

Field and Feather

The Retrieving Game
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Be Prepared in the Field

As I write this, we are in the middle of hunting season here in Iowa. There are certain things we need to be prepared for when we field train or hunt in case of injury to the dogs or us. Here are some things to keep in mind.

We carry a “human” first aid kit and a dog first aid kit. However, neither of these kits has some things that I consider essential. One item is the fast-acting Benedryl, the strips that melt in your mouth. These can be used for humans or dogs and can be a big help if you or your dog get stung or start to have some other type of allergic reaction. It may buy you valuable time to get yourself or your dog to proper care.

This is particularly fresh in my mind because a friend just had a life-threatening experience from several stings. She has bee hives and has always been very cautious with proper protective gear. However, the last time she took care of her bees this fall, she forgot her boots. By the time she realized she had been stung and started to the house, she was already in trouble. She never had problems in the past, but went into anaphylactic shock within minutes and barely made it to the phone to dial 911. It took several hours in a local hospital to get her stabilized and get all the fluid out of her lungs. She now has to carry an epi pen (epinephrine), but her doctor told her to also keep the fast-acting Benedryl handy for additional help between the sting and the hospital.

Dogs can stick their noses into all kinds of things when out in the field, and getting stung is a common occurrence. When they are obsessed with making the retrieve, they will overlook things like bees or wasps and can get stung easily. You can give the antihistamine strip to help slow the allergic reaction until you can get to a veterinarian or home for proper care. It can also help if they get into a particularly noxious weed that is causing a lot of sneezing and eye irritation.

The other thing that is lacking in both kits is some sort of pain medicine. For the dogs, plain aspirin will work, and for us it is usually Advil. Although I usually have Advil in my purse, it occurs to me that I should duplicate this in the kit, because the kit is ALWAYS in the truck.

Several years ago, I found a product called “Cut Heal.” It smells like pine tar, and is sticky and pungent, but it does the trick. I have used it on cut pads with excellent results. It seals the wound quickly, doesn’t sting and the dogs do not mess with it. They won’t lick it at all—probably because it has such a pungent odor. Obviously you wouldn’t use this product on a really deep cut, but for pad cuts or other small cuts, it works well.

Another key ingredient in the dog kit is some sort of sterile eye wash. After three hours of upland hunting recently, one of the dogs had several grass seeds in her eyes. It is always good to just give a quick once-over and rinse out the eyes when you know they have been in heavy cover. The foxtail seeds can be extremely dangerous—they can work their way under the skin or into the eyes and travel throughout the body, often causing terrible damage, like lung infections. When we are done hunting, we check our dogs over quickly for cuts, abrasions, and examine the eyes, ears and feet. We are less likely to do this in a controlled training situation, but it is a good idea to give your dog the once-over after any type of field work.

Labradors in particular are very stoic, and will keep working even if they are hurt or in pain. That's why it takes a hands-on exam to make sure there aren't any injuries. Recently, friends of mine were checking their dogs out after a hunt and discovered that one had gone through a barbed wire fence. He had ripped open his chest and needed 38 stitches. He had given no indication in the field that he was hurt!

In the spring and summer months, this inspection after field time will also give you a chance to leave behind any ticks the dogs may have picked up. Actually, I pulled a dog tick off one of my dogs in NOVEMBER...so they aren't just for spring and summer any more.

Many times the places we choose to train or hunt are isolated or far enough off the beaten path where help is not readily available. We owe it to ourselves and our dogs to be prepared as much as possible so we can continue to enjoy this sport safely.

Happy Training!

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