

Zwinger u. Feld (Kennel & Field)

Illustrated Weekly

On Hunting, Dog Breeding, Shooting, Fishing, and Equestrian Sport.

Editor **Karl Brandt** in Osterode a. Harz.

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Deerhounds at hunting

by Fr. B. Laska, k. u. k. Hauptmann (Captain)

Dear Mr. Brandt!

I'm pleased to respond to your kind invitation to write something about my own hounds and the way I use them to hunt. Although I must admit that I'm willing to do so with a certain hesitation, as I worry that your readers might suspect I could be writing *pro domo*, hiding the promotion of my own opinion in the guise of a classic and rigorous cynological debate. This is not the case, as you yourself know very well, and fortunately, my passion, the Deerhound, due to its rareness and – in the eye of the hunter on the Continent – its unfamiliar appearance, is never destined to become everyman's dog.

My hounds originate from the famous Rossie-Kennels in Forgandenny, Perthshire County (Northern Scotland) whose owner, Mr. Weston Bell sadly died more than two years ago. Mr. Weston Bell has earned the immortal distinction of having preserved this time-honoured breed, which had almost disappeared. My hounds carry the oldest, noblest, most purebred blood of the legendary breed uniting the merits of the strains of Menzies of Chesthill, Cameron Breadalbane, and of the Duke of Sutherland. In their outward appearance, they fully represent the so-called Champion Strathmore type, i.e. the modern type of dog preferred by the judges with a fine and subtle head and ear, elegant extremities, high-arched and compact cat paws and a harsh, wiry coat – originally, the Menzies of Chesthill hounds had longer, softer and fluffy hair that distinctively hung over their heads. Today this type is no longer favoured and is gradually disappearing due to selective breeding towards the Strathmore character.

Before I'll get down to the actual intention of my lines, please allow me to say a few words on size in Deerhounds. On the Continent - even among cynological circles - one can find the very erroneous view that a Deerhound should be perceived as a giant animal with a size approximately of 76 cm (30 inches) upward – the higher, the more noble and beautiful.

Accordingly at a show on the Continent in 1897, the German judge sent one of my hounds, which only had one competitor, down, mainly because he was too small (at a height of 72 cm: 28 inches). The same judge, at the same show, disqualified my Deerhound bitch Highland Mary from competition, due to her small size (66 cm: 26 inches shoulder height).

On the occasion of the Dog Show in Graz in 1896, the same bitch placed first under Mr. Raper, the judge certified by the English Deerhound Club, when the judge explicitly called the attention of the surrounding gentlemen to the outstanding beauty of Mary. It goes without saying that I did not object to the derogative remark by the German judge in 1897 and took it in my stride. I shall take "revenge" by showing the offspring of Mary, who was sent out of the ring, to an English judge who will certainly judge them differently.

In Vero Shaw's "Book of the Dog" Mr. Graham, famous for regenerating the Deerhound, writes:

"It is a most noticeable and curious fact that the purer the breed is, the more marked is the disparity between the sexes in the Deerhound. Thus, if two *pure* bred dogs be used, the difference between the sexes will vary from four to six inches in height (10-15 cm); whereas, if the female parent be crossbred and of large size, the difference between the males and females of the litter will only be two inches (5 cm), and, oddly enough, even if the bitch so bred shall vastly exceed the truer bred one in size, the dog puppies from her – by an equally fine dog – will generally in no way exceed in size those from the smaller but truer bred bitch."

Those that are further interested in the correct height of Deerhounds will find the detailed measurements of several English prize winning hounds in the respective chapter of Beckmann's comprehensive work (*Beckmann, Ludwig; Geschichte und Beschreibung der Rassen des Hundes 1894; reprint from Kynos Verlag GmbH 1983. O.F.*), where it can be seen that the largest hound measured 74 cm (29 inches) at its withers.

By the way, the English Deerhound Club officially incorporated a description of the Deerhound in 1892 – drawn up by Messrs. Hickman and R. Hood Wright. I herewith provide future show judges (for their information) who, themselves, have seen no or only a few Deerhounds, with the official wording concerning the height of this breed.

"Height of Dogs. – From 28-30 inches (70-75 cm) or even more if there be symmetry without coarseness, but which is rare.

Height of Bitches. - From 26 inches (**65** cm!) upwards. There can be no objection to a bitch being large, unless too coarse, as even at her greatest she does not approach that of the dog, and therefore could not have been too big for work, as over-big dogs are. Besides, a big bitch is good for breeding and keeping up the size.

Weight: from 85-105 lbs in Dogs. From 65-80 lbs in Bitches."

I'm utterly convinced that the previously mentioned mistaken words on the dimensions and other qualities of the Scottish Deerhound on the Continent derive from the identity of this breed being mistaken with that of the formerly closely related Irish Wolfhound which has been re-created in England in the past years from the Deerhound, from sparse remainders of the own breed, and with the aid of various large dog breeds. It is bred for height and mass, surely today still to the extreme disadvantage of other points, but in particular the paws, the ears and coat as well as the typical nobility of the overall appearance.

Among the famous illustrated purebred dog types made by the German Master, Professor Sperling, one can find a picture of a Deerhound, depicting "Druahmah" a bitch, which was kept in Germany years ago. In the interest of my breed I feel an urgent need based on practicality to raise an objection against the animal displayed ever having been a Deerhound. No Deerhound, since the times of Fingal and Ossian, ever looked like this!

To me it is inexplicable how this picture (that was also reprinted on the title page of the "Oester. Hundesport") can even up to now be considered as an ideal of the beauty of the Scottish Deerhound on the Continent without anybody's objection. Apart from this totally impossible build with its flat, horizontal topline and the odd, unnatural root to the tail, this image of "Druahmah" shows a hound with a totally deadpan or expressionless head, in which a human eye with too much white has been inserted. In itself the inferior ear flabbily hanging down would be enough reason to exclude such an animal from any competition. But the most impossible aspect of this picture is the coat. Unfortunately, I'm not able to find the proper distinctive term to describe the unnatural and spruced-up "hairstyle" of this dog, which is actually supposed to be harsh and wiry.

