

Pacific Northwest Chapter NAVHDA Canine First Aid Seminar

By Phil Swain

On Saturday, July 30, the Pacific Northwest Chapter of NAVHDA hosted a canine first-aid seminar for handlers of dogs in the field. The seminar was led by Dr. Ray Calkins of the Wilsonville (Oregon) Veterinary Clinic. Ray is an experienced veterinarian, having practiced for over 25 years. He is also an avid hunter, an experienced breeder and longtime field trial competitor with his German Wirehaired Pointers.

Ray began the seminar by discussing conditioning for hunting. He made the point that muscle tone and conditioning takes three-four weeks of work of about an hour at least three times per week. However, this muscle toning is not the only aspect of the dog's physiology that requires conditioning. Equally important, the tendons and ligaments must be stretched and strengthened and this takes considerably longer (according to research done by Purina, up to 12 weeks.)

He encouraged participants to exercise their dogs year round to keep them in good condition and to not just try to get the dogs (and themselves) into shape two to three weeks before the first hunting trip. He also cautioned against working dogs heavily when temperatures are high. On warm days, working a dog for excessive periods can cause the dog's body temperature to elevate to 107-109 F, while a normal temperature is 101-102. An overheated dog must be cooled rapidly by immersing in cool water, or, if immersion is not possible, by wetting the head, ears, legs and chest where blood circulation is closer to the skin surface. If ice or ice packs are available, these can also be used, but care should be exercised to avoid frost bite by getting the skin under the ice too cold. Symptoms of excessive temperature in a dog include weakness, stumbling, drooling and bright red gums.

Ray advocated providing small amounts of nourishment to the dog while hunting. He likes the [Purina Performance Bar](#). Other sources of energy for the dog could be [Nutri-Cal](#) or small amounts of normal dog food (with water). The *Purina Performance Bar* is a good choice as it does not include sugar and so avoids a spike in the dogs glycogen level. Giving the dog sugar, or sugar related products is not advisable as the glycogen spike is a very short-lived energy burst that will require intake of water and, long term, more energy will be expended to burn the sugar than the benefit provided. Ray advocates a feeding regimen of twice a day when hunting. A light meal in the morning 1 1/2 to 2 hours before hunting (kibble mixed with and allowed to absorb a good deal of water) and a more substantial feeding in the evening (again, kibble mixed with and allowed to absorb a good deal of water.) When the dog's food is served with a quantity of water--and has had time to absorb the water--it not only puts fluid into the dogs system but prevents the food absorbing water in the dog's stomach and bloating.

Other areas covered in the seminar:

Pad injuries: Pads should be inspected after each day's hunt for cuts and abrasions. Foxtail, cheat grass, etc. should be carefully removed. For cut pads, your vet can provide a topical treatment called: "HB101". If you are in the field, however, a wet tea bag applied to a foot wound will help the healing process due to the tannic acid in the tea. Pads that have a torn loose flap should have the flap trimmed



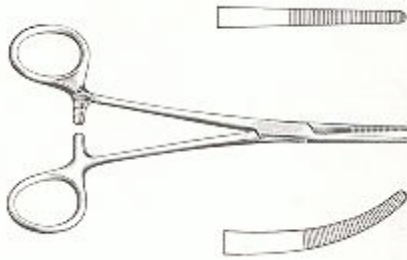
using scissors (some knives, e.g. Swiss army knives and Leatherman tools have scissors on them). The pad should then be protected with a boot or wrap. Pads must have time to heal and can take anywhere from one to three weeks to replace the outer skin when it is sloughed or abraded.

Toenails: Should be kept short. The nails should not touch a hard floor when the dog is standing. If a dog's nails are too long, tearing or breaking are almost certain during hunting. If a nail is torn or broken, applying styptic powder may help stop the blood flow. Serious injuries will require bandaging.



