

## GUNDOG TRAINING



Verbal commands allow you to instruct your dog when out of sight – but always be clear

# SORRY, WERE YOU TALKING TO ME?

Doctor Dolittle isn't the only one who can speak to the animals, as Lez Graham reveals how to 'talk' to your gundog

**T**he voice is one of the most powerful tools we have when training our gundogs and yet it's one of the most misused and wasted. Voice commands allow us to give instructions when out of sight.

When we use our voices, whether around the home or on the training field, it's important that we use it appropriately. Not just at the appropriate time but at the right speed and pitch also.

If we go wandering around the house chatting away to our dogs we very quickly turn into 'white noise', there to be ignored. Think of all the times you've thought out loud and have people ask you to repeat what you're saying – it doesn't take very long for them to completely ignore your ramblings.

Your dog is no different. Initially, it

will hang on your every word, but it won't take long for it to disregard your voice, and, if you tag its name on to your ramblings, you are actively conditioning it to ignore anything you say. Not a great foundation for a relationship, working or otherwise.

### All creatures great and small

Have you ever heard an elephant squeak or a mouse roar? No, me neither. The smaller the animal, the quieter and higher pitched noise it makes, whereas the bigger the animal the louder and deeper noise.

In the dog world, that generally equates to the bigger the dog the deeper the bark and the more menacing the growl. Your dog's bark will be deeper when it's angry as it will have made itself



**At first, a young dog will hang on your every word, but may soon tune you out**

physically bigger by expanding its rib cage, whereas its 'happy' bark will sound quite high pitched in comparison.

Think about the speed of the bark as well. Happy or excitable barks will be fast, with them coming in rapid succession, whereas a menacing growl is normally a slow drawn out affair. When we communicate with our dogs in a fast, rapid fire manner, this can really excite

the dog, winding up an already fizzy dog or firing up a less than enthusiastic one. Alternatively, by talking to our dogs in a slow, quiet voice, we are calming things down. Taking on a 'matronly' no-nonsense voice is great for simply getting things done.

### Yes, yes, NO!

Another way to use the voice is for marking behaviours; both positively and negatively. I condition dogs that I work with to the word 'yes' by hand feeding them their dinner and saying 'yes' with each piece of food. This act, known as charging, is especially good for dogs that are less confident working away from you or when you first start sending them out of sight. By simply saying 'yes' when your dog is getting it right will mark the behaviour as positive and fill it with confidence as it knows it's getting things right.

Marking unwanted behaviour is just as important, as in the animal kingdom anything that is ignored is acceptable, or rather, when a behaviour is ignored it is being left up to the dog to decide if that behaviour is worth repeating or not. The best thing that we can do with our dogs



**A dog's bark deepens when it is angry as it expands its rib cage to increase its size**

is to make all communication as clear as possible.

So, give them a positive and upbeat "yes" or "good boy/good girl" when they're getting things right. However, when working or at distance I find

a single 'yes' works very well. A clipped deep-toned 'no' when marking unwanted behaviour, or, if correcting, a deeper growlier 'no' or 'ahhhh' are best. The reason these commands are so effective is because they mimic the pitch that other dogs would use at those times.

### Fear factor

The pitch and tone of commands and corrections are one of the many reasons why women are generally very good at training younger dogs, whereas men tend to excel at training wayward "teenagers" as they can naturally get the guttural growly tones. It is an excellent trainer who can do both the high-pitched excited voice and deeper admonishing tones.

The one time, however, when it is always inappropriate to use our voices, is when our dogs are displaying fear. Soothing reassurance is often interpreted as praise, thereby praising the fear and making it worse, while growling tones will only exacerbate the problem. **SG »**

**You can condition dogs to the word 'yes' by hand feeding them as you say it with each piece of food**



## LEZ GRAHAM

Lez Graham works full-time as a gundog trainer and behaviour practitioner and is the author of the *Pet Gundog* series of books. For details of her training days visit [www.trainedforlife.co.uk](http://www.trainedforlife.co.uk).

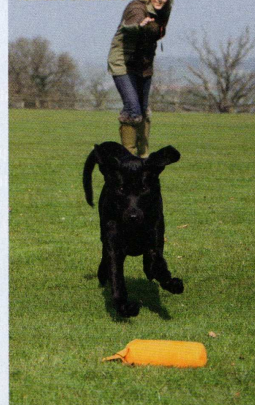
### Got a question for Lez?

Contact her by emailing [sportinggun@timeinc.com](mailto:sportinggun@timeinc.com)

## QUICK WORDS

- > **Think about tone:** a high-pitch will tell your dog you are pleased with it, while a low, guttural tone should be saved for admonishment.
- > **Don't use 'soothing' tones** when your dog is scared as it can exacerbate the problem.
- > **Don't ramble on to your dog** or they will soon tune you out.
- > **Be sure to mark unwanted behaviour** with a clear, deep 'no'.

### Younger dogs respond well to female trainers



## NEXT MONTH:

In next month's article, Lez explains how to engage an unmotivated dog.



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