

## **Positive Reinforcement Pigeon Games - Part 2**

*By Chad Hines and the Willow Creek Kennels Staff*

In the last article we wrote about beginning to use a pigeon as a means of positive reinforcement and incorporating the “whoa” command. Keep in mind that even though these methods are easy for the dogs to learn, they must be old enough to understand the concepts of the training. A good rule of thumb is usually about 8 months of age.

### **Honoring**

Honoring can be started by working two dogs together. Hold up a pigeon and wait for both dogs to stop. Once they stop (keeping all four feet still), verbally release the dogs and the pigeon. One dog usually returns faster, and will point the second bird in hand. When the second dog sees the first dog pointing and associates the pointing with the bird, he will start to honor. This is a great positive way to begin teaching honoring but will require a few more steps before you can expect a consistent honor in the field.

### **Retrieving**

At the end of any successful whoa session, a winged pigeon or bumper can be thrown for a job well done. It helps dogs realize the purpose of whoa training early on. Rewarding a proper whoa with a bird or bumper helps maintain interest and provides an exciting ending. This also keeps the retrieve moving forward throughout whoa and pointing training as well as helping your dog to distinguish the time for pointing and the time for retrieving. If the dog does not run after the bird, act like the pack leader and run over to the bird yourself, pick it up and toss it again. If you look excited to have the bird, most dogs will begin to have fun with it as well.

### **LRS (Least Reinforced Scenario)**

Again, it is most effective to build on success and not failure. Do not tempt your dogs to fail. If they do fail, one tool we use is called LRS (least reinforced scenario). LRS is simply ignoring the dog until they are ready to train again. This works very well when dogs are having fun with the game and want to play it. If they do something wrong, the game is stopped. Their desire and drive will encourage them to play again in the way you consider appropriate.

### **Benefits**

By using pigeons as positive reinforcement it allows us to encourage numerous behaviors at once. With this method, the dog is looking to us to find birds and works through us to get them. We can condition our dog to range as far as we would like once the birds are moved to the field. Starting with the birds coming from the handler allows us to gain the focus and cooperation needed from the beginning. The dog is also learning that some birds will get away and he must return to us to find more. This is a great way to develop teamwork between dog and handler.

The benefits of using pigeons as a means of positive reinforcement are numerous and help lay a solid foundation for later training. You can use these methods to steady a dog to wing, teach “whoa”, honoring and other behaviors you desire from your dog.

*To learn more about Willow Creek's training methods, visit [www.willowcreekkennels.net](http://www.willowcreekkennels.net).*