First Aid for Canines Begins with Recognizing a Problem

Owners and handlers should be prepared to administer first aid to an injured dog whenever necessary. In some cases, half the challenge is recognizing when a dog doesn’t feel well.

First Aid in the Field

Field dogs largely encounter problems due to the environment, says Bob West, Purina Director of the Breeder-Enthusiast Sporting Group. “Cuts and abrasions from fences or brush are not unusual, and neither are grass or weed awns that can penetrate the skin.”

A tailgate inspection — putting a dog on the truck tailgate and giving it a thorough once-over check — can work well for field trial and hunting dogs, West says. The physical examination should include:

- Checking the eyes to make sure they are shiny and free of debris.
- Checking the inside of the mouth for puncture wounds.
- Looking for cuts and tears on the body. These should be cleaned with soap and water. If a cut is deep or long, it may require veterinary attention.
- Inspecting a dog’s footpads.
- Running your hands through the coat.

- Inspecting the ears, particularly if the dog has been in water.
- “When field dogs are hunting hard, they are very focused,” West says. “They often don’t give any indication of injury. It’s important for a handler to find any cuts or tears and treat them. Otherwise, you may find an injury days later and it may be infected. It also could become enough of a problem to require veterinary care and lay the dog up for several days.”

Though broken bones may seem unlikely to be a common injury in sporting dogs, they rarely are, says Purina Scientist Dennis Lawler, D.V.M. Injuries to ligaments and tendons occur somewhat more frequently, and are fairly common causes for lameness. However, if a dog does break a bone, the broken bone should be immobilized, the dog calmed down and then quickly taken to a veterinarian. Spending time splinting the leg may cause more problems than it solves, unless the handler has been trained to do it properly.

One of the biggest problems in the field is poorly conditioned dogs worked too long and too hard. “Bred to be hunting dogs, these dogs may overdo it if you don’t keep an eye on them,” West says. “At least six to eight weeks of conditioning is needed prior to the hunting or field trial season to help build up muscle and cardiovascular systems so they can perform safely. Sporting dogs are athletes. The ones that work hard are very enthusiastic and really push themselves. It’s the owner’s responsibility to watch over them and not ask them to do more than they should.”

A very real concern today is that many dogs are overweight and with that weight often comes a greater risk for overworking and in turn, overheating. It’s important to keep dogs hydrated. “Give a little bit of water quite often,” West says. “Don’t let a dog gulp and drink large amounts so its stomach becomes distended.”

As a dog begins to tire or stress, there is often less animation in its behavior. “Dogs have facial expressions, not unlike people, that show concern or apprehension, as stress or overheating become factors,” West says. “A handler can tell fairly easily. The tail action usually slows and becomes less active. Dogs may slow...”

Continued on page 2
First Aid continued from page 1

their pace even though they continue trying to do their job. If they wobble or pant excessively or excitedly, the dog is approaching a point where he’d better be slowed down.”

A dog’s respiratory and circulatory systems are very important to temperature maintenance, West says. Blood flows to organs such as the tongue, gums and lungs and is cooled by the panting action that moves air across. At the same time, critical gas exchange occurs as the lungs dissipate carbon dioxide and acquire needed oxygen. The cooled, oxygenated blood then recirculates to cool and supply oxygen to the internal organs.

“When the dog can’t cool fast enough, the brain starts to protect its core by shutting down different body functions,” he says. “The dog may get an apprehensive look on its face, and panting is accelerated, sounding dry and shallow with less effect, so it makes good sense to flush the dog’s mouth and cool the tongue to allow for more efficient cooling.”

“If a dog shows signs of overheating,” says Lawler, “immerse it in cool water or spray it with a hose. If water is not available, apply ice packs to its head, neck and belly. Move it to a cool place. Use squirt bottles of cool water to flush its mouth. Monitor rectal temperature if possible, and consult a veterinarian quickly.”