On the whole this is a breed image that is profoundly substandard and which does not fit in with the Master's grand collection of superbly characteristic canine images, fully admired by myself. "When you can't get what you like, you must like what you get!" as the immortal lines have it from the "Grand Duchess of Gerolstein", and so I suppose that "Druahmah" herself was by that time the only representative of a Deerhound in Germany that could act as a model for Master Sperling. Judging from the way the picture turned out, the hound couldn't have possessed much quality. The fact that, as a bitch, she was said to be 80 centimetres! (31½ inches) in height, as well as the height of those of her descendants known to me, confirm my opinion. However, if, as I take for granted, anybody disputes my candid opinion of Druahma's picture, I herewith propose the following "gentleman's agreement": we shall send the reproduction of the picture, which is commercially available, to the English Deerhound Club and kindly request their expert judgement! I would be pleased to defer to this.

In order to proceed with the hunting skills of the Deerhound, it should be understood that since the intensive economic exploitation of the Scottish moors for grouse shooting and to a lesser extent for big game shooting, deer hunting with the Deerhound became almost entirely obsolescent. Deerhound husbandry was then mainly carried on by the Scottish nobility for the sake of a fine tradition dating from Ossian's ancient time, when this noble dog was mentioned in the same breath as the highland nobility itself.

Today a Scottish castle without Deerhounds in its halls and courtyards is almost in the same way unthinkable as it would have been centuries ago. Moreover, the Deerhound is currently the favourite of English ladies from high society who treasure it for its noble characteristics. The hounds of the Duchess of Sutherland annually win the first prize at shows.

When I brought my first Deerhound bitch in whelp from Scotland to Austria – thanks to the expert mediation of my dear friend J. B. Staub, Zurich – I had the intention of getting these wonderful animals re-accustomed to game, in opposition to their northern homeland where they are hardly ever used for hunting anymore. By re-awakening ancient instincts I aimed at turning them into hunting companions, which would give me great pleasure.

Allow me to refrain from describing all the misfortunes in breeding that I initially had to overcome, as well as the severe losses among my young and old stock caused by distemper. I only want to express astonishment at myself, and the doggedness that made me rise again and again after I had cursed Deerhound breeding for the failures and illusions I had succumbed to.

Today I have overcome these difficult beginnings almost completely: I own a fair number of faultlessly shaped hounds, which are fully acclimatised and exceedingly weatherproof – and their hunting performances have been very satisfying. In particular, I want to emphasise that due to my residence in Vienna, where keeping and least of all handling so many dogs would not be feasible, I have distributed my fosterlings. My hounds are held by dear friends in Russia, Galicia (*today: Polish province – formerly: province of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire O.F.*), Hungary, Styria and Carinthia (*the latter two: Austrian provinces O.F.*) and are used there intensively for hunting.

In Scotland, the Deerhound was according to its name solely used for deer hunting. In former times, when the hunting grounds were enormous, the hounds hunted only the fit and healthy stags. As is commonly known, the big game of Scotland is found almost exclusively on the cliffy, woodless high moors, and the highlands, where it is able to browse abundantly. When the Scottish nobleman wished to hunt, the primary task was to locate a particularly powerful stag or a herd of deer that had settled down after the nightly browse.

When this had been achieved, the huntsman endeavoured to stalk the game with a leash of Deerhounds as closely as possible, taking cover in the deep brook beds, behind rocky cliffs and knolls. Then the hounds were slipped and the frantic chase

raced up and down the bens and glens until either the stag was pulled down by an exceedingly fast and strong hound or, what frequently occurred, it went to bay, i.e. it stood still in a brook bed or a lake between cliffs – especially during the time when deer are fattening. There the hounds would bay at the stag – often for as long as 24 hours – until the huntsman arrived and shot it in the head. He would have followed the chase from high ground using his binoculars.

It goes without saying that such a chase often went for a very long way. This kind of hunting was called “deer hunting”. As the hunting grounds and the deer population diminished, hunting with Deerhounds changed in the following manner. The size of hunting grounds became insufficient in order to hunt the “cold”, or fit and healthy stag, and so the hunt was superseded by “deerstalking”, the hunting of sick, i.e. wounded deer.

The start of the latter was exactly the same as in “deer hunting”, but it was the stalker’s job to give the stag a “gut shot”, or wound it in the haunch. Then the hounds were slipped and the hunt proceeded as described above.

As an Austrian huntsman I won’t ever approve the intentional haunch or gut shot, due to an age-old understanding of good sportsmanship, but having said that, it would not at all cross my mind to call it unsporting of English huntsmen, which would be intolerant and chauvinistic. In the same manner, I certainly won’t accuse the English, for hunting the fox solely “par force”, or the French for riding after the roe deer with a pack of dogs, of being “carrion hunters”. Each country has different customs and, likewise, I expect my traditional Austrian hunting conventions and my hunting language to be respected. Consequently, I will not allow myself to be spiteful of other nation’s historical peculiarities in hunting. Each to his own!

I most likely needn’t have to mention that I, in no case aimed at following suit the briefly outlined English form of hunting and stalking when I acquired my Deerhounds. No! I myself didn’t know the breed from practical experience and, thus, I wanted to learn whether the hunting instincts, which had been suppressed for a long time, could be awoken at all for the time being and, if so, to which form of Austrian hunting the aristocratic Celt could be best adapted.

With great delight I well recall the day in September when I first took my Deerhound bitch “Schuloch” to the hunting field. She had whelped in August having already been bred in Scotland. It was near Vienna at the hunting ground for fowl and hare on the left Danube bank where several quite considerable lots of shrubbery could be found amidst the stubble fields.

Even while going out to the part of the grounds where I wanted to hunt, I noticed, with great pleasure, the lively interest of my noble Deerhound bitch caused by each hare hopping over the stubble fields. She stood straight up, showing herself in a superb pose – every nerve tense from ardent passion – just so, a model worthy of Canova’s chisel. All of a sudden as we were about to walk down a knoll we had climbed just before, a hare popped up out of its form and got ahead. “Schuloch” threw herself against her leash, begging. Not wishing to be heartless to her any more I gave her the hare, which fled from us some 70 yards ahead. At the same time I grabbed my watch.

