



Prey Drive Promotion, Part I by Armin Winkler

Following my article in the Nov/Dec issue I was asked to continue discussing the drives used in protection training in short articles. I will use my translation of Helmut Raiser's book *Der Schutzhund* as a reference in my discussion.



Let's begin practical training for protection work where it should begin: with prey-drive promotion. Let me briefly explain why I chose the word "promotion" over the word "development" to translate the German term "*Förderung*", which could be translated either way. To me the term development refers to a process which takes place on its own. Drives develop naturally

through maturation to a certain degree. As trainers we should try to give nature a helping hand by promoting what is already there, and therefore actively enhance a particular drive to its maximum potential.

I like to start prey work as early as possible with puppies, usually around ten to twelve weeks old. This allows me to work with all the unspoiled inborn instincts of the dog. I start young puppies the same way I start late starting adults, with a rag or a sack. The most important thing for the helper to understand during this early work is that the sack is the prey, not the helper. Therefore, the quick, sporadic, and unpredictable movements of the sack are what peak the dog's interest and consequently stimulate the dog's prey drive. As Raiser writes in his book: "If one tries to promote prey drive, then all the dog's focus should be on the prey, meaning it is the prey that does all the moving around, not the helper." One of the reasons for starting with a sack is that it is relatively easy to shake it and wiggle it and let it fly around, and therefore get all the dog's attention on the sack. Another is that it is much easier to bite for beginners whether they are puppies or late starting adults. Now that we have the basic idea of what the crucial elements of start up work are, let's see what typical training exercise should look like.

The dog is on leash, the handler encourages the dog calmly, without distracting him from focusing on the prey. The helper makes the rag come alive by moving and wiggling it sporadically. This moving rag triggers the dog's prey drive. The helper will see first the dog's eyes following that little creature, then his body will follow slightly pouncing after the elusive prey, finally the dog will start to snap after it in an attempt to catch it and make prey. When the dog appears almost hypnotised by the rag and the tension waiting for just the right moment is written all over the dog's body, that is when the helper moves the rag to within the dog's reach, and snap, the dog bites into the rag. As soon as he does the prey is his. He wins his rag, and the handler should praise him in a proud tone (but not to the point where the dog forgets about his prey). Initially I let the dog have his way with his prey for a bit, but then I want to make it clear to him that it is indeed a prize worth keeping. I use two methods to accomplish this. One, I have a string on the rag which I keep in my hand even after the dog wins the rag. And just when the dog starts losing interest in the seemingly lifeless prey and he loosens his grip or drops the rag on the ground, I revive the rag by pulling on the string. The dog will either feel the tension in the rag and firm up his grip, or it will slip away from him and the prey stimulation starts again. After a couple of these "losses", or near "losses", the dog will hold on to the prey quite firmly, not wanting to take the chance to let it slip away again. As soon as he shows this kind of commitment the dog should be allowed to carry his prey off the field.

The second method I use is pretty close to what Raiser describes as "challenging" in his book. Again this work starts after the dog has won his prey but then either holds it loosely in his mouth or he puts it down on the ground in front of him. This time I try to show the dog that he is not the only one interested in his prey. The helper also has his eye on that prize, and this already describes a large part of the exercise. The helper starts challenging the dog for the rag, by cautiously reaching for a corner of the rag, then quickly pulling his hand back, only to reach for it again from a different angle. If the rag is still in the dog's mouth, a slight tug might help to make it clear to the dog that the helper's intention is to steal his rag. A lot of dogs will at that point show a pulling away of the prey, or a confident re-grip on the prey with a dirty look, or a slight growl and then a re-grip on the prey. All these behaviors lead to a confident holding of the prey, which should be rewarded by letting the dog carry the prey off the field. In dogs with good balance in all drives both methods work well and we should probably use both to keep the work interesting for the dog. If prey drive is the dog's strongest motivation, then the first method will lead



to quicker results. The second method works nicely on dogs who are very possessive and who show defense of prey behavior easily. As Raiser writes: "...the challenging is already the first stimulation of defense behavior..."

