

Going the **EXTRAMI**



COURTESY OF JOACHIM ERNST

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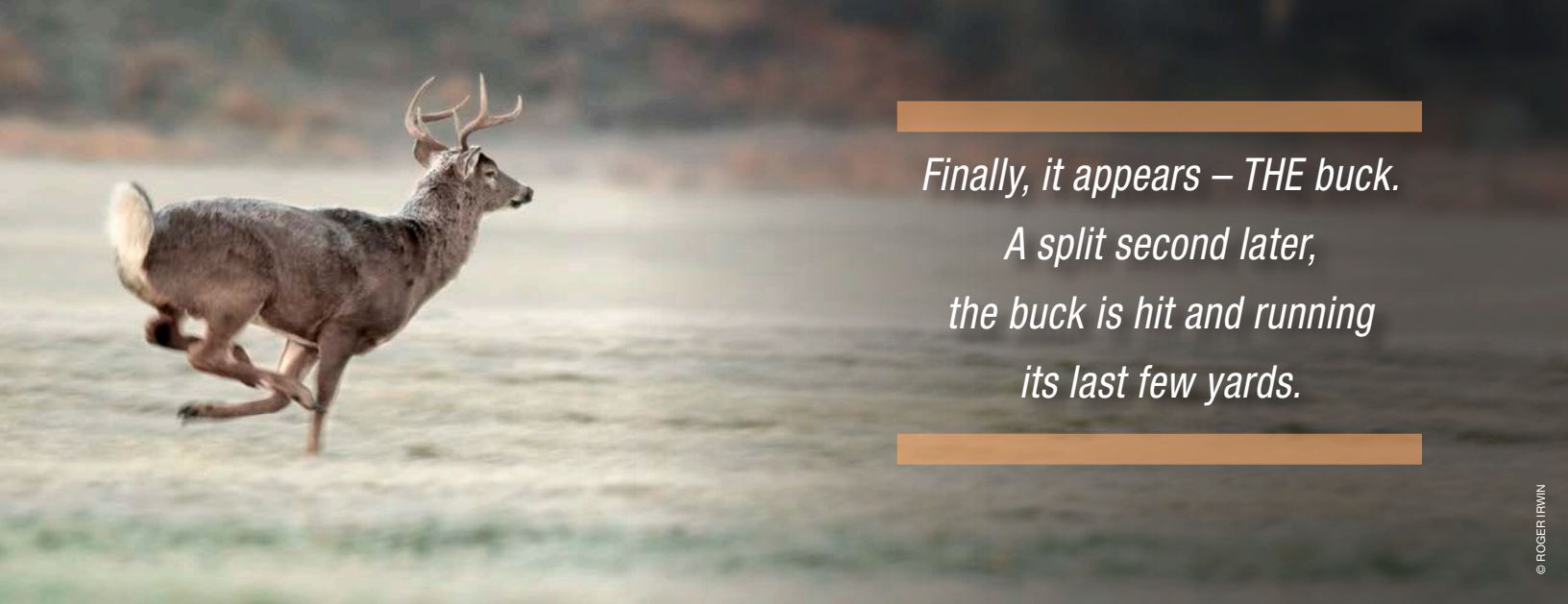
NEW HAMPSHIRE'S DEDICATED LEASHED DOG TRACKERS PROVIDE A REMARKABLE RESOURCE FOR HUNTERS

Fall game hunting is one of the most exciting seasons of the year. Thousands of hunters across New Hampshire can't wait to get out into the wild. Weeks in advance, the most promising spots are explored, tree-stands are built, and shooting abilities trained. Once you are out in the field, everything is different. What seemed easy weeks ago, now turns into a challenge. It's hard to stay cool when you hear the snap of small branches that tells of the arrival of the deer you dreamed of. The longer it takes, the stronger the thrill of the chase will be. And finally, it appears – THE buck. Endless minutes lie behind you; now with a flexion of your finger, the buck will be yours.

A split second later, the buck is hit and running its last few yards. It may already be dead, but it usually takes some seconds until all of its movements are finally stopped. Full of expectation, you look for blood to follow the trail. But what if there is blood, but no buck at the end of the blood-track? What if there is no blood at all, much less a buck?

There is only one answer. Stop searching on your own and call one of New Hampshire's licensed leashed dog trackers. They provide hunters statewide with their volunteer service. They are as enthusiastic about hunting as you are, and they know that when hunting, everything is possible. Even the impossible can happen. Many hunters still do not know that such a service is available for every hunter, without any cost.





*Finally, it appears – THE buck.
A split second later,
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© ROBERT IRWIN

LOOK FOR CLUES

To get the total benefit of a leashed tracking dog, it is essential to understand that there are some rules to follow, which are different from hunting without a tracking dog in reach. A wounded animal is full of adrenaline. It is able to move on, even though it is heavily or mortally wounded. The further it moves, the more likely it is you will never find it. And the further it goes, the greater the chance it will leave a track that will be found by coyotes.

