



Above, left: The river shore with its duck blind; center: the author, in the blind, with Winkie, his tolling dog; right, a close-up of Winkie.

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Toll and Retrieve

By
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THE season for duck shooting opened yesterday morning. Winkie and I have lived one of the happiest days of our lives. Winkie is my tolling dog and, although not old enough to have seen as many ducks as I have, he knows how to bring them home.

As soon as I put on my heavy socks, he knew what was going on and from then on he changed from being the most wonderful pet to a dog of responsibility and enthusiasm. He watched every movement while prancing and wagging that bushy tail and telling me to hurry, hurry, we must be going. In fact, he was commanding so much of my attention that I started off without my mittens, but my good wife was on the job, and before I got to the garage, she called after me, "Don't you want your mittens?" That was enough said, for Winkie was back in a jiffy, gleefully bringing the mittens so there would be no further delay.

All the while we were driving to the hunting grounds, Winkie was sitting as close to me as possible with his head resting on my arm and if you could see the expression in those brown eyes you would immediately say out loud, "What a sweetheart you are!" Which I did, and that meant a wag of his tail and a lick with a warm tongue. Then, with a sigh, he cuddled closer and prepared to wait with all the patience in the world for the arrival at our destination.

When we left the car, Winkie followed so close to my side that the straps of my rubber boots would hit him quite hard, but, unlike a human being, he did not mind, and instead kept crowding closer. When going through a wood path, his nose would hit the calf of my leg to let me know he was with me, and when I would find it necessary to crawl past an opening so as not to let the ducks see me, he would get down on his stomach and crawl too. We soon came to the water's edge, and immediately prepared to build a blind. Winkie was trying to draw my attention and, when I whispered to him, he placed at my feet a pipe that looked just like the one I had put in my pocket before leaving home. After feeling for my pipe, I realized that when we were crawling it must have fallen out of my pocket. So right

then I again was forced to repeat, "What a sweetheart of a dog you are," and boy, that was too much for him. He immediately covered me with affection and started out in the small clearing for a stick which he brought to me in a second. I was not quite ready, as the raft of ducks that we were preparing to toll in close to the shore were downstream too far, and I felt that my chances would be better if we waited for them to come abreast of our blind. But now that Winkie had shown himself, I thought it best to carry on. So I threw the stick out front and Winkie would play with the stick, tossing it in the air, rolling on it and making that tail spin round and round, then bring it in, and was out of the blind in a second and played up and down in front of the blind, making believe he never saw those ducks. When he first went out, some of the ducks lifted their heads, then one started shoreward. Others joined, and presently all of them were forging in the direction of the blind. Winkie kept on playing as if there were not a duck around. The leading ducks were now in very close, and five of them were lined up so one could not miss getting them with one shot. I had just loaded my double-barrel gun and decided to call Winkie in, when one of the ducks gave a loud "quack" and either that or the click of closing my gun brought Winkie in the blind with actions that clearly said, "Here they are, for Heaven's sake, shoot!" When the dog disappeared in the

blind, the ducks became suspicious and so, aiming about two feet in front of the five that were in line, I pulled the single trigger of my gun once, then stood up and emptied the other barrel at the only one of the five that was rising. He fell back in the water and at the command "Fetch" Winkie was in the water and for some reason swam past the four dead ducks and retrieved the fifth duck which was flapping in the water trying desperately to get away. Winkie did not drop this crippled duck until he had brought it up the bank to me, then he went for the other four and, bringing them one by one, laid them on the shore with the exception of the last one one which he brought to me, then returned to the shore for the other three.

All this time I kept out of sight, thinking that perhaps I might get another chance to toll them again, because when the ducks are young and foolish they sometimes appear quite stupid.

To my surprise, I then noticed that the same raft of ducks, with a few more which had joined them, had only flown a short distance up the channel, and were being carried toward me by the current.

Winkie had not wasted any time in getting dry by shaking and rubbing the water from his shaggy coat. The undercoat of a tickle-shedly nature, never gets wet, and these dogs love the water—their retriever ability cannot be surpassed by any breed.