The next step in training should be to make sure that the dog holds his prey (the rag) hard enough on his initial bite. This is done by simply not letting the dog win the prey on his initial snap, but instead holding on to the rag a bit longer with a bit of tension on it. So that if the dog snaps at the rag, but then eases his grip, he will lose the prey which should then immediately begin to move and wiggle again. Prey drive is once again stimulated by this movement and the dog gets another opportunity to bite the rag. The goal is not to try and rip the prey out of the dog's mouth, but to challenge the dog enough to make him bite progressively harder.

This work should progress to where the dog has to jump to reach the rag and make prey. I accomplish this by simply holding the rolled-up rag high enough, at the moment the dog gets the opportunity to bite it so the dog has to jump to reach it. With adolescent dogs or late started adults this means chest or belly height, with talented puppies I usually hold it just high enough to make them do a little hop which gets their front paws off the ground. The principle is the same, jump and bite to make prey. This is a foundation technique which a dog will use throughout his protection work career.

The step I chose as the next training progression jumps the queue a bit in the sequence Raiser outlines in his book. However it still follows one of his most fundamental principles: "It is not the helper who dictates the action, but the dog. During drive promotion work one has to accomplish that the dog stimulates the helper, not the helper the dog." My choice as the next skill the dog should learn is to flush the prey by barking. The previous training steps should have created a bit of an obsession in the dog for chasing and biting the prey (rag). As before I start by stimulating the dog's prey drive with the wiggly rag, I may even let the dog snap at it and miss once. Then when I have the dog primed for this activity, I create a bit of frustration by suddenly stopping all action and movement. The helper stands still looking off into the distance, the rag hanging in his hand lifeless. Most dogs whine just a bit, then they let out a frustration yelp. It is this yelp which causes the rag to fly up like a bird flushed from a bush, and the

dog gets to make prey. It won't take long until these initial yelps turn into demanding barks which sound purposeful and pushy; their goal, to get the action started again. So, the dog learns early on that he has some control over what happens on the field, and that barking is the way to make things happen. The reason I incorporate this exercise this early into training is to avoid letting the dog get so pre-occupied with biting during protection work that nothing else matters to him any more.



The next training stage in my program is usually the strike or attack. And once again my program deviates slightly from Dr. Raiser's. He lists the transfer from the rag or tug to the sleeve before the teaching of the strike. I follow the same sequence when training talented late started adult dogs. However, when training puppies and young dogs I like to teach an early



form of the striking technique first. When the dog has mastered the hard initial bite and the jump and bite to make prey exercises, I start teaching the striking technique. The handler holds the dog by the collar, the helper stimulates the dog in prey drive, first very close to the dog, he can even let him snap and miss once. Then he distances himself from the handler and dog, while still simulating the dog. He goes to a distance of about three to four meters initially. He continues to wiggle the rolled up rag or puppy tug to entice the dog. On a pre-arranged signal by the helper, the handler releases the dog. The helper stands slightly sideways to the dog, when the dog reaches the

jumping distance, the helper pulls the rag upwards and slightly sideways, "remember prey always moves away from the dog" (Raiser). This last second movement should prompt the dog to pounce quickly to prevent the getaway of the prey. The helper should gently absorb the dog's impact in the rag and set the dog on his feet. Then the prey is released, the dog is leashed up, and the dog gets to carry the prey off the field. I have found that puppies and young dogs have no hang-ups about hopping up on strangers from any angle. Therefore, they learn a nice striking technique into the helper very easily and early on. Sometimes dogs can't bite a sleeve yet because they are too small, or because they have to undergo defense drive promotion before they bite hard enough to handle a sleeve. I have learned from experience that "missing the boat" when it comes to teaching a technique when the time is right can lead to a lot of "what might have been" discussions later on. Don't misunderstand me I do not mean to imply that I know as much or more than Dr. Raiser, I simply have developed a preferred program sequence over the years.

This brings me to the end of this article, since there are limits to how long these things can go on. The follow-up article, discussing the transfer to the sleeve, teaching the dog to fight, shifting into prey drive from the control phase, and the pro's and con's of prey work, is already in the works. I hope to get your attention again in the next article.