“To get on the right track for having a healthy and safe sporting dog, an owner needs to take his dog to the vet for its basic overall health, including dental hygiene and detection and management of any medical problems,” he says. “At the same time, critical gas exchange occurs as the lungs dissipate carbon dioxide and acquire needed oxygen. The cooled, oxygenated blood then recirculates to cool and supply oxygen to the internal organs.”

“Your dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.

“Water from locations across the country, with different smells and tastes, can be a problem.”

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

First Aid on the Circuit

The very nature of campaigning — being away from home, in a different environment and different routine — can be the biggest problem related to sickness on the road. Stress may show up in many ways. A dog may act depressed, not eat or pick at its food, lose weight, not show well and generally indicate unhappiness.

Steps can and should be taken to reduce stress, says professional handlers Jerry Bryant of Granger, Ind., and Bruce and Gretchen Schultz of Riverside, Calif.

Bryant, a professional handler for 30 years who attends 100 or more shows a year with his wife, Dot, handles most breeds but specializes in Boxers. “It’s important,” he says that the “dogs’ routine away from home be kept as close as possible to their normal home routine. When dogs are brought along on the road when they are young, they are pretty well acclimated by the time they are ready to show at 6 months.”


“Often dogs that are not accustomed to traveling will experience homesickness but that lasts a relatively short period of time as they get into the routine of being a show dog,” Gretchen says.

“A dog’s respiratory and circulatory systems are very important to temperature maintenance, West says. Blood flows to organs such as the tongue, gums and lungs and is cooled by the panting action that moves air across. At the same time, critical gas exchange occurs as the lungs dissipate carbon dioxide and acquire needed oxygen. The cooled, oxygenated blood then recirculates to cool and supply oxygen to the internal organs.”

“The dog may get an apprehensive look on its face, and panting is accelerated, sounding dry and shallow with less effect, so it makes good sense to flush the dog’s mouth and cool the tongue to allow for more efficient cooling.”

“If a dog shows signs of overheating,” says Lawler, “immerse it in cool water or spray it with a hose. If water is not available, apply ice packs to its head, neck and belly. Move it to a cool place. Use squirt bottles of cool water to flush its mouth. Monitor rectal temperature if possible, and consult a veterinarian quickly.”

“To get on the right track for having a healthy and safe sporting dog, an owner needs to take his dog to the vet for its basic overall health, including dental hygiene and detection and management of any medical problems,” he says. “The dog may feel depressed, not eat or pick at its food, lose weight, not show well and generally indicate unhappiness. Steps can and should be taken to reduce stress, says professional handlers Jerry Bryant of Granger, Ind., and Bruce and Gretchen Schultz of Riverside, Calif.

Bryant, a professional handler for 30 years who attends 100 or more shows a year with his wife, Dot, handles most breeds but specializes in Boxers. “It’s important,” he says that the “dogs’ routine away from home be kept as close as possible to their normal home routine. When dogs are brought along on the road when they are young, they are pretty well acclimated by the time they are ready to show at 6 months.”


“Often dogs that are not accustomed to traveling will experience homesickness but that lasts a relatively short period of time as they get into the routine of being a show dog,” Gretchen says.

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.

“Water from locations across the country, with different smells and tastes, can be a problem.”

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.

“Water from locations across the country, with different smells and tastes, can be a problem.”

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.

“Water from locations across the country, with different smells and tastes, can be a problem.”

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.

“Water from locations across the country, with different smells and tastes, can be a problem.”

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.

“Water from locations across the country, with different smells and tastes, can be a problem.”

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.

“Water from locations across the country, with different smells and tastes, can be a problem.”

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.

“Water from locations across the country, with different smells and tastes, can be a problem.”

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.

“Water from locations across the country, with different smells and tastes, can be a problem.”

“Many times a new dog will not eat for the first few days because it is in such a different environment than what it is used to,” Bruce says. “But hunger soon ensures that the dog will start eating.”

Bryant notes the importance of dogs maintaining their weight while on the road. He and Dot try to maintain a feeding schedule as close as possible to the home schedule.