

George DeCosta's Birddog Dictionary

Throughout the years when I've worked with folks and their pups often times I'll say something about the process, or the dog and the person will ask, "What's that mean?" And many times when I read posts on line, or I myself post there will be a question about the meaning of some dog terminology. I decided it would be a good idea to share some of the common, and maybe not so common, definitions of terms and words used when working and testing your hunting dog. These definitions are not set in stone, they are my understanding of the terms from the information and experience I've gained from hunting, training and working with hunting dogs and hunting folks for over fifty years. Hope you find some of them useful and informative.

Air washed: This refers to a bird that has just flown and set down in a field. There has not yet been enough time for a scent-cone to build up around the bird. And because it has just flown through the air beating its wings the bird itself does not permeate much scent. Many times even seasoned dogs will work right over the top of one of these air-washed birds, never scenting it.

Back: When a dog Backs, it points another dog and does not intrude on the pointing dog's find, or retrieve. Also, some retriever handlers use the command Back to send their dog straight away from them. (For more see Backing)

Backing/Honoring: This when a dog stops and points another dog that has already established a point. The Backing dog should stop as soon as it sees the other dog on point. The backing dog is out of the scent-cone. If the backing dog moves into the scent cone and then points behind the other dog, that IMO is a double point, not a back. (Doing this is also a failure at the NAVHDA Invitational.) Some folks use the term Honor in place of Backing. Also some folks will consider a dog that points behind another dog (double point) an honor because the second dog did not steal the point. (Cut in front the original dog for the point.)

Biddable: A dog that takes well to training and is fairly easy to train.

Birdie: You'll here some folks state that a dog is "Birdie" when they see a dog's body language change knowing that the dog has located strong scent.

Bite: This is how a dog's jaw is configured and how the teeth line up. The normal bite is a scissors bite where the front top teeth are slightly in front of the bottom teeth. Butt bite is when the front top teeth butt right up against the bottom teeth, edge to edge. Undershot is when the front top teeth are behind the front bottom teeth. Overshot is when the top front teeth are out in front of the bottom teeth, there is an obvious space between the top and bottom teeth.

Blind Retrieve: This is when a dog is sent for a retrieve either in the field, or into a body of water and it has not seen the bird, or bumper fall.

Blinking: This is when a dog decides not to do something and pretends not to notice what is in his/her view, or scenting area. For instance a dog that has blinked a bird has come into the scent cone and has obviously made game and then acts as if he/she didn't scent the bird and turns away from the area to keep searching. A dog that blinks a Back/Honor is a dog that has seen the other dog on point, but then turns away as if it hasn't seen the dog so that it can keep searching.

Bottom: A dog that "has Bottom" is a dog considered to be super strong in the field with a never give up attitude. It's also a dog that can take a very high level of training that might include heavy pressure.

Brace: This is when dogs are put in the field together to hunt, compete, or test. Usually there are two dogs to a Brace, but there can be more than two per Brace.

Break Away: This is what field trial folks call the start of a Brace. The dogs are released simultaneously and usually all bolt straight out into the field.

Broke Dog: This is a dog that is considered completely finished; rock solid on steadiness, retrieving, searching, etc. Sometimes called a finished dog.

Cast: This is when a handler gives the dog a directional command in order for the dog to head towards a retrieve, or to hunt in a certain section of a field.

Check cord: A long lead many times used when working with young dogs. Mine are from twenty to thirty feet long.

Coat: This is a dog's hair, or fur covering its body. Coats are judged by their Density: Dense, Medium Dense, or Open. Coats are also judged by their Harshness: Harsh, Medium Harsh, or Soft.

Conformation: The build of a dog's body relative to the standard of that specific breed.

Cooperation: This is a dog that works with its handler without having to be commanded. Example: a dog that chases a bird and then comes back on its own to the handler to continue to hunt with the handler is considered a cooperative dog. If a dog has to be commanded to come back to the handler for the hunt, that dog is an obedient dog.

Creeping: This is when a dog does not remain solid on point, but creeps forward, most times the dog will stop, creep, stop creep.

Delivery Command: This is the command used to have the dog release the bird, bumper or animal into the handler's hand. Some delivery commands are Give, Drop and Out.