In very, very little time, much faster than I am able to write down these notes, “Schuloch” had gained on the hare with great, elastic Deerhound bounds. The clumsy “Marchfeld” hare (*“Marchfeld” is the plain N.E. of Vienna between the Danube and the Morava - German= “March” - rivers, on the border of Slovakia O.F.*) did not appear to understand the impending mortal danger – it had not yet been acquainted with exactly this kind of hound. Only when the bitch opened her jaws with brilliant white teeth, did it see the daylight and took flight frantically – but too late! Suddenly taken at full speed, there was the plaintive cry, and it fell prey to my beautiful Scot – she choked it and let it fall.

As I was about to hasten downhill in order to save Puss from the presumably inevitable gorging, I cannot describe my astonishment when “Schuloch” picked up her prey, completely in compliance with “retrieving” rules, and gripping it in balance, while

she properly retrieved it, brought it with a prancing trot back to me. Overly delighted, I yelled "Well done! Well done! Retrieve!" when she laid down the hare and paused with a puzzled expression. She obviously did not know the words and was afraid of having displeased me. I was instantly silent, and "Schuloch" picked up the hare again in order to lay it down in front of me.

I must add at this point that this Deerhound bitch could never be induced to pick up an object and bring it to me on command. She only ever retrieved game, and that solely without command. It is exactly the same with another 6 of my hounds, so that I tend to consider the retrieving of small to larger game, compatible to their strength, to be an inherited characteristic of the Deerhound. It is absolutely, with the strain I have bred.

On the same day I was so fortunate as to be able to put another, at times much disputed, characteristic of the Scottish Deerhound to the test – its excellent scenting ability. Shortly after the kill of the first hare, I had already put "Schuloch" on the leash again, when a second hare suddenly appeared, but this time a bit further away. Wishing to admire once more the fine work of my bitch, without hesitation I encouraged her to chase.

Shortly after this happened, I knew I was bound to regret it bitterly: there was quite a dense and extensive scrub lying approximately 200 yards ahead, mainly consisting of alder and blackthorn. The hare was rushing towards it in haste – far behind in pursuit was my Deerhound bitch, apparently somewhat hindered from the first hunt since she had just stopped suckling her offspring and was completely out of condition.

With a good view from the hill to the leafless and sparse scrubland, I could easily observe the hare heading for it where it – at full speed – now disappearing, then visible again – raced across the lot at its greatest width (300-odd yards). Then the hare came out of the scrubland aiming for a wooded hilltop about 800 to 1000 yards away. Normally a hare carrying out such a manoeuvre towards a wood is safe from ordinary sighthounds, Greyhounds, and therefore I was quite annoyed with this failed hunt, which was my own fault.

(To be continued)

Sangerhausen, 22 January 1898

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by Fr. B. Laska, k. u. k. Hauptmann (Captain)

(Continued)

But things turned out differently. Schuloch was approximately 100 yards behind and naturally lost sight of the hare, which disappeared in the scrub; when she reached the ground, she stood still for a moment in order to scent. But then, at a fast trot, she kept track and sought wind of the hare consistently with clear determination. After having run along two turns of the hare's trail, she left the scrubland at exactly the same place as the hare had previously.

From that moment on, she continued to hunt by sight again, and bounded on admirably, in a way that is solely characteristic of the Deerhound, and she caught up with and took her crying prey while it was preparing to escape into the protective mountain forest. The first hunt took 47 seconds, the second 4 minutes and 20 seconds.

Later I shall find space to talk about the scenting power of Deerhounds. When I started to distribute my fine hounds to various countries, it was my intention to provide them through this with many opportunities to hunt, on different game under diverse climatic conditions, and so test them for what they were best qualified. I will now try to review the hunting performances achieved by my hounds in the order of those countries where they were used for hunting.

Let me start with Russia. Deerhounds originating from my kennel are held by the Barons von V.....ff in Livland, and von E.....dt in Kurland. The former gentleman has used my Deerhounds for hunting moose, together with his pack of scent hounds (*Austrian breeds: Brackes O.F.*), as well as for hunting fox and wolf since this last autumn. According to what I have heard, they show an unusually strong hunting passion, which I consider to be the most important thing for the time being. At the present I am not in a position to state further details since I await in-depth reports on their merits at the end of the current hunting season.

At the same time, my hounds that are with Baron von E. will now be completing their first hunting season, but I have been notified several times about their courage, scenting power and speed. Baron von E. is – given the location of his manors – a passionate fancier of coursing with sighthounds, and he owns a number of excellent English Greyhounds. I have recently received a letter from him stating: “I have taken “Ossian” along with me lately and was surprised to see him always up among my English hounds (Greyhounds). One of these days I will take “Ossian” out again to the field (Ossian had been suffering from a bad toe for a month) to match him against my conditioned Greyhounds who hardly ever miss a hare.” – And so forth. So I eagerly await further reports, which most likely will not arrive before February or March.

I also have a dog with a friend in Hungary who is counted among the country's most famous huntsmen on horseback. Much to my regret his messages are however not as favourable as those from Russia and other places. All my hounds that were kept by him so far, three in number, have been equal to his best sighthounds regarding swiftness, but my friend only complains that they don't take the fox and hare although they reach them quickly. This is really inexplicable to me since the siblings of these hounds demonstrate outstanding courage on any kind of game in other countries. Although I must admit that almost all my hounds, when first entered, were puzzled as to what they were supposed to do with the game. They behaved like bashful cadets at their Colonel's table: they did not dare help themselves.

This initial indecision of my hounds is only the entirely natural result of the fact that in the past 40-50 years the Deerhound has been kept merely as a noble luxury dog, whose hunting instincts became dormant. But I think though that I have proven splendidly with my efforts how quickly they can be re-awakened. Taking into account

that only my Hungarian friend complains about my hounds lacking courage, I conclude that an incorrect approach to management must have been adopted.

