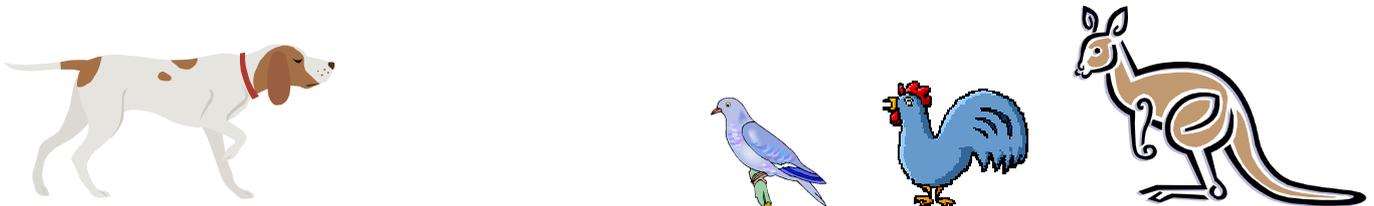


CHASING WILDLIFE

For dogs, chasing and catching smaller animals (and sometimes larger animals such as kangaroos) is a natural instinct called “prey drive.” While some dogs may be perfectly happy to live with chooks, pet rats or guinea pigs, many dogs will not be so relaxed. The best method to ensure a peaceful home is, of course, prevention. While your dog is still young, teach them to be calm around small animals, and give them other ways to occupy their time and interest. (See entertaining your dog handout). If your dog has already caught and injured or killed an animal, you will need to be very patient, vigilant and persistent while you train an alternative behaviour.



We need to set your dog up for error-less learning. This means that during the training you will need to ensure that your dog does not have access to the small animals.

Ensure that your dog is receiving enough exercise and enrichment. A dog who is bored is much more likely to engage in destructive behaviours, or to try and “make his own fun.” General obedience and the ability to follow instructions is also extremely helpful, however you will still need to teach your dog what to do in the specific situations where their prey-drive is activated.

The first step to take is to ensure the small animals are in a safe enclosure, where your dog is not able to see them. Work with your dog on building focus - targeting is an excellent exercise for this. (Ask for our Clicker and Target Training information sheets.) Make sure you are rewarding your dog highly for this focus, with treats or preferably a toy. As your dog’s focus increases, along with their ability to work for a reward like tug, (don’t play tug too wildly when you begin this exercise - you need your dog to be thinking clearly, not playing exuberantly) take them on lead to just within sight of the small animals. Practice calling your dog to you, and reward them for continued focus. Move around the small animals (from a great distance) and reward your dog for keeping their eyes on you, instead of watching anything else. These sessions may be as short as a few seconds and should only increase in duration if your dog remains focussed on you.

Slowly increase the amount of time you expect your dog to focus on you in the presence of the animal, and then slowly start decreasing the distance between the two parties. Ensure you continue to reward your dog for each success and always make sure you have your dog’s focus before moving on to the next step. Once they are able to maintain their focus closer to the prey animal, start to increase the distance between you and your dog keeping your dog on a long lead, while the smaller animals are within sight. Practice calling your dog, getting and keeping their focus. Remove your dog immediately if at any point it can’t respond.

If the animals are roaming free, like chooks, ensure there is still a fence between your dog and the small animals even during the training process.

Punishment is not the answer

Be mindful never to associate the presence of small animals with punishment - it will only break down the bond between you and your dog, confuse them (as they don't know what is the right thing to do) and increase their desire to seek out the small animals when you're not there, to avoid being punished. Remember that a lot of dogs were specifically bred to chase and kill small animals.

You need to ensure that your dog knows what to do instead of chasing chooks or other animals.

If the animals are occasional visitors to your dog's environment (ie snake or possum) you can pair the arrival of the animals with starting an activity like going to your bed with a chew toy or playing with a particular toy.

If the animals are permanently present, always ensure that there are effective barriers in place, no matter how much training you provide if you cannot control the circumstances when you are not present! Do make sure you teach your dog an alternative behaviour i.e. come and play with this toy, the alternative behaviour needs to have moderately high value for your dog. (See Take-tug-give info sheet).

Information sheets that you will find helpful:

- Clicker & Target
- Take-Tug-Give
- Nothing in life is Free
- Denning/crate training
- Look at me
- Mat training
- Entertaining your dog
- Kongs
- Treat dispensing toys
- Why we don't use punishment