

Martina Nau

Snooping Around!

Train your dog to be an
expert sniffer



CADMOS

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A question of snooping ...



Snooping permitted? Why, of course it is! If by snooping we mean utilising the canine's extraordinary powers of smell, we're thus opening up a new world of discoveries where human and dog can embark on the path to becoming a successful snooper team.

First off, let's have a closer look at professional sniffer dogs. They co-operate closely with their humans, working as customs and police dogs, as hunting dogs, rescue dogs, as mould-detector dogs and mine-detector dogs. In each case, it is their excellent nose that allows them to become indispensable helpers. Yet almost any dog could theoretically carry out these important tasks – if it had been trained from early youth.

The stars among sniffer dogs include the Bloodhound, the Beagle and certain varieties of Spaniel. This doesn't mean,

however, that other breeds or types of dog are inferior in the olfactory department. Even a dog with the worst possible sense of smell will still have the potential to awe us humans with its abilities.

Dogs are not just equipped with an excellent sense of smell, they also thoroughly enjoy ‘sniffing things out’. That’s the reason why we often have a problem out on walks, when our dog constantly sniffs anything and everything he comes across. Sometimes it can be hard for us to get through to them, so lost are they in their world of interesting smells. However, we can also take advantage of this passion for investigating with their noses – in other words, their ‘snooping’ can be of great benefit to them and to us.

This book covers a lot of ground and will suggest many exciting sniffing ideas to try with your budding snooper dog. We begin with some fun nose games, and move on to suggestions for interesting activities requiring longer and more structured training, using concepts similar to those used with hunting or rescue dogs. In particular, the elements about telling different smells apart, the ‘blind retrieve’, and ‘dragging and tracking’ will be useful for utilising the instincts of dogs with a passion for hunting.

As well as enjoying lots of fun and games, this training will also improve our dog’s levels of calm and obedience. In addition, for working and mixed breeds in particular, an activity only becomes worthwhile if the dogs feel they are doing something important. We should therefore endeavour to give an air of seriousness to our dog’s training.

Before we begin, we will take a further look at the canine’s incredible sense of smell.

The dog’s sense of smell

While the human olfactory organ is comprised of five million smell receptors, the dog – depending on the breed and type

- has up to 200 million receptors. The surface area of a dog's nasal lining is about 85 to 200 square centimetres; a human's is only five square centimetres. If you also take into account that about ten percent of the dog's brain is reserved for the processing of olfactory information, you can imagine how much greater the dog's powers of smell must be compared with the human's.

Dogs take in a huge quantity of different smells simultaneously, filtering the interesting ones in order to pursue them further. When a dog follows a particular trail, he can smell microscopically small dead skin cells or squashed microbes, no matter if the trail is several hours or even days old. The micro-organisms' state of decomposition can tell him whether a trail runs from right to left or from left to right. He is able to smell such a scent trail as clearly as we would be able to see it had it been marked with luminous paint. Try to imagine that!

Nose work is extremely tiring for dogs. The high breathing rate involved - up to 300 times per minute - increases their pulse frequency and body temperature. This is exhausting for a dog so, particularly early on in his education, it would be advisable to keep the training sessions shorter in duration. You will, however, notice your dog's stamina and powers of concentration will improve steadily. This also has a positive effect regarding other aspects of his behaviour - for instance, you might notice an increase in his ability to concentrate on you, despite the presence of external stimuli. You might also find he doesn't get nervous or stressed as easily. This is because his brain, as well as his body, is becoming fitter and healthier.



When a dog follows a trail, he smells microscopically small particles.



Nose work makes a dog tired and content.

How does a dog learn?

The tasks our dogs learn when doing nose work are often difficult and complex. Not every dog learns the same things in the same way. While dogs who mainly rely on their eyes, such as pastoral breeds (think of a Collie herding sheep) will swiftly benefit from watching; 'action' dogs such as terriers often learn quickly by trial and error. Others – above all sensitive, emotionled dogs, such as Irish Setters – feel most comfortable and will understand quicker if the first steps of a new exercise are conditioned very clearly. Think a little about your dog, and try different training approaches to discover which approach suits. This is an exciting process, and at the same time will allow you to get to know him better. This will benefit you in terms of your everyday routine, because if you understand which training approach is the most appropriate for your dog, it will be easier and quicker to teach him new things. In addition, you will be able to find explanations for some of his (perhaps previously mysterious) behaviour. When we train a dog, however, we should remember that in stressful situations he may develop a 'block', which makes it impossible for him to learn anything. For this reason, you should avoid exposing him to too much stress. This can be triggered by external stimuli, such as the weather, certain smells or other dogs, but also if your dog feels under pressure simply because he doesn't understand what you want him to do.