

Alone or with a companion? Cooperative behaviour of hunting dogs in driven hunts

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Cooperation among hunting dogs during driven hunts is essential for the successful execution of these hunts and the effective regulation of wild boar populations, which have been increasing across Europe. This contribution aims to evaluate cooperative behaviour among hunting dogs during driven hunts and to analyse the factors influencing cooperation between individual dogs. The importance of this work lies in understanding the effects of social bonds, training, and environmental conditions on the efficiency of hunting dogs during driven hunts.

We tested the hypothesis that hunting dogs work together in a single beat, but unrelated and/or unfamiliar dogs with one another would exhibit lower willingness to cooperate in searching for and driving game than related or familiar dogs. Using GPS technology and Garmin Virb Elite cameras we assessed cooperative behaviour by monitoring real-life situations and potential cooperation among hunting dogs. Data were collected over two hunting seasons (2019/2020 and 2020/2021) during 13 group hunting events in the hunting grounds of the Czech University of Life Sciences (ČZU). In total, 233 hunting dogs participated in these events. We observed the dogs' responses in the beat to the "initiator," i.e. the dog that first located the game and began alerting. We analysed whether and which factors influenced the willingness of other dogs to join the initiator, including age, sex, breed, distance from the initiator, familiarity with the initiator, and game species/category.

Overall, 26 events were recorded in which the initiator discovered and alerted to the game, causing prompt responses from other dogs. Analysis showed that the only significant factor affecting cooperation was the distance from the initiator; dogs closer to the initiator were more likely to join in the pursuit of the game. No significant effects on cooperation were found for familiarity among dogs, sex, age, size, or breed. This study contributes to a better understanding of the factors influencing hunting dog cooperation, which can positively impact their training and the organization of driven hunts.