



Gun dog first aid

Veterinarian Dr Karen Davies says readily available sanitary products and cling wrap from the kitchen cupboard make perfect companions for hunting dogs in the field, just remember to mention that you borrowed them.

Whether working dogs are retrieving ducks, hunting deer or chasing down pigs there is a risk of injury.

Any natural environment hides potential danger that dogs focused on their work and full of enthusiasm might fail to see.

Humans are advised to take basic first aid kits with them whenever they go bush whether they are hunting, bushwalking or birdwatching but what about man's best (and most helpful) friend?

Karen Davies says being prepared doesn't require a big outlay.

Her basic canine medical kit consists of tampons for puncture wounds, sanitary pads for cuts and condoms to protect and apply pressure to a leg injury.

It might be unorthodox but she insists these common items are as fit for purpose as much more expensive first aid products.

"Gauze bandages don't have a backing and gauze will tack into a wound while a sanitary pad is non-adhesive on one side and waterproof on the other," she said.

Given the intended use, sanitary pads are also absorbent, drawing away moisture and contaminants while protecting the wound.

Karen, who hunted her own German short-haired pointer on ducks and deer, said a simple but effective first aid kit can make all the difference, buying hunters the time needed to get their dog to a caring vet who understands the sport of hunting and the unique types of injuries it can cause.

Cling wrap is another useful item which can be used even for extreme injuries where a dog's stomach is ripped open.

"It keeps it clean and pulls the wound together," she said.

"You can even make it tight enough to be a compression bandage."

Another essential item for hunters is a

pair of tweezers for removing grass seeds although the time spent plucking them can be significantly reduced by a little preparation.

"Shave its feet for the season, especially with the wire haired breeds so you can see them."

The improvised field kit should also include pre-boiled water or a simple saline solution to flush wounds.

"Washing a wound with saline and then wrapping it in glad wrap can be a lifesaver when injury occurs in a muddy, wet environment," she said.

Another handy inclusion is electrolytes to treat one of the most common problems, dehydration or exhaustion.

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Dr Karen Davies

"High motivation dogs like Labradors will often push themselves beyond their limits because they are so overstimulated," Dr Davies explained.

The polite explanation is that even older Labradors retain a 'puppy like' enthusiasm for retrieving which can overwhelm their self-preservation. They literally party until they poop.

"A heart rate of 150bpm is normal while working but it should drop to 80bpm within five minutes, if the breathing and heart rate doesn't come down it is a sign of fatigue."

Electrolytes will help the dog recover but there is also a preventative pathway — pre-season training.

"You wouldn't see a footballer take the field without training and it's the same for hunting dogs."

"The pre-training has got to reflect the work you're going to do, if you are stalking deer than walking is fine, with Beagles get them to follow a scent trail or work on a treadmill, duck dogs need to swim.

"Some of my hunters will come in with their dogs pre-season and work them in the hydrotherapy pool which we use at the clinic for rehabilitation."

While exhaustion or dehydration can be spotted and treated immediately in the field the outward signs of muscle soreness is delayed.

"You won't see that until the next day when there is obvious soreness or your dog refuses or is reluctant."

Treatment should be with anti-inflammatories but this is one instance where you will have to seek professional advice and purchase the right product.

"Most anti-inflammatories made for humans are not suitable for animals," Dr Davies stressed.

The final bit of advice for the hunting season is to think about the welfare of older dogs you might think have reached the end of their working life.

Karen Davies has personal experience with her own pointer who was struggling in the field but still excited when the guns were loaded up for a trip.

A little veterinary investigation including the use of a pedometer revealed that it wasn't her desire that had waned but reluctance because of the onset of arthritis which was causing pain.

A program of supplements and anti-inflammatories gave the much-loved companion her spring back and a quality of life which allowed her to do the work she loved.

"She went back hunting and kept going until she was 15 years old, she was slower and didn't walk as far but she was happy, that was pretty cool"

Arthritis was the root cause but it was being compounded by inactivity.

"The saying you snooze you lose is never more apt than it is with muscle mass."

Veterinarian Dr Karen Davies owns and uses hunting dogs and has broadened her expertise to include animal rehabilitation, animal physiotherapy and animal hydrotherapy services. Readers of Field & Game Magazine can draw on her experience and expertise by submitting questions to editor@fieldandgame.com.au

Karen can be consulted at Direct Vet Services, 8/22-30 Wallace Ave, Point Cook, VIC; Email: directvetservices@bigpond.com or Tel: (03) 9369 1822.