Eye care: At the end of the day, eyes should be checked carefully for seeds and other debris. Eyes can be flushed with simple saline solution available at pharmacies or distilled water. A dampened [Q-tip](#) can be used to clean the eye and if done carefully, can be very effective. If there is irritation around the eye after cleaning, an ointment from your veterinarian may be applied. **DO NOT** use an ointment with cortisone or other steroids (normally denoted by an "H" in the name of the product) when there is a scratch in the eye. Non-steroid products are the only ones suitable in this case.

Ear care: As with eyes and feet, the ears should be carefully inspected at the end of the day. A hemostat (left) is best for removing cheat grass or foxtail from the ears. If a hemostat is not available, needlenose pliers or heavy tweezers may work. Ears should be flushed or washed out weekly with a good ear-cleaning solution. This is part of normal maintenance.



Cuts and wounds: Ray recommends against attempting to suture a cut in the field. A medical stapler may work or, on smaller cuts, skin glue or super glue may be appropriate. In most cases, a pressure bandage is the best treatment. A tourniquet is not advised in any situation. There is too much threat of additional damage to the injured area and the tourniquet will require constant monitoring. For wounds to the body cavity where holding a bandage in place may

be difficult, using a T-shirt or undershirt to cover the wound and then taping over it may help. Wounds should be cleaned as well as possible prior to bandaging. Chlorhexidine is a good product for cleaning wounds. Use of hydrogen peroxide is not recommended as it stings and may produce an adverse reaction from the dog.

Snakebite: Get the dog to a vet as soon as possible! Ray also discussed the new injection available to help dogs build resistance to snake bite. While this injection is a plus and has little known adverse effect, it is not normally sufficient without additional veterinary treatment to prevent damage to the dog.

Fractures and lacerations: Ray demonstrated how to muzzle, immobilize and then bandage a dog for injuries ranging from a broken leg, torn ear or puncture wound in the abdomen. For a broken limb, after the basic isolation taping is done, taping two sticks to the leg can create a splint.

First aid kit: In a first aid kit carried with you while hunting:

- Adequate water for your dog
- Compact thermal sheet/blanket
- Q-tips
- Medication your dog may need or that your dog normally takes
- Purina Performance Bar
- Roll of one-inch medical tape
- Several pieces of gauze
- Small tube of eye ointment
- Tea bag
- Scissors (blunt nose) or knife (a Swiss army knife or Leatherman with scissors, needlenose pliers, tweezers, etc. is a good choice)
- Antibiotic

In addition to duplicates of the above items, the first aid kit in your vehicle should include:

- Bandage materials: Tape, gauze, vet wrap
- 3 X 3 gauze pads
- Telfa pads
- Dog boots (for foot injuries)
- Mobile phone. Make sure you include the number of your regular vet and, when hunting away from home, take the time to find out where the nearest human and veterinary hospitals are and what

vets are available. Enter their numbers your phone's directory.

- Cold pack
- Muzzle
- Non-prescription medications: Buffered aspirin; antihistamine; topical antibiotic; hydrocortisone cream, etc.
- Surgical stapler
- Scissors (blunt nose)
- Hemostat
- Steel comb (especially if you have a dog with long hair)

Flea and tick prevention and other preventatives. Ray recommended using a product like *Frontline* or flea and tick prevention and *Heartguard* to avoid heartworm. Although there is not a significant incidence of [Lyme disease](#) in our area, prevention is the best policy. Similarly, heartworm is found in pockets throughout the Pacific Northwest, so using a prophylactic is recommended to ensure your dog is not vulnerable. Testing for heartworm is currently recommended every two years. There is a vaccination against [giardia](#) but Ray does not recommend it as it has not been shown to be very effective. Diarrhea, when it occurs due to nervousness, may be controlled by giving the dog tablespoon of Metamucil in food the night before a hunt or field trial.

There were many other topics covered and Ray took a number of questions from participants. The information provided was very helpful and all of us went away better prepared to deal with the next field emergency with our dogs.

Editor's Note:

- Thanks to Phil Swain for this report
- Note that Purina[™] is a major sponsor of NAVHDA.