Desire/Heart: This is the fire in a dog's belly to hunt, or retrieve. Something that can't be trained, it's in the breeding/genetics. You can however help pull out some desire from a dog with training and some pup's higher desire comes out as they mature.

Duck Search: This is within a NAVHDA test and is testing the dog for the desire to search for downed game within a pond. The dog is brought to the edge of the pond and the handler will fire one shot and then send the dog out for the retrieve. The dog does not see any bird fall and is not required to find the bird. The dog is judged on its search of the pond, but if the dog does find the bird it must retrieve it. In hunting it comes into play in a heavily covered pond, sending a dog for a duck search and seeing it come out of heavy cover with a bird in its mouth after a long search is something special.

E-collar: This is a modern day electrical collar that derived from the old shock-collar. (Big difference.) Think of the first IBM computer that filled an entire room just to compute mathematical equations. Now we have iphones, Androids, laptops, notebooks, notepads, etc. All of which derived from the original computer, but do far more than ever believed possible. Today's e-collar can have GPS, vibration, beeper, voice and soft to strong stimulation, far more advanced than a shock-collar.

Ectropic/Entropic Eyes: Ectropic eyes have eyelids that are turned outward and sometimes make a pouch under the eye. Entropic eyes have eyelids that turn in and sometimes rub on the eyeball.

Field Trial: This is usually a competition where there are braces of dogs going against one and other for points... and sometimes money.

Finished Dog: This is a dog that is considered completely finished; rock solid on steadiness, retrieving, searching, etc. Sometimes called a Broke dog.

Flagging: This when a dog is on point, but its tail does not become solid. The tail wags, which is called flagging. (Flagging is also known in breeding. Something a female dog does when she is ready to take the male. She will stand still and flag her tail.)

Forced Fetch: This is when a dog is trained to retrieve an item to hand every time without ever putting it down, or dropping it. The completely FFed dog should hold the item waiting for the handler to give the delivery command.

Gun Sensitive: This is a dog that is affected by gunfire, but will continue to work at some point. Example: a shotgun is fired and a pup runs to the handler and stays by his/her side for a while and then goes back to searching and hunting. Or a pup stops for a period of time after a shotgun is fired and looks scared, but after a bit, goes on about its business.

Gun Shy: This is a dog that shuts down when a firearm is fired anywhere near the dog. The dog may run away, run to the car, go by the handler and not leave the handler, or even cow-down and no longer move at all.

Hack: Continually giving a dog, or pup commands when they are not needed. Over handling the dog and not letting the pup work on its own.

Handler: This is the person handling the dog/pup while hunting, or testing. There might be four hunters in the field, but there should only be one handler. In a test you might have judges, apprentice judges, gunners and others out in the field with the dog, but there should only be one handler.

Hard Mouth: This is when a dog chomps, chews, or clamps down hard on a bird; so much so that it breaks the birds skin and ribs.

Honoring/Backing: Some retriever folks will use the term honor for a dog that stays sitting in the blind while another dog goes for the retrieve. This term is many times used when a dog stops and points another dog that has already established a point. The Honoring/Backing dog should stop as soon as it sees the other dog on point. The Honoring dog is out of the scent cone. If the honoring dog moves into the scent cone and then points behind the other dog, that IMO is a double point, not a back, or honor. (Doing this is also a failure at the NAVHDA Invitational.) Some folks use term Backing instead of Honoring. Also some folks will consider a dog that points behind another dog (double point) an honor because the second dog did not steal the point. (Cut in front the original dog for the point.)

Kick Box: These are usually boxes made of a heavy screen type of material that a bird is placed under. The box keeps the bird in place in the field, but allows a scent-cone to permeate from the bird for the dog to scent. Once the dog has pointed the bird the handler can move to the box and kick it over to release the bird.

Launcher: This is a box that holds a bird until the handler decides to launch the bird into the air. Some are remote where the handler can push on a transmitter to release the bird from many yards away. Some are manual where the handler pulls on a string, or steps on an arm to release the bird.

Making Game: This is when you can see a dog's body language change and you know it has scented a bird and is trying to locate the bird for a point, flush, or retrieve. Some folks will say the dog is getting Birdie.