Those that ride to the hunt with sighthounds well know that a firm whip plays the key role in training, to make them firm and tough. The Deerhound despite its courage and bravery is extremely gentle by nature (a circumstance that made it so popular as a luxury dog). Its gentle soul does not accept any harsh treatment, it is deeply grateful for kindness. A sharp reprimand is adequate to have it obey. My friend may have applied some intense whippings “hot as pepper”, since he is used to managing the tough Hungarian greyhound stock (*the Magyar Agar O.F.*), and so as a result the Deerhounds became unreliable.

While the aforementioned friend lives in the Hungarian plain and hunts only on horseback, I have placed more Deerhounds with a second acquaintance in Huberto, in the Carpathian Mountains on the Hungarian side (Province of Zemplén in the Great Beskid mountain range). In the enormous and almost boundless mountain forests there, the mighty stag, the roe deer and notably the wild boar live in an abundance that we don't see even in our hunt-loving Austria. My friend, who hunts the latter game passionately, provides his hounds with training in order to track and take it perfectly. It is strange to say, but the very siblings of those hounds, that are with the “alföldy Cácsi” the “uncle from the plain”, which handle hare and fox too “tenderly” there, perform excellent service on adult wild boar, foxes and even the lynx.

Last year a powerful wild boar of the Beskid threw one of my bitches on the spot, typically one of the very best, with such violence against an oak tree that the left upper thigh of the poor animal broke immediately. Actually, I have to frequently undertake replacing hounds there due to the severe kind of hunting both for huntsmen and hounds, which can be faced with quite dangerous situations, when a severe gash in the trousers or body is definitely not the worst that can happen. Before I am able to push the cold iron in behind the thick “armour” of a resisting wild boar, a back-up hound must usually be sacrificed. Needless to say, it does not always end in bloodshed, but very often close to it, and the curved needle, as well as iodine always found proper use after all these boar hunts.

Our true huntsmen join the hounds as a “pack leader”; this term though is unknown to the coarse hunters, but those that know their hounds well, and who are provided with sound lungs and legs, and additionally a strong hand, will indulge their hunting passion by following after the trusty hounds through the dense oak scrub, searching out the sows in the basin. While the older guns (waiting for the game to be driven towards them) freeze, lifting one leg after the other, and cocking their rifle excitedly every time they hear the sound of the hounds, the “pack leader” glowing from exertion, savours the splendid pleasures of hunting in the thickets of the surrounding hunting setting. His hounds have tracked the sounder of boar down, and flush it out of the basin where it had taken cover.

What a fortune for huntsman and hounds when the latter lunge at the wild sow accompanying its young shoats, or the boar of the sounder, since the adolescents at the age of two and the shoats hardly pay attention to “papa” and “mama”. They only aim at getting ahead, and soon a volley from the two groups of guns (waiting for the boar to be driven towards them) cracks out gamely when the wild boars sally out of the thicket in between.

If the hounds prove themselves, and the snow is deep, the huntsman “pack leader” and his sharp iron can meanwhile silently and easily, finish off the not so difficult task. However, the situation turns out to be quite different and significantly more uncomfortable as the hounds take an interest in one of the adolescent boar (at the age of two) or one of the shoats, and grab it by the ears.

On the first cry of pain from the victim, the old wild sow arrives in a rage like the demon incarnate, and woe betide the huntsman or hound that sidesteps too late! Then there is a desperate leaping and hopping in the dense scrub in order to escape the tusks of the furious sow.

Deerhounds have proven themselves well in this sort of situation. They track wild boars with great courage, give tongue loud and freely, and grab it willingly. My hounds show a specific finesse when confronted with adult sows, by simply hopping over them if stepping aside is impossible.

Unfortunately, it is not always up to oneself on to which game to set the hounds: they chase whatever the spoor gives them. For this reason young and inexperienced hounds often go for the strongest sows from the front, and endure severe attacks. It is of course well known that a boar hunt never takes its toll among the weaker, but always the best and fiercest hounds.

The Carpathian Mountains, both on the Hungarian and the Galician (*today: Polish O.F.*) side, also provide my hounds with the opportunity to hunt red deer, roe deer and fox. Wherever possible I have the Deerhounds start hunting with the Brackes (*scent hounds; different Austrian breeds O.F.*). In doing so, I aim at two results: first I force the pups, which driven by their ardour and speed and thus always ahead of the slower Brackes, to make use of their really excellent scenting ability in the dense mountain forest.

At first, I often noticed, this caused the hound great difficulties: if it could sight the game, it would dash off for a while in the direction the game had escaped. Then it would lose the track, and start to run around. This is the first moment it is forced to scent the ground in order to keep track. Given more time they then rely to a much lesser extent on the clear signal of the Brackes giving tongue, which run following the art of pack hunting. By doing so, the Deerhounds learn how to scent and spoor on their own.

It goes without saying that this work reduces their speed, and I can't recall my hounds hunting down cold deer (*not wounded deer O.F.*) of any sort anywhere, when running together with the Brackes in the woods. I note here that my previously described approach of teaching Deerhounds to make use of their scenting ability has already proven me completely right. I already own a number of hounds that can even keep track in the thickest of woods, superbly and reliably.

The second result that I aim for by having the hounds hunt jointly with the Brackes is wishful thinking. Deerhounds hunt silently.

From time to time pups will bark as long as they hunt by sight when a hare runs off to its form, but once it escapes into the scrub, they immediately become silent again. By having my Scots hunt together with the Brackes, I can now have a go at teaching them to give tongue, and to make it a hereditary characteristic by mating the ones that show the disposition. At the present I'm hardly succeeding at all in this, because with the exception of the few squeals that I and my friends happen to hear on occasion, my hounds don't make any barking noise at hunting. I have however, not abandoned hope – if I don't achieve this, my son may do so. My perseverance in this is based on the fact that probably no other breed in the world can “bail up” and bay at game so keenly and persistently as the Deerhound.

