

Spring Training – Think Woodcock

By David Molyneaux

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As late winter rolls around, we have a tendency to get the winter blahs of cabin fever. The family dog is getting more restless as the days are getting longer and things are turning green. There is an opportunity out there for both you and your dog to enjoy the spring time perusing woodcock under actual hunting conditions.

Reflecting back on the end of last bird season, you may recall how the pup was progressing worse on his steadiness and retrieves. As with most dogs, the more we hunt our dog throughout the hunting season, the worse it seems your hunting partner gets. You keep reminding yourself that before the shooting preserve closes you want to get out there one more time. But, coaching your dog on a preserve seems to be difficult at best, for the cost of birds and traveling takes priority over the training. This leaves us with training as a second choice to hunting and bagging birds.

Well folks, the majority of upland hunters are missing out on some of the best dog training available. You can be working wild birds, and best of all the cost is next to nothing. When you notice “spring seeps” showing the first green grass, even if there is still snow in the high spots, there is a good chance you will find woodcock. By the time you see geese moving north, the woodcock migration has been well established for a few weeks, so grab your dog and camera.

Nothing can beat working your pup on wild birds. Dogs seem to bloom knowing that the situation isn't a setup, as with planted birds. The woodcock have not experienced any pressure for months now, and the cover is knocked down. The birds hold exceptionally tight in the spring and are easily seen. Along with the little bird's pungent odor, they allow for some great undiscovered dog training. This will enable you to concentrate on steadiness as your dog holds on the flush and report with the use of a starter pistol.

Anyone who has hunted the timber doodle (woodcock) realizes that getting multiple flushes on one bird is a common occurrence. Only a few birds will get your dog an afternoon full of high quality training. This gives the trainer a decided advantage on being able to see your dog working and reading up cropping problems before they occur. This spring, on my personal agenda, is a pup I have to break from running rabbits. We have an appointment waiting for us in our local snowshoe swamp. Woodcock drop in as they are in route northward and we will be waiting their arrival.

The photo opportunities are the best this time of the season due to the barren cover. A series of snapshots of a spring afternoon is a treasured keepsake and will be cherished long after your hunting buddy has passed on. Some of my best photos of my dogs are with spring woodcock in the picture.

So shake off the cobwebs this spring and get in some free wild bird training. Scout out your favorite deer trails and watch for grouse snow roost signs while enjoying an afternoon of woodcock hunting for fun. By mid April you and your dog will be a well trained machine again. It is unnecessary for you to wait for late summer to brush up on a local preserve. After you enjoy this spring outing, you both will have a different outlook on winter's thaw. Check out your state regulations. Most states allow training into the month of April.