

Cedars Point Development Guide

Wild Bird Foundation First Season Field Introduction

Purpose

A guide to introducing young dogs to real hunting environments in a way that builds bird drive, confidence, and independence without unnecessary pressure or overhandling.

Why It Matters

The first season is the foundation everything is built on. You don't build a house on a shaky foundation. If you do, you'll spend far more time remodeling later—and remodeling is always more difficult and time-consuming. Solid foundations are built most naturally through wild bird exposure.

What to Do

- Hunt your dog alone most of the time
- Be the only handler and decision-maker
- Let the dog find, see, chase, and pursue birds
- Allow the dog to learn why it is there before introducing shooting

Expose your dog to multiple environments:

- Prairie
- Forest
- Water

Expose your dog to the types of game you expect it to hunt:

- Upland birds
- Waterfowl
- Fur (where applicable)

The first season is about exposure and experience—not control.

What to Watch For

- Hesitation in cover
- Confusion in new environments
- Dependence on others dogs or you
- Lack of confidence
- Pushing the dog beyond its current physical development. Epiphyseal growth plate development does not fully close until roughly 12–14 months. Be mindful of where your dog is developmentally and avoid pushing beyond what it is physically ready to handle.

Common Mistakes

- Hunting in groups
- Shooting over a dog that is not actively engaged with a bird or covey
- Shooting birds that are not properly handled
- Taking birds from pup or dog immediately upon retrieve or without praise
- Introducing any form of control or pressure too early
- Expecting finished behavior from an unproven pup or dog

Environment

Expose your pup or dog to real-world conditions:

- Vary terrain
- Vary cover
- Vary bird species
- Vary conditions

Development comes from variety and repetition in natural settings.

Cedars Point Perspective

You are the only consistent factor in your dog's development. Your dog learns most naturally from association with birds, environment, and experience or repetition—not from control. Let birds teach distance, pressure, and consequence. Your job is to provide opportunity—not direction. Say little, if anything, on outings.

Final Reminders

- Keep it about birds.
- Keep it about experience.
- Keep it fun.
- Development of a bird dog takes boot soles on ground, and handler soul and vision. It's rewarding work if you are willing to put the boots to ground and your heart into providing these opportunities.