English authors have repeatedly reported on hounds baying at a bailed up stag for 24 hours, without them breaking the bail. My hounds too have had the chance to bail up stags, which were wounded in the gut, for more than an hour before they were given the finishing shot. If this breed is so excellent at barking when holding the game at bay, why should it not be feasible in the future to encourage the Deerhound to give tongue when hunting?

I now come to my hounds in Styria (*Austrian province O.F.*). In the skilful hands of my dear friend Sch...l, the Styrian gentleman with a fondness and passion for hunting as well as a heart full of woodsman's poetry, my sweet hounds enjoy a care and guidance in the art of deer hunting of which no one could dream of any better. My friend also keeps meticulous records of every thing our hounds do, from which I can refer to a great number of episodes when these Deerhounds have proven their excellent hunting qualities so well.

First of all I have to note that Mr. Sch...l takes advantage of every opportunity to actually teach the hound a lesson whenever possible. On one day the Deerhounds hunt jointly with the Brackes, as they say “like a pair of tongs”, the next day they will dutifully sit still at his side, as quiet as a mouse, while their master awaits the commendable Brackes, their companions of yesterday, close-by, driving game loud and joyfully towards him.

Then again there is game wounded by a shot: hounds off this way, on the leash and let’s have a go at tracking it down – somewhere out there is the reward of pulling down a wounded roe buck or stag. I really fear my friend Xand’l (*Viennese nickname for “Alexander” O.F.*) will turn my hounds into veritable “first class working Deerhounds”! But not on breeding partridges, please!

During last autumn I personally had the chance to watch these fine hounds at work. Having accepted an invitation from Mr. Sch...l, I travelled down to the green and joyful heart of Styria, and already on the second day I was utterly blessed with fortune while hunting by shooting a really capital stag with ten points – magnificent antlers, and incisors (of the upper jaw) – as well as a fox. May Saint Hubertus reward my friend for that with one hundred years as chief huntsman in the hunter’s seventh heaven!

Another time it was a wonderful deer drive with the hounds in the high mountains of the well-known Parschlug (*in Upper Styria O.F.*) (when the guns are positioned at a pass or passage in the high mountains). “Irg’l” (*a countrified name for e.g. farm labourers O.F.*) the honourable and incomparable huntsman of his master, who himself epitomises the art of deer hunting, went stalking early in the morning on one of the local, characteristic “Köpf’ln” (a wooded knoll, partly surrounded by fields and meadows). He reported a number of big game there, among which were two fine stags.

Before our friendly leader of the hunting party, Mr. Sch...l, allowed the guns to leave and take position for the driven game he addressed them quietly and briefly: “Gentlemen! There is a large number of deer in the drive. Everyone must prepare himself as soon as he is in position. The deer will appear suddenly; just as soon as they are here, they will be gone again! Everyone must stay in his place until the huntsman picks him up. As far as your sportsmanship and shooting are concerned, I can only say the following: this concerns the royal stag, and the pride of our mountains! Waidmannsheil!” (*Good hunting! - a hunting salute O.F.*)

Friend Sch...l loves to address his guns prior to the hunt with some pithy words that catch the resinous fragrance of the firs and the rustling of the woods. It warms a man’s heart and – I willingly acknowledge – moistens one’s eyes after he has spoken. Everyone feels that he is completely at one with the art of hunting – as the most upright Styrian huntsman should be: honest, faithful and devout.

It is interesting to get to know and observe his hunting guests at work. When Irg’l signals from the “Graben” that several particularly fine stags are around, everyone deemed worthy of an invitation by my friend hastens eagerly to the hospitable inn “In the Graben” where one is in such good hands. They are no princes and earls, no high imperial dignitaries that come marching up in loden jacket and the short “chamois leathers” (*pair of trousers O.F.*). The former are scarcely seen in the valley of the green Mürz (*a river in Styria O.F.*). The guest hunters are burgers, tradesmen, estate owners and officials from nearby towns, but virtually all are true huntsmen. They are all his handiwork, he trained them in shooting – they all keep terrific discipline, as they know they should: whoever does not obey, whoever does not behave in a sportsmanlike fashion, goes hunting for the last time “in Parschlug”.

But it all goes like clockwork, because the “the Governor”, who by the way is still quite young, can’t take a joke where hunting is concerned. He is one of the most excellent riflemen I know of. So, if any particularly awkward shot is off target, he will become grouchy and taciturn. His guests know all about this and nobody dares rub salt in the wound by asking in a prying and jocular way “whether he really had fired?”, “how could this have happened?”, or other stupid remarks.

I was a guest of honour on all the hunting days. I was assigned positions for the drive which I really doubt whether, if I had been allowed to allocate them, I would have been ready to make such unselfish sacrifices for any guest, and been so free of envy, unlike my friend Sch...l. I had to shoot as well as my excellent positions demanded of me. At the same drive when I shot my stag with ten points, there was a shot over on one side. "The Father", as he is also referred to, was rumoured among the guests to have completely missed a roebuck that came from far, and at an acute angle through the branchless trunks of the woods. Only then did I appreciate the strict hunting decorum my friend had introduced here as well as the high degree of respect he is paid: all his hunting guests were straight-faced not daring to show any reaction to the shot, although some of them when hunting outside Parschlug at other hunting grounds most likely wouldn't have held their tongues. This is what I call decorum and discipline.

But back to hunting. When I shot my stag, which had been driven and then bailed up by two of my Brackes, regrettably my Deerhounds were on the other side of the mountain. It would have been a brilliant practical lesson for them to bay at this wounded "teaching-stag" in a thicket not far from my position.

At the next drive my position was at a steep, not very large clearing. Deep inside the rift the hounds had scared up game and the chivvy was moving extremely rapidly towards me. While the barking of the hounds sounded quite far away, all of a sudden the hunted game, a huge roe doe, appeared in the clearing, crossed it in a rush and disappeared again on the other side of the wood. As soon as it had disappeared, my fine Deerhound bitch Varuna II came out of the scrub at the edge of the wood, keeping track. Having reached the clearing she paused in order to take wind. But then she chased on with raised head in precisely the same direction as the doe had taken before, over the clearing, through the blackberry and juniper bushes, then jumped over the forest railings exactly where the roe had run off.