Therefore, if the game is out of sight after the shot, the most valuable thing you have is time. Take a moment to remember the details of what happened. Did you see where you hit the game? Did you notice the game's reaction to the shot? Do you remember exactly where it disappeared? Examine the place where the game stood at the moment you shot. Have a close look at all you can find there. Pick up any evidence and save it for the tracker. It might give him or her an idea of what happened. Be mindful of not disturbing the site.

The best sign you can find is bright red blood, indicating that you hit the lungs. It is the most deadly shot. No need to call a tracker.

If you do not find that type of blood, and the game is not in sight, wait at least an hour or two. Give the animal time to lie down and reduce the amount of adrenaline.

Many signs indicate where you hit the game. A wounded liver leads to dark blood that appears to be more brown than red and contains liver bits as small as grains of sand. The animal, especially a bear, will react aggressively if you approach too soon. Hollow bones or bone marrow indicate a leg shot. By the way, if you are not certain if you have found fat or bone marrow, rub it between your fingers. Bone marrow will disappear and leave a kind of oil on your fingers; fat won't.

If the game falls down immediately, but stands up after a minute or two and runs away, you usually will find a great amount of hair. This may indicate that you hit the dorsal process on the deer's backbone, resulting in temporary paralysis. Shots like these offer a reduced chance to get the animal.

Whatever you find, if it's not the game, don't search on your own. Do not make the wounded animal stand up and run away. Go to the Fish and Game website and call a licensed leashed dog tracker near you.



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Bright red color and small bubbles are typical evidence that a bullet or arrow hit the lungs (left). Usually this means the animal will be found dead within 100 to 400 yards. If you find no trace of lungs in the blood (center), give the animal an hour or two to lie down and reduce the amount of adrenaline in its system. While humans need visual evidence of deer tracks (right), tracking dogs can detect a "footprint" on hard surfaces like asphalt.

LEASHED DOG TRACKERS

To become a licensed leashed dog tracker in New Hampshire, you need to have a valid hunting license, an additional tracking license and, of course, a well-trained dog. These dogs have fascinating abilities. But all talent is nothing without hard work, nothing without years of training and practice.

Many hunting dog breeds are used, American as well as European. What they all have in common is the will to hunt game in their genes. Although they act instinctively, only those who are trained well and get a lot of practice become excellent tracking dogs.

Ethical hunters, out of respect for the game, do everything they can to recover it. Leashed dog trackers can help. Find a team at huntnh.com/hunting/leashed-dog-tracking.html.



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THE NOSE KNOWS

Most hunters believe the dog follows a blood track. That is not true. To find blood on the track is nice, but not more than a sign for the tracker that his dog is still on the right track. While a human nose is equipped with about 5 million receptor-cells, a hound has more than 300 million. In combination with what's called the Jacobson's organ, an organ humans don't have, a hound can literally taste the smell and analyze its origin, age and gender. All in all, the hound smells 10 thousand times better than humans do.

What the dog actually follows is a more complex "track." In general, a track consists of three parts: the individual scent of the animal; blood and other parts, such as bones and hair; and disturbance of the ground.

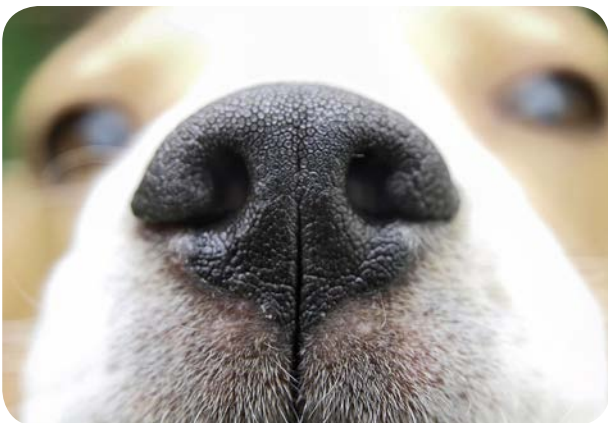
Each animal has its own scent. The smell of a wounded animal is mixed up with the smell of stress caused by the shot, which the dog is able to discern. This is why a tracking dog is able to follow

the right animal, even if it is part of a larger group.

The disturbance of the ground is the most important of all three parts. To understand why, it is necessary to have a closer look at what happens when an animal puts its foot on the ground, keeping in mind what the dog's nose is able to smell. If a foot touches the ground, it is pressed into the earth. How far depends on the consistency of the ground and the weight of the animal. The foot, in combination with the animal's weight, crushes the soil, plants and bacteria. That causes a smell that is different from the smell around the footprint. When the animal moves forward, small parts of the ground stick on its feet and are brought into the next footprint. This is why the dog is able to recognize in which direction the animal is moving, even if it goes back in its own track for a hundred yards or more. On a muddy surface, we can see these footprints, but the same thing happens on hard surfaces like streets, which are often used by wounded animals and where footprints cannot be seen by humans.

