

T&G Report

Trailing Dogs: Controversial Dogs Save Lost Hunts

IT WAS LATE IN THE EVENING.

As I watched a parade of does come down the Jim Hogg County sendero, the wallop of a .300 magnum sounded off just ahead of me. I could tell it was a hit. There was no echo. Just a thud. I was excited that the gentleman hunting on the stand 1/2 mile away had gotten the big buck he had been looking for.

When the rancher picked me up he said the buck had been shot, there was a strong blood trail and then nothing. In the dense south Texas thicket that is a bad thing as there are thousands of spots for

a deer to lay up and never be found.

Enter a black labrador.

After a quick phone call to the ranch next door, a man showed up with a lab that had been trained to trail wounded deer.

He called us all off the trail and set the dog on the blood. Within 10 minutes, the 150 class drop-tined buck was found where it had stuck itself in a huge tangle of briar. Chances are none of us would have found it.

Trailing dogs are becoming increasingly popular in Texas according to Wendy Hallenbeck of Thistle Ridge Terriers. "More and more hunters and ranchers are wanting to do everything they can do recover their deer, especially those once-in-a-lifetime trophy bucks, and a well-trained dog can make that happen," she said.

Hallenbeck and her husband specialize in game recovery dogs and have a long his-

tory with Jack Russell Terriers in particular. "I started breeding them in 1999 and training back in '97," She said. "I sold my first tracking dog in 2008 and trained a few for some guides and bowhunters after that."

Soon a demand for specific traits and training for guides began to build. "We are very serious about breeding for specific traits and training dogs for guides and ranches and the demand continues to grow," Hallenbeck said. "It's very rewarding to see people recover their game. I don't know any hunter who wants to wound and lose an animal, but it happens, and our dogs can help find them."

In the past their dogs have found deer the day after they were hit, and many deer have been found that traveled much farther than most would think possible.



CATFISH
Colorado River

Pat Stewart of Montgomery caught this Opelousas catfish on live perch while fishing with his longtime hero and friend, Travis Puls, on the Colorado River near Smithville.



WHITETAIL
Zavala County

Thirteen-year-old Sarah Schott of Houston got her first buck while hunting with her dad, brother and grandfather in Zavala County. The big eight point was taken at 100 yards with her 7mm-08.

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Thistle Ridge Terriers have helped find many deer over the last few years.

Although these dogs are effective, they are not actually legal in all parts of the state. For example it is illegal to use dogs to trail wounded deer in Angelina, Hardin, Jasper, Nacogdoches, Newton, Orange, Sabine, San Augustine, Shelby, and Tyler counties. These were the core counties for deer-dog hunting, which has long-since been banned, but still has a few hunters who pursue them in that fashion.

According to the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, “A person is prohibited from using a dog to hunt or pursue deer in this state. A person who violates this law is subject to a fine of \$500-\$4,000 and/or a year in jail.”

Additionally, a person’s hunting and fishing licenses may be revoked or suspended.

Also, no person may possess a shot-

gun and buckshot or slugs while in the field with dogs on another person’s land during an open deer season in the counties listed above.

Many law-abiding hunters believe the law is antiquated, and it prohibits them from doing everything they can to find their deer.

“The counties where the ban is in place, especially in the southeastern pocket are some of the thicket spots in the state, and it can be hard to find even a mortally hit deer,” said a hunting club manager who requested to remain anonymous. “If we could use dogs under the same guidelines the rest of the state has, it would be a big help to us down here. The people who run dogs illegally are going to use dogs whether we use trailing dogs anyway.”

The guidelines he spoke of are that no more than two dogs may be used to trail a wounded deer. A “wounded deer” is a deer leaving a blood trail according to TPWD.

The law is not likely to change any time soon, but the interest in using these specialized dogs is growing tremendously. Each year they are saving the day for hunters who want nothing more than to find the deer they pulled the trigger on.

More information on trailing dogs is available from Thistle Ridge Terriers at www.thistleridgeterriers.com.

—**Chester Moore**



SPECKLED TROUT
Laguna Madre

Colton Crawford caught this gorgeous 28-inch speck while drifting the Lower Laguna Madre with his dad and sister. Proud Papa Grant Crawford could barely hold the camera still enough to take this picture.