

You Too Can Hunt Your Jack Russell Terrier (Part II)

By: Bob Franklin

You read Part I of this article, you have all of your gear ready and you found someone to take you out hunting. Now what can you expect?

Both you and your terrier(s) should be in reasonable physical condition when you consider going hunting. If you poop out, your day of hunting is done. You may well walk several miles during the day and your terrier(s) will undoubtedly go several times as far. Of course, the judge will always have some of his terriers too so if your terrier poops out, you will be hunting with his terriers. In fact, it is not a bad idea to start the day using one of the judge's terriers so both you and your terrier can learn from watching an experienced terrier at work. If a quarry is found, then it might be possible to set up a situation where your terrier can confront the quarry in a controlled manner to learn a little bit about what it is all about and to become familiar with the scent of the quarry. The idea is to avoid getting the novice terrier into a bad situation and thus ruin his/her attitude toward hunting. They have to learn just the same as you do.

Hunting a JRT consists of following the terriers along fence lines, out in hay fields or other likely places that might have woodchuck or other dens. The terriers should go into the brush thickets and look for likely places. If your terrier just follows along behind you, then you will need to encourage the terrier to poke its head into likely holes and take a few sniffs. Experienced terriers will usually enter most holes far enough to really determine if there is someone home. Some will back out of the hole and go on and others will traverse through the entire den before emerging – sometimes out a different exit. When an experienced terrier encounters “something”, it will really open up and start barking, yelping, whining, etc.. Then you wait awhile to see if the terrier can drive the quarry out another entrance, pull the quarry out of the hole or whether you will have to dig to the terrier and quarry. The judge should be able to determine the best course of action after observing and listening for a little while.

When hunting, you are encouraged to never have more than two terriers out at a time unless you or your companions know their terriers very well and the terriers do not range far ahead or behind. Always put a “Ferret Finder” collar on each dog you have out hunting. While digging to reach a terrier that has gone-to-earth, stake the other terriers somewhere nearby but where they will not be in the way or wander off and go down another hole. Hopefully, your judge will have chain, stakeouts so the terriers cannot chew through the stakeout. When digging, use the “Ferret Finder” box to know where the terrier is located so you can be absolutely certain you do not hit the terrier with your shovel or crow bar. The judge will show you how to operate the “Ferret Finder” box and will closely supervise the use of the shovels and the bar to avoid any possibility of injuring a dog in the earth. After a dig, you must fill all holes you made during the dig, but be absolutely certain all terriers are accounted for and probably staked out so you don't inadvertently bury one that slips back into a hole unnoticed.

If you get really lucky and your terrier earns a “Natural Hunting Certificate” (NHC), you can be very proud of both your terrier and yourself. Some days you won't even find quarry and your day simply turns out to merely be a nice hike in the outdoors. Even though your terrier does find a quarry, it might not earn a NHC. Since this is probably the first time your terrier has hunted, it

may not perform up to the standards necessary to earn a NHC. So, don't be disappointed if you and your terrier(s) go out several times without success.

A "Natural Hunting Certificate Below Ground" (NHC) can be earned by terriers that use their scenting abilities to locate likely dens or "sets" and crawl into or "enter" a set. The terrier must go completely out of sight below the ground, confront the quarry by barking, growling or whining and "bay" the quarry by keeping it in one location through constant harassment toward the quarry until terrier and quarry can be dug to by the handlers so the quarry can be identified. Also, the terrier may "draw" (drag) the quarry out of its den or alternatively the terrier may "bolt" (drive) the quarry out of another entrance of the set. The terrier must perform to the satisfaction of the Working Judge and the quarry must be deemed sufficiently aggressive toward the terrier or the judge will not issue a Certificate. Examples might be very young quarry or some judges feel many opossums are not sufficiently aggressive toward the terrier and merely faint or "play possum".

After you have hunted a few times, you will soon realize why there are so few terriers being shown in the Working Terrier Classes at JRTCA sanctioned trials and you will have great admiration for those terriers that have earned a NHC and are Working Terriers. Acceptable quarry for earning a NHC are red fox, gray fox, raccoon, woodchuck, opossum and badger.

Sometimes seasoned owners prefer to hunt two terriers at a time to better confine the quarry to one location in its "set" by possibly coming at the quarry from two directions. However, only one terrier may be entered into the earth at a time when they are being judged for a NHC. This rule insures that it was that particular terrier which did the hunting and not a terrier following the lead of another terrier that is in the earth at the same time. Some judges want the terrier to have combated a "formidable" quarry and in order to earn a NHC. Interpretations of this objective and what the terrier does can vary from judge to judge.

CAUTION: Before you decide to hunt your terrier, you first need to consider several things.

1. Can you run your JRT off lead in the local park or in a wooded area and call it back to you or does he/she seem to always disappear over the horizon? You should have reasonable control of your dog before you decide to take it out hunting. Start with your terriers as puppies and get good recall on them or you will spend your day in the field looking for your terriers rather than hunting for quarry.
2. How will you react if your JRT goes down a small hole in the ground and disappears completely from sight for maybe hours at a time?
3. How would you feel if your terrier confronts an aggressive quarry and gets bitten or otherwise injured – sometimes seriously?
4. Can you watch your terrier kill a quarry or watch the judge kill the quarry because the land owner wants the quarry eliminated?
5. If your terrier is sprayed by a skunk while in a hole in the ground and dies, can you cope with that? Most "Working Judges" can recognize signs and smell of skunk, but those damn skunks have no rules and can show up in some of the most unlikely places. In some areas of the country, it is possible for dogs to encounter a porcupine and get quilled,

but this doesn't happen very often. Poisonous snakes can be a problem in some parts of the USA.

6. Are you physically able to walk in the fields or woods for several hours carrying a shovel and a crowbar, dig holes in the ground while moving rocks, and cutting roots and maybe carry your injured or totally exhausted terrier a mile or so back to your vehicle?
7. Can you handle having a good case of Poison Ivy the week after your hunt with your terrier? Terriers can carry the oil from Poison Ivy for a week or so after the hunt on the hair on their underbody and you or someone else in your family can even get Poison Ivy on the inside of your forearm simply by scooping up an oil covered terrier with one arm.

I have been hunting my terriers for about 20 years and have never lost a terrier nor have I had any seriously injured terriers (knock on wood). I often get Poison Ivy big time so I always wear a long sleeved shirt no matter the temperature. With my bad knees, I am now limited as to how much I can walk and/or dig, but I just pick my hunting associates well. Needless to say, I have had many wonderful experiences hunting with my terriers over the years. I have had 11 different terriers earn 17 Natural Hunting Certificates and I have hunted with 11 different judges and numerous other non-judges. I always learn something new from each of my hunting companions and the comradeships I have developed with my hunting partners – both human and terrier - are something special.

If your terrier shows signs of wanting to hunt as discussed in the first of these articles and you think you can give affirmative answers to most of the above questions, then you should definitely hunt your terrier(s). I hope you have as much fun as I know your terriers will.