Mark: This is when a dog sees a bird, or maybe a bumper land in a field, or water. The pup then marks in its mind where the bird/bumper is at for a later retrieve.

Pinch Collar: A collar that pinches a dog's neck when pulled. Many have metal prongs that protrude and poke the dog's neck as pressure is applied.

Pin, or Pinch Birds: This is something you can't train, only a very smart dog that has been given its head to reach out at an early age can learn this. And once you've seen it you'll never forget it. The dog learns to figure out that the bird, or birds that it is working will not hold and just keep running far in front of the both of you. The dog will go to the side and take off in a fast run until it is in front of the running bird/s. The dog will then start working towards you until it has pinned, or sometimes called pinched the bird in between you and itself. Amazing to watch and takes a special dog.

Quartering: This is when a dog is out front searching. The dog does a large figure-eight motion in the field using its nose to locate a scent-cone. Once the dog locates a scent-cone you can see the dog make game, or maybe even start a track.

Recall: This is the command that tells the dog/pup to come back to the handler. Come and Here are common voice recall commands. A whistle, beep, or vibration are also recall commands.

Release Command: This is the command used to release a dog from a stationary position. Could be a release for whoa, pointing, sitting, or any other stationary position. Some release commands are Out, Free, Go, or many times the dog's name.

Relocate: This is when a dog is on point, but the handler cannot locate the bird. The handler will give a command for the dog to relocate closer to the bird. The command could be a silent command such as a tap on the head, or a voice command.

Scent-Cone: Think of a small smoke bomb that is placed in the middle of a field and then activated. If there is no wind the smoke will be dense and thick at the bottom and then spread out and become thinner as the smoke rises. That is a scent-cone. Now think about what happens to the cone if a slight breeze comes along. The cone stretches out with the breeze, leaving one side and maybe even the top area of the smoke bomb with clean air. And if a strong breeze comes along the actual scent cone may be far down wind of the smoke bomb. It's very important to know the scent cone when training a pup/dog.

Searching: This is when a dog works a field, or a pond in a systematic manner. Most times in the field the dog will quarter, but depending on the cover and scent areas, smart dogs may not always quarter when searching.

Slip lead: A leash that tightens on a dog's neck when pulled.

Started Dog: A dog that has been exposed to training, obedience, field and maybe even water work, but is not a finished, or Broke dog. Sometimes these dogs are referred to as Green-Broke dogs.

Steadiness: This is how still a dog will stay in place when on point, or the steadiness of a dog in the blind. A pointing dog that is totally finished in steadiness is steady to flush, wing, shot and fall. Mostly judged as follows...

Steady to flush: From when the dog goes on point until the bird flushes.

Steady to wing: From when the bird flushes to when the shot is fired.

Steady to shot: From when the shot is fired until the bird hits the ground.

Steady to fall: From when the bird hits the ground until the handler releases the dog.

Stealing a point: This is when a dog sees another dog already on point the eases in front of the original pointing dog and then locks on point.

Temperament: This is the dog's outward personality. Is it Shy, or Sensitive, or does it have a Normal, friendly, outgoing personality?

Top Dog/Bottom Dog: This terminology is used in Field Trial Braces. The top dog is the first dog listed for the Brace on the running sheet and the Bottom dog is the second dog listed for the Brace on the running sheet. Top dog usually wears an orange or red collar and the bottom dog usually wears a yellow or lime collar.

Tower Shoot: This is when a dog and its handler are placed at a lower ground level and birds are flushed, or pushed over the top of the handler and dog from a much higher ground level, or tower. Dogs retrieve shot birds that the hunter has shot from high above.

Tracking: This is when a dog/pup is following the path of a bird, or animal to locate it at the end of the path. The dog could have its nose to the ground following the scent path, or it may also have its nose in the air following the scent-cone path. Both are acceptable. A dog that is searching is not tracking.

Quartering: This is when a dog makes a large figure eight figure out in front of the handler searching for scent cones and scent paths.

Whoa: This came from working with horses and is now a traditional command for stopping a dog in place, standing until released. Or to command a dog to remain standing after it has pointed, backed, or just stopped somewhere.