I first became acquainted with this breed of dogs when I was six years old. My oldest brother brought one home to use for duck hunting. He would go to the village school with me and would not leave the doorstep until I came out. Then he would take my books home and many times would take the mail home alone. On several occasions he was given a part in our Christmas Concert at the school, and enjoyed being harnessed to a sled. Whenever I wanted to have a fight, I would have to send him home. Even though he was good natured, he loved to take my part. Then, when the duck season opened, he would toll and retrieve for anyone that would take him along. This breed of dogs is

A story of duck hunting with the little, brightly colored Tolling Dogs, exclusive to the Province of Nova Scotia, that attract ducks to the gunner by their actions and retrieve the dropped game

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never quarrelsome, but there is not one sign of fear in their make-up. They are at all times ready for any emergency. Those that look most like foxes seem to attract the ducks, and the history of this breed dates back to the year 1872 when a corn vessel from England brought a female retriever to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. This female was bred to a dog of uncertain breed which had been used as a tolling dog by the market hunters. This cross gave the toller the necessary retrieving ability, and so came the Yarmouth Tolling Dog or Little River Toller.

Well, here we are in the blind with five nice fat ducks, a loving companion watching every movement of his owner with a few interested glances in the air at one or more ducks flying in to join the other birds that were nearly abreast of the blind, but some 200 yards offshore. Not seeing the stick that Winkie had been playing with, and having enough ducks for one day, I took a chance and told Winkie to go toll them in. Enough said. Out he went down the beach, up over the high rocks, back and forth, jumping, rolling and having a good time. The foolish ducks started quacking, and a dozen or more were swimming as fast as they could toward the dog. I called Winkie into the blind and watched them. They stopped and, although some turned back, the remainder started feeding. They were then about 75 yards from shore. After watching them a few minutes, I threw an empty shell out in front of the blind and Winkie was there by the time it landed. He tossed it in the air and did his stuff all over again. The ducks that were swimming away turned back, and those that were feeding came closer. I put one shell in my gun, called in Winkie, stepped outside the blind, and as they took wing, fired at the leader and dropped him. Winkie did not wait for the word "fetch", but in no time had the duck laid alongside the other five, asking as plain as could be, "What now?"

Someone had fired a few shots some distance to my right after my last shot, which I judged was at some of the birds that had been frightened from my shot. Thinking that there would not be another chance at that spot, and not anxious about more birds, we picked up our bag and started in the direction

of the other hunter. Passing a clump of trees, Winkie drew my attention to an empty shell, and further on was a hunter peering in the air, not knowing anyone was within sight. Just then, Winkie spotted a lone duck flying over the woods, and it looked as if the hunter was in the right place for a single. He spotted it and with a neat swing he dropped that duck at his feet.

I then made my presence known, and seeing that he was a fellow I had known for years, I asked, "Why are you wasting ammunition like that?" He didn't like that remark as he thought he had made a good shot. So he picked up the bird and said, "I knocked him down with one shot."

"Yes," I said, "I saw you, but you wasted that shot. The fall of the bird alone would have killed him." He told me he had shot a pair of ducks on his way in, but could not get them without a dog or boat. We walked back to the place where he had lost the birds and could see one floating some 200 yards from shore. We tried to point it out to Winkie, and he started out into the water but changed his direction for a point of land. We threw stones in the direction of the bird we saw, but Winkie did not change his course and he landed on the point of land, followed a small ditch for a short distance, and came out with a flapping cripple, into the water, and back to shore with the bird for the hunter. We then gave up hopes of retrieving the other duck, as by now it had floated nearly out of sight. Another fine game bird lost because a man would not hunt with a retriever. Not only are birds saved from waste, but there is a thrill in watching an intelligent tolling dog do his work. The indispensable companionship, and the knowledge that there is no possibility of leaving wounded game to die a suffering death, all play a major part in the conservation of game.

We arrived home in time for a supper which consisted of fish balls and rice pudding, but we knew that tomorrow we would feast on roast Black Duck, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and squash.

Winkie wanted to carry all the ducks into the house, but one was all he could manage, and, other than his owner, no one was prouder than Winkie, a real comrade and sportsman.