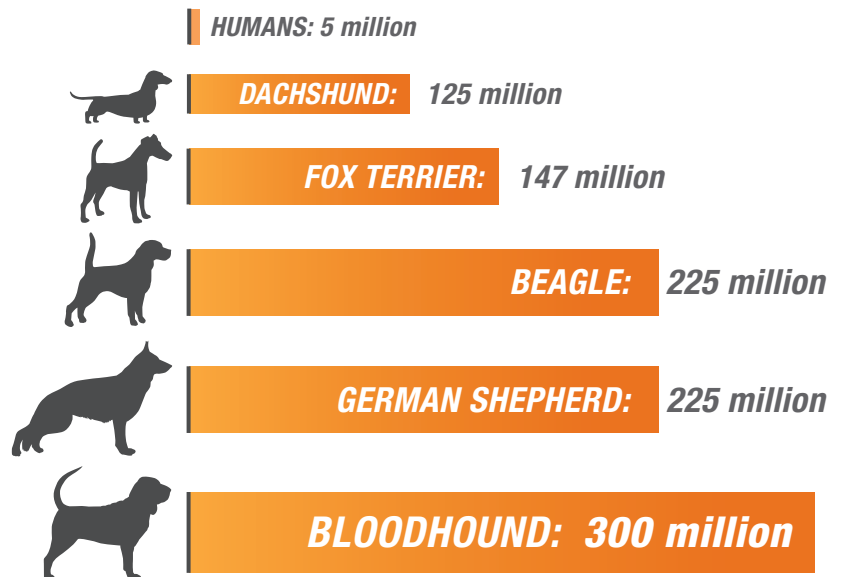
THE NOSE KNOWS!

In addition to a highly developed olfactory lobe in the brain, dogs also pack a far greater number of scent receptors than humans do. However, not all dogs are created equal; some breeds have a superior nose.



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*Number of Scent Receptors in Humans and Dog Breeds



* REFERENCE: "Understanding a Dog's Sense of Smell" by Stanley Coren and Sarah Hodgson from *Understanding Your Dog For Dummies*

A grateful hunter thanks author Joachim Ernst (right) and his tracking dog "Argos," a male Austrian black and tan hound, for helping recover his doe.



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WONDER DOG

Let me give you an example of what a tracking dog can do. One September day, Mike, a hunter from Langdon, N.H., called us. Right after the shot, he found just a little blood, no real blood track and no doe. Some 48 hours later, he heard about tracking services and asked if we thought there was any chance at all of finding the animal, especially because there had been a night of heavy rain. After a trip of nearly two hours, we met Mike and he showed us the shooting site. Every visible trace had been washed away by the rain the previous night. We had to rely fully on the dog's abilities. Immediately, he started to work. It was not an easy job and took the dog a lot of concentration. Many deer had crossed the location during the past 48 hours. Again and again, the dog moved back to the starting point, knowing that he had lost the track. Finally after about an hour, the dog found the last particles of scent and followed the track to the doe, which lay hidden under thorns. Mike was totally amazed and said, "I have heard from hunters about your wonder dog, but did not believe this could happen after 48 hours and heavy rain."

Back home I got a call from a Conservation Officer: "Mike brought in a doe he shot 48 hours ago and said your dog found it today. I don't believe it. Is this really the truth?"

"Yes, it is!" I replied.

There are many more stories to tell. We found a bear after three hours of constant tracking and many miles through the woods. No blood on the track at all. A buck was found after 72 hours. In another case, a doe we tracked did not bleed, and the dog led us to a restricted area. We decided to ask for permission to access the property after

"I have heard from hunters about your wonder dog, but did not believe this could happen after 48 hours and heavy rain."

the dog found and indicated a single hair of the doe. And the dog was right – we were just 100 yards away from the already dead doe.

The licensed trackers you find on Fish and Game's website will make every effort to assist you. We found the first blood from Patrick's bear in Lancaster half a mile away in a swamp. And we crossed a river in a canoe to check if Tom's doe had died in the river and got lost, or made it to the other side. In a word, we go the extra mile. After we tracked for him, Patrick said, "I will never again track without a dog!"



Joachim Ernst of Baden-Baden, Germany, has been a licensed leashed dog tracker in New Hampshire for two years, and currently assists hunters in the Black Forest, Germany. He has written articles for German hunting magazines and published wildlife photography in magazines, calendars and postcards. Visit eye2nature.com.