Only now the Brackes arrived, giving tongue loudly, 200-odd yards behind Varuna, chasing the long lost buck. Mr. Sch...l told me that this had not been a rare case at all, but totally normal since Deerhounds always hunted in this manner with him. I believe that with this evidence, I can offer to those sceptics doubting the scenting ability of the Scottish Deerhound, the clearest proof of the opposite, which I can confirm by many other examples.

I am not the only one to experience this. My valued friend, the President of the Swiss Cynological Association, Mr. J. B. Staub, Zurich, who I freely recognise as the greatest authority on Deerhounds on the Continent, articulated long before me the same conviction. Recently, I have received a letter from a German comrade, Captain Bock-Rockwitz, writing literally the following about his Deerhound "Lord":

"..... Lord is fully developed, now 1¼ year old and would definitely cover well. You would take much pleasure in his hunting passion. He hunts with great enthusiasm. His scenting ability is excellent. When I recently took him on leash to a tame roe deer, he immediately took to the scent 'like a leashed scent hound.'" etc.

Another bitch of mine, the ideal beauty, Highland blake Countess, is the personal hound of the good hunter Irg'l. She goes stalking with him, locates deer, kills vermin like a demon, including foxes, but especially some "cute" kitty cats which end up in her crushing jaws. Her hunting passion is enormous. She had never seen a roe buck before when Irg'l wounded one with a shot, and the bitch started to course the game, which headed for a copse of young spruces. In a flash Countess reached it, lunged at its windpipe and pulled it down. Without even plucking at the throttled buck, the bitch returned to the huntsman and guided him through the covering shrubs, with a prancing trot and wagging tail, to the dead game.

Varuna also pulled a buck down quite far away, after Mr. Sch...l had wounded it by a shot, and returned to the gun in order to guide him to the prey. However, in his fervent search of the wounded game he ignored the posturing of the bitch, took her on

the leash, and so it happened that the buck was only found some day later by labourers.

Anyway, given my not inconsiderate experience, I have drawn the conclusion that Deerhounds, given proper management, show a disposition to giving tongue, as well as following spoor with the huntsman. I have also heard similar reports from other places. My hounds in Styria hunt all the fur game on which they are slipped.

If I briefly recapitulate my experience in the practical hunting capacity of the Scottish Deerhounds owned by me, I have to say:

The Deerhound possesses an unusually great intelligence that starts to manifest itself only with constant and affectionate contact between man and hound. It does not tolerate rough, harsh treatment or a continuous dull kennel life, as it is then bound to become dull and unmanageable. Its scenting ability is excellent, only it must learn to make use of it. It is keen on any kind of vermin, and will eagerly course all game it is set on, passionately and with endurance. The retrieval without command of small game appears to be an inborn virtue of it, without it really being a passionate "all-round retriever".

It holds wounded and unwounded big game at bay with a deep baying very persistently and will always attempt to take it. If it kills game, or comes across dead game, it will hasten back to guide the huntsman to it.

Besides its hunting virtues, the Deerhound is an outstanding companion dog. In great contrast to the average sighthound, with which it has nothing in common except the stature and the silent hunting, the Deerhound is exceedingly loyal and devoted, never snappish towards people in the house, but in particular of good nature and soft with children. It is deeply fond of accompanying one when riding a horse or bicycle, as well as following a carriage, and very easy to guide from the seat. In the same way it is very grateful for gentleness and affection, it seldom forgets suffering by cruelty. In general, today's nature of the Deerhound is more prone to sweet temper and timidity and, thus, it must be the primary concern of any breeder to re-acustom their hounds by appropriate exercises to self-reliance and courage.

Having read the description of my experiences the reader will certainly at times get the impression that I work unsystematically. This is not the case. First of all, I wanted to expose the ancient hunting passion of my breed from the covering "varnish" of a life in English drawing rooms – this I have completely succeeded in.

Up to now I have not bothered at all what my hounds hunted, if only they did it courageously and prudently.

(To be concluded)

Deerhounds at hunting

by Fr. B. Laska, k. u. k. Hauptmann (Captain)

(Continuation)

My next step, which I have now achieved, was to teach the Deerhound to really make use of its excellent scenting ability. The dense Carpathian and Styrian mountain forests were a teaching location that cannot be outdone – the facts have testified to this. I have now almost attained the temporary aim that I designed for myself regarding the hunting behaviour of the Deerhound. By providing the gentleman hunter who is not solely concerned with giving the comparatively easy, in these days, finishing shot, but who also wants to enhance and perfect his hunting pleasures through the work of noble, shapely hounds. This hunter, a man after my own heart, shall be provided with the Deerhound, a hound that will please him.

The Scottish Deerhound, the way I have adapted it to hunting practice in Austria during the last years, will in some respects replace the scent hound, at times also the retriever, as well as the Bracke. It will combine all the qualities of these hounds, crowned with its very own speed.

When I'm out stalking, the Deerhound accompanies me silently on the lead – regardless the type of game we are hunting. My hounds have mastered this. If Diana smiles on me, provides me with game to hunt, and allows me the shot, it will then be the hound's turn to do its job. As I genuinely believe that I'm not mistaken, the Deerhounds will be slipped and set on the game, even if it drops immediately when wounded by the shot, this will be a lesson to them as well. But due to the relatively scarcity of this happening, the game, even if appropriately wounded by a good shot (in this context it is understood that I'm solely thinking of the art of sportsmanlike shooting), usually takes flight off into the distance until it falls, wounded. If I had taken another hound than the Deerhound with me, at least two hours would have lapsed – under the rules of the art – until I was eventually able to start searching for the blood spoor.

But who can always be in the position to so easily sacrifice such long hours for this purpose? The professional huntsman certainly is, more often than even the most passionate and honourable hunting fancier. Due to a lack of time the latter is in many cases bound to forgo the most splendid moment – the retrieval of the wounded game – having to leave the search to his gillie. In this case – it is nothing else than Scottish stalking, transported to Austria – the Deerhound provides admirable service, taking a few leaps in order to catch up with the wounded game and pulling it down. The huntsman saves many hours of searching and is assured possession of the game. ¹ My hounds have mastered this too.

