable of accurately following a scent trail, even from a lightly injured animal. The trail may be 24 hours or more old and stretch over long distances, possibly miles/kilometres. Such a dog will also easily follow a “hot” track if the handler decides that is appropriate (see also part 2 of this guide).

- 3 Cold tracking training should be well embedded before a dog is allowed to follow hot tracks or track live deer.

A well trained dog works slowly enough to “indicate” any relevant signs that they find, and at a speed that the handler is able to spot and check these signs. At a year or so old most dogs should easily be able to follow a 400 m trail, with turns, 3 hours old, and using only 25cl or so of blood or no blood at all. More experienced dogs should be able to follow a much older or more complicated trail. Cold track training should be regular, even experienced dogs benefit from reinforcement training, especially those that are also used on hot tracks

- 3 Most tracking is done using the leash but it may be necessary at the end of a track to release the dog so, when reliable at cold tracking, they should also be trained to either bay or hold deer if necessary.

- 3 Handlers also need experience. They should be able to recognise any information that the dog’s behaviour provides and know how to maximise the chances of a find. Important skills are being able to analyse the “strike” (or “shot site”) and acting accordingly (See the Follow up of Shot Deer guide), as well as knowing how best to help the dog get re-started on a trail if the trail is lost. Handlers should also be competent at humane dispatch***.

A number of organisations offer advice and training for tracking dogs and handlers as well as a free, confidential tracking service using an experienced dog/handler team. Amongst these, in alphabetical order are:

Bavarian Mountain Hound Society (BMHS) UK Deer Track and Recovery (UKDTR)
UK Scent Hound Association (UKSHA)

Decision to bring in a dog for tracking

- 2 All shots taken at deer should be followed up by the stalker (see the Reaction and Follow up guide*).

- 3 Following the correct follow up procedure will lead the stalker to the “strike” or “shot site”, i.e. the place where the deer was standing when the bullet was fired. This should then be clearly marked.

If a dog is already present it should be kept a little distance away whilst evidence is being examined.

If, judging from the signs, there is a high degree of confidence that the deer is well shot, it can be tracked by following the blood trail by eye or, if a dog is present, it can be put through its “hot” tracking routine. If at any time subsequently the animal is obviously lost, pause and review options as per the “Deciding on how to track the deer” section below

- 3 Otherwise, using a dog to track a shot deer should always be considered when:
 - ◆ from the shooting position, it is obvious that the animal is wounded and has gone out of sight and that a dog is likely to be required. In this case, estimate where the shot site is for finding later, but leave it undisturbed until you return.
 - ◆ at the shot site there is no sign of a bullet strike, or of the deer. A surprising number of “missed” deer are subsequently found, often perfectly well shot, but occasionally wounded. A trained dog will be able to confirm a hit or a true miss.
 - ◆ the signs at the shot site indicate that the animal is wounded rather than already dead.
 - ◆ a search has been made without a dog, but the animal is still lost. Note that the longer or more intensive an unsuccessful search is, the harder it may be to track the animal subsequently because repeated trampling can spread the scent away from the true trail.
- 3 Once the decision to bring in a tracking dog has been made, it is best to leave the area undisturbed until the dog is available.

continued in Use of Dogs(2)

* See BPG Reaction to Shot and Follow-Up ** See DCSG Night Shooting: Code of Practice
***See BPG Humane Dispatch