

INTRODUCING BIRDS

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The age that you introduce your Brittany pup to birds depends on the personality of your puppy. Three months old may be fine for a bold pup, but you might wait until the pup is 5 or 6 months old if he is timid. Your pup should be confident when he runs on different grounds. He may be self-assured in the yard, but he also needs to be sure afield. If he acts unsure in any way when he's out running, he's not ready to be introduced to birds.

Once the pup is running with confidence on different grounds, you can begin to introduce him to quail or pigeons. These birds need to be good flyers so your pup can't catch them. Match the size of the bird to the pup. Small birds (quail) work best for young puppies. Larger birds (pigeons) work fine for older pups. The flapping wings of a pigeon may hit a small pup in the face and frighten him. Be observant. If he acts uncertain, if he hesitates or looks back at you at any time during the introduction, he's telling you that he's not ready. Let him get a little older before you try again.

To introduce your pup to birds when he is 3 to 5 months old, do the following.

- Take 2 or 3 good flying quail to a small field.
- Dizzy each bird by holding the body and spinning its head just enough so it's head droops to the side.
- Toss the bird down along a tree line where there is enough cover to hold it.
- Plant each bird separately so that you have 2 or 3 objectives to walk to.

Now go get your pup. Do not take him directly to a bird. Let him run free and hunt on his own. He is still young enough to want to go with you. Walk in the general direction of the bird but don't call him or in any way indicate where the birds are. This is the reason for putting out 2 or 3 birds. All you want to do is work him on one bird. If he misses the first bird, continue to walk to the next bird. Don't try to call him back over ground he's already hunted.

Once he finds a bird, he may point it, pounce on it, bark at it, and so forth. Whatever he does, let him do it on his own. If the bird flies, let him chase it. If he starts to chase but stops and looks back at you or comes back to you, he's telling you he's unsure. Wait a week before working him on birds again.

A puppy has a short attention span so train him in 15 minutes sessions. Be

careful not to tie him out or let him lose interest. Continue to work him on birds as long as he's not catching them, and you can pick him up at the end. Be quiet while your puppy learns about birds and scent. When he gets older, you will have to correct him for chasing birds, so, by being quiet now, you aren't indicating your approval with your voice.

An older pup needs to catch a bird and taste it. If your pup is 5 months or older, you can work him on pigeons. Pigeons don't hold like quail and will fly off unless tethered in some way. To make a cardboard tether, cut an 8"x10" section from a cardboard box. In one corner punch a hole. Then cut a piece of yarn about 18" long. Double the yarn and tie the two ends together. Push one end of the doubled yarn through the hole and separate it to make a loop. Take the other end and put it through the loop. This forms a half hitch between the hole and the edge of the cardboard. Now form another half hitch with the tag end of the yarn and slide it over one of the pigeon's feet. Placing the cardboard tether on only one foot puts the pigeon off-balance. The bird is able to fly, but the cardboard spins around forcing it to land. For strong flyers, you may also want to pull a couple of flight feathers from one wing.

- Dizzy the pigeon by holding the body and spinning the head just enough so it droops to the side.
- Toss it down in a small piece of cover in an open field.
- Keep the pigeon away from trees because the cardboard can get hung-up in them.

Now go get your pup. Attach a 12 ft. checkcord to his collar, since, at this age, he may not listen to you. If he's never had a checkcord on, walk him around until he gets used to it. Once your pup is comfortable hunting at the end of the checkcord, bring him in to the bird downwind and across the scent. If he points the pigeon, quickly walk in and flush it. If he dives for the bird, stop him with a gentle tug on the checkcord to prevent him from catching it. You don't want him to catch the bird until it flies. Once the bird flies, drop the checkcord and let him chase it, or hold onto the checkcord and run with him to catch it. When he catches the bird, let him do whatever he wants. Once your pup starts to lose interest in the pigeon, take the checkcord, turn, and walk in a different direction. Encourage him to go with you by pulling on the checkcord with quick gentle tugs. Praise him if he brings the bird to you but don't make a big deal out of it if he doesn't.

These early experiences with birds are part of the foundation that his future training is built on and are key to having a hunting dog you will be proud of. This is where the desire to hunt takes form and where he learns to enjoy his work. Remember to be quiet

and let him have fun.

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