But if the stalking changes to hunting, i.e. the huntsman misses his target and, nevertheless has his hounds give chase – now then, he gets exactly what he deserves. The chivvy heads off into the distance just the way it would with scent hounds and even the Brackes. And regrettably, my hounds have also mastered this too!

However, my favourite, being a trusty working hound does not exclusively qualify for stalking, but also for the drive (where the guns are stationed and wait for the game) in the woods and the high mountains. I know of no better and more heart-warming possible use for it, except deerstalking according to the rules of the art. We were positioned in a wintry mountain forest, covered with snow. Carefully assessing the angle of shot, we have prepared ourselves next to a massive beech. The trusty hound, or more precisely, the leash of noble Deerhounds sits motionless – well behaved by our side, and peers – just as we do – into the leafless, sparse winter wood.

¹ I needn't specifically explain the enormous advantage of this, indeed especially when hunting very close to the outer limits of the hunting ground.

Far, far away, one can hear the vague noise of the drive. There has already been a merry lot of cracking at the flanks where hares are likely to be flushed out – only now, in the middle of the woods, we are surrounded by a solemn, strained silence – nothing moves. There – confound it – is that a man hiding here? – there’s a deep-drawn, trembling sigh in the air, very close, next to us.

Monkey business! – it’s the Deerhounds, not some damned poachers’ souls!

Quivering from deep agitation the noble ones are sitting side by side on their haunches. A shiver, like a fit of fever, streams through their steel-sinewed, toughly muscled bodies – the small black eyes glint like flashes of fire, at times steel-green, then glowing like coals again and their tongues, thick with their own blood, longingly lick their moist noses and their bristly lips. And once more this deep-drawn, longing sigh.

Their tails start quivering and wagging gently. We wonderingly follow the burning glare of our good hounds – there, something vague scurries far ahead of us over the white snow, now once again, and – there he comes trotting blithely to us, the grand villain and gallows bird, Reinecke the fox! Unsuspecting, sneering with lips half open, he prances unhurriedly towards us, sometimes pausing and peering backward from where the beaters are now approaching. Fortunately, the thick beech is now between us and the red one, who appears to be lost in himself, because our hounds are sighing pitifully – like silly girls after the springtime parade – and –

But now to hell with restraint – the fox came straight forward crossing the path not far from us – we had to let it pass, because you never hunt it when “facing its teeth”. Just now the cord is gently slipping through the collar ring. Not even the quivering hounds had anticipated their freedom when we yell “Kill!”

We did not shoot, there was no need. Like two arrows from a bow long drawn, that is how the hounds flew off from our side, taking great leaps, their jaws agape. But Reinecke the fox, as a jumper himself, will not lightly be fooled with either. His fate however, was sealed. After one hundred yards they got him. Snow clouds, branches tinkling from the frost, three animal bodies striking a fabulous fighting pose – soon it will be two, and not long after the hounds will retrieve the choked freebooter, stopping at every obstructing tree, and pulling him towards us in order to throw themselves down into the snow beside us, panting with wide open muzzles.

Further, perhaps at some other time, I would like to tell you just how highly pleasurable it is for a huntsman out on a low sleigh on frosty winter days with Deerhounds to over-run a fox while he’s “mousing”, or when on foot, to cut off his path to the woods and slip the dogs on him.

I only want to make further mention here that a Deerhound owned by the university professor Dr. Ch. gives splendid service as a plucky retriever on the occasion of the large district shoots around Vienna, retrieving every hare even over the farthest distance faultlessly.

I have now explained how I use the Deerhound at hunting and at drives in woods, so there is nothing else to add but to refer to its skills as a Bracke and scent hound. We, as huntsmen in Austro-Hungary, are in the fortunate position to be able pursue our noblest game, the red deer, the way our fathers so sportingly did with Brackes. Only those who have witnessed this - have been able to witness, such superbly sporting hunts in our Alps or the green, secluded Carpathian valleys, can truly value what this means.

A little while ago I took the liberty to point out that the terms hunting and stalking – much as they sound strange and rude to the ear of the German huntsman – may easily be converted into accepted Austrian or German kinds of hunting, which then appear to be entirely inoffensive. Using the Deerhound as Bracke also offers the chance to transpose a specifically Scottish, distinctive and frequent phase of deer hunting with swift hounds, without changing its meaning in any way, into our fair hunter’s German usage.

If keen and courageous hounds course a red deer, particularly in the highlands or mountains, it will not take too long until it goes – now comes the dreaded Scottish

expression – until it “goes at bay”. If we would say instead “it goes into the water”, it means the same and does not sound so strange.

My skilled Deerhounds, who have learned to make good use of their sensitive nose, are wonderfully suited for deer hunting with hounds, even through the thickest of woods. They are by nature, predestined masters at bailing up a deer. So, if the hunted deer takes flight after a short and rapid chase into the valley in order to position itself in familiar surroundings, protected where possible against every attack in the bed of a mountain torrent, between cliffs and rapids, it is then that the huntsman will experience the most thrilling “scenes from the highlands” worthy of the brush of a Sir Edwin Landseer or an Ansdell – two English masters who have indeed sought and found their fame in the graphic celebration of Deerhounds.

The images accompanying this work are reproductions from some works by these two renowned artists, and need no further commentary – they are self-explanatory. Regrettably, I am unable to show you further pictures of hounds of my own breeding this time, except for the introductory vignette depicting my two bitches H. Schuloch and H. Queen Bess. All my stereotypes are in Moscow and upon retrieving them I have already pledged to provide them to another cynological journal in Germany. But I do hope that I will soon be in the position to send you a current picture taken from nature and titled “Deerhounds holding an alpine stag at bay”. This time no Scottish huntsmen will be standing there with plaid and kilt, but Styrian men in “chamois leathers” (*pair of trousers* O.F.) and knee-high socks (*part of the traditional costume in Bavaria/Germany and Austria* O.F.)!

