

About The Cover

Story & Photos By Kevin Billy
San Clemente, California



PUPPYHOOD & BIRD EXPOSURE



How to introduce my pup to birds, and when, is a question that I have wrestled with since owning two pointing dogs. I own two Vizslas, Mika, who is four years old, and her daughter, Moxi, who is now four months old.

To be clear, I am a member with the Southern California NAVHDA Chapter and new to bird-dog training. What I've learned from NAVHDA, articles, DVDs, and help from the professionals in my chapter and others is this: the best time to start the introduction to birds with puppies is somewhere between 12 – 20 weeks old. Goals should be limited, focused and exciting to help establish, strengthen, and solidify prey drive. I like to see puppies bold, confident and aggressive. And from what I've experienced, I think the best way to achieve this goal is to set a schedule, using the formula of bird-building blocks as a guide.

To start, I find a quiet place. I've used my fenced back yard, the side of my house, and have put a check cord on the pup out in the field. These areas should be free of




and not to interfere. At this time I'm not concerned if the pup doesn't point or retrieve – my goal is to stimulate prey drive, not obedience training.

Once I see no hesitation with the quail, I step-it up and bring out a defrosted pigeon, and later move to a live pigeon, and repeat the same formula. One caution, because pigeons are bigger, I will often lock the wings to prevent them from flapping so as not to frighten the puppy, then will unlock their wings once I see confidence and aggressiveness has been established.

And lastly, I introduce a defrosted chukar. I play the same game of fetch and tease the pup to plant interest with something that is much bigger, always repeat-

ing the same formula – live bird to follow, flight feathers removed, and allow the pup to focus in a controlled area without interference.

In short, I found this technique of introduction works well. It helps lay the foundation to stimulate drive and keeps it interesting and fun for me and the puppy. I always quit the exercise on a high point and careful not to over-train. I believe a better prepared puppy with a foundation of bird introduction is more likely to succeed in the field and will be eager to start the next chapter in their development as a polished bird dog, a partner for life, who doesn't tire of the game.

“Hunt ‘em up!” 

other dogs, people, gunfire—anything that may distract the puppy. With each exposure, I perform the same exercise in the sequence two to five times before moving on to the next level in the introduction (hence the building blocks) and I will not rush the pup. If I have a set-back, I will retreat back to the previous level, allowing the pup to gain its confidence. Remember, each level is important, and jumping ahead too fast may cause some confusion.

For example, I start off by dragging a wing on a string to entice, and then move on to a defrosted quail, as they are small and fit nicely in the pup's mouth. I will drag and throw the quail for the pup. Once I see keen interest and the pup is excited with the game, I move on to the next step by dropping a live quail in this same area. You will need to remove six to eight flight feathers from the bird or tape them to prevent the bird from flying.

The flapping of a clipped wing bird is intoxicating to a young puppy. During this first introduction of a live bird, I find it best to allow the puppy to investigate the bird

