

Introduction to Birds

March 22, 2009

Step 1



This is the first time birds are introduced. Keeping a few homing pigeons is essential for our training methods. I keep a number of active lofts and have had individual birds for well over ten years. They live, breed and function normally, proving to be tremendous working partners for training young dogs. I enjoy raising pigeons and these photos were taken in Pasadena, California, so not an impossible task to raise homers within the city.

Brea is commanded to “step up” on her crate not using any whistle at this point. It is important for the young dog to be allowed to “choose” its own action. It’s very easy to “make” a dog do what we want while we are positioned to control its actions. But, I believe in setting up situations where the dog is in a position to select right from wrong. Then, I reward when the right choice is made. It allows for the dog to develop his own honesty.

Step 2



Brea has never been allowed to chase anything from the time she was a tiny pup. She’s always had to sit, even if very gently restrained, before retrieving (by calling her name). Introducing birds is the point where all our early training drills are tested against Brea’s natural hunting instincts. The better her basic training, the easier to control prey drive. She was born with a “gas” pedal and it’s training that creates a “break (stop)” pedal.

Telling Brea to “mark”, I release the pigeon. I like that she follows the flight path of the bird. It’s a bonus she didn’t jump off the box but this isn’t always the case! Most dogs in for training will have had a very different start and the temptation for the pup to chase the bird, sometimes really long chases, is more likely than not! When this happens, saying nothing, I wait for the dog to come back without making any fuss. Upon their return, I again tap the box to get them to sit to repeat the process using another pigeon.

Step 3



With very headstrong dogs, I move the box nearer significant boundaries like thick hedgerows or creek beds. With luck, the pigeon will fly over them! This discourages the pup from following. First and foremost, make sure the pup can come to no harm while it’s choosing to chase. However it is better to be pro active than retroactive, starting a pup in the above manner will alleviate many early problems.

Some dogs will chase 10 times, others more or less. You should see them discovering they can’t catch the bird and begin to not to travel as far. Eventually, they will remain sitting and just watch the bird fly away.