Finally, I would like to remark here that I am by no means the first to use Deerhounds in Austria at hunting. The reigning sovereign of Liechtenstein brought some hounds of this breed from England to Austria even by the end of the seventies, and assigned his head forester Mr. Mois Schön in Rabensburg, Lower Austria, to manage them. Following a notice to this effect by Mr. von Kadich in “Oesterr. Hundesport” (*Austrian cynological journal* O.F.) I contacted the head forester Mr. Schön, initially in written form, then in person and I owe to the great kindness of this gentleman, a pupil of the famous old “Hanover hunting school” (*where scent hounds are required to spoor cold, big game, whose tracks are more than 2 hours old.* O.F.) a great deal of very precious data on the use of Deerhounds at hunting.

Mr. Schön has used his hounds chiefly to take, and pull down wounded red and fallow deer at the hunting grounds of the Liechtenstein sovereignty Feldsberg and Eisgrub, near the Morava (*March*) rivers (*bordering Slovakia* O.F.), and he had a very high opinion of their work.

Deerhounds gave exceptionally fine service at the time when the large Zoological Gardens were abandoned, and all the animals there were shot. It frequently happened that a deer in the large herd was shot, which had left its cover in order to browse. The wounded stag then took flight with its herd. These Deerhounds were reported to have the very special ability to pull down – infallibly, without ever erring once – the wounded game out of a herd of 60-80 cold deer. They took dams and calves mostly by their tongue, and held them until they could be finished. Since the Zoological Gardens ceased to exist, no more Deerhounds were procured, and consequently the breed died out here again.

Furthermore, an eyewitness told me about a parforce hunt in Austria that was ridden with Deerhounds about ten years ago. At the invitation of an Austrian aristocrat, whose name escapes me, a member of the English nobility had sent for his Deerhounds to come to Austria in order to demonstrate their hunting skills. They were taken to Holics, where the Imperial packs are kept, with which the famous annual deer hunts are ridden on horseback by members of the court, the aristocracy, and the k. u. k. (*Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: “Royal Imperial”* O.F.) “Military Equestrian Academy”.

At this time only two Deerhounds would be used, the Imperial pack remaining in its kennels. As the large hunt assembled on the hill, where the hunt normally starts,

the stag with ten points, originating from Gödöllő (*town in Hungary, near Budapest O.F.*) was released from the box in which it had arrived, and took flight at full pace.

(To be concluded)

Deerhounds at hunting

by Fr. B. Laska, k. u. k. Hauptmann (Captain)

(Conclusion)

The peculiar circumstance well known to all our huntsmen on horseback should be mentioned here: that on releasing almost all carted stags, which usually come from Hungary in boxes, they immediately head for the Morava (*March*) rivers that run at two hours distance, without ever having been here. As a matter of course, the hounds had not set eyes on this stag with ten points before. It too took flight in this direction, and soon disappeared into covered ground that afforded no sight. Only after twenty minutes had entirely elapsed were the two Deerhounds set on the spoor and the Master could start the hunt. Both hounds had almost instantly got wind and then hunted silently and at a great speed. The hunt, which had to clear many obstacles, soon lost sight of the hounds. When, after a run at a speed that had never experienced here before, the first horsemen together with the Master reached the Morava (*March*) rivers, they found the stag there held at bay by the Deerhounds, swimming around it in circles and barking at the same time, unable to grab it by the throat – the deep water could not provide support for a jump and so the hounds could not do any harm to the deer, which furiously defended itself with its antlers.

Earl A. put an end to the hunt by jumping into the water with his horse and roping the stag in by means of a long line. This hunt too, as described here, is one more evident proof of the excellent scenting ability of the Deerhound. I suppose that I have now explained all the essential details concerning the Deerhound, and the tests I have carried out on it - which I consider by far, not yet conclusive.

I will now hasten to proceed to the end. I am anxious to explicitly emphasise that it has never crossed my mind to portray the Scottish Deerhound as a legendary hunting animal, which has been provided with the most of multiple hunting virtues. I also protest against the assumption that the Deerhound is a “working dog” whose “versatility” could oust all other breeds or even supersede them in the near future. No!

That will never be the case.

The Deerhound has up to now been a rare and distinctive breed, and it will remain so in the future. It is not everyone’s dog, most of all however, it is not a dog for every huntsman. Those who meet it with prejudice, those who can’t overcome its unfamiliar looks and only see the spiritless sighthound in it, will stay away from it completely.

Also the certainly intolerant, and the one-sided, quirky “working-dog man”, who only wants to see a “Poodlepointerdachshund-Sightshpherdssaintbernard” at shooting parties and at home, and who would love to poison the rest of the world, will never get to like it, and that is quite all right.

But for the gentleman hunter, who is unaffected by financial matters when providing feed to a few more dogs, who seeks complete enjoyment in hunting which he expects to achieve through the work of shapely hounds, the elemental kind of hunting, and not only by mere target practice on live game – for such a huntsman the Deerhound represents the proper companion, which will by no means supersede all other breeds for him, but usefully complement the hunter’s generous hunting equipage.

In our frenetically accelerating era, the sense of which is focused on rapid, short term indulgence, it is also regrettably the huntsman himself who plucks one little rag of glory and dulcet poetry after the other out of the sick and hunted body, through the use of all the “convenient” innovations such as arms, equipment, or the hunt itself. And thus, I am absolutely clear in my mind that many of these “exceedingly down-to-earth” men will compassionately shake their sapient, omniscient heads, smiling disapprovingly about my love for the oh so “dysfunctional” Deerhound. So much worry, love and effort for an animal – for what? Today’s shoots can easily do without it!

To those for whom this has not yet become clear from my lines, to those who would still not want to grasp it after further explanation from my side, I therefore can find no better, more striking answer to such questions than the familiar quotation of the self-confident French king and dedicated hunter: Car tel est mon plaisir! – Weil’s mi so g’freut! (*“Because such is my pleasure!” – in Austrian/Viennese dialect O.F.*)

With sincere huntsman’s salute
Yours very truly
Fr. B. Laska, k. u. k. Hauptmann.