

Using Your Pigeon Sock

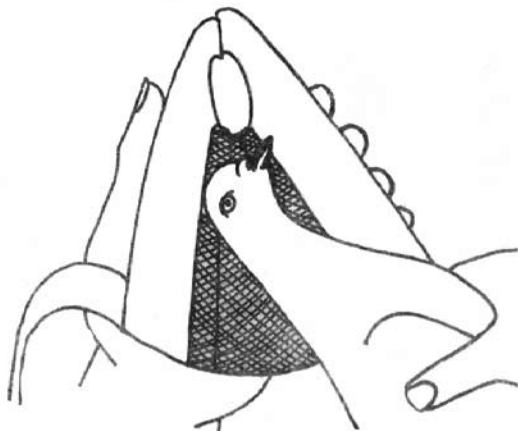
Ideal for yard training and field work using pigeons to Make Your Good Dog Better.

We call this a sock because the earliest trainers used a stocking with the toe cut out for the bird's head. While it did immobilize the bird well, it was difficult to release the bird from the stocking. The term also serves to distinguish it from the Pigeon Harness. Both products allow you to keep control of a pigeon, however, the Pigeon Harness allows the bird to walk while the Pigeon Sock does not. You'll need to choose the product that suits your needs depending on the situation you want to set up (see article titled, "Using Your Pigeon Wing Strap"). Of course, using pigeons is artificial, but if a pup is started young on these non-game birds, he will accept them as birds requiring the same performance of him as true game birds. And there are advantages to using pigeons in training such as their low cost and availability. And by using homing pigeons, you're assured of their return to the coop to be used again. So we use tools and tricks to approximate the field conditions we want the dog to learn from. The goal is for the dog to carry the discipline he's learned with him as he moves on to wild game.

Securing the Pigeon

Getting the pigeon into the sock can feel a little awkward at first, especially if you're wearing gloves. So it's a good idea not to do this in front of your dog until you get the hang of it. In fact, we recommend loading the sock inside the coop any time, just in case the bird should slip from your grasp. After you do it a few times, it will seem as easy as turning your hand over.

With the sock open as shown below, slip the pigeon's head through the opening at the top. Holding the bird across its belly seems to control its wings and feet and gives you a good angle for starting the head.

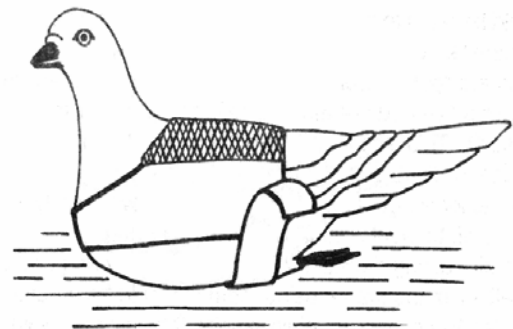


As you take hold of the pigeon with the hand that was holding the sock, secure the Velcro snugly with your now free opposite hand. The bird's legs should be pulled back so the Velcro strap fastens in front. This way, when placed in cover, it cannot run or fly and will remain in place until released.

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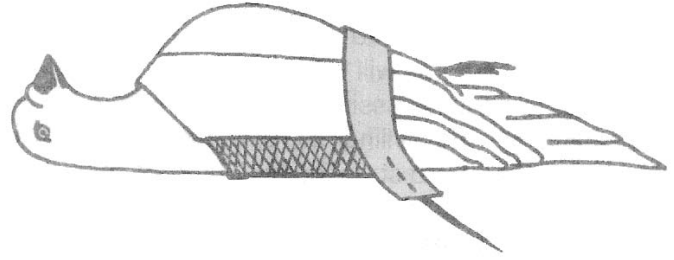
For beginning work, you may not want to hide the pigeon at all--just put the pup on a lead rope and walk him up to the bird. When planting in cover, since the bird can neither fly or walk, you can simply toss it into the cover leaving less of your scent in the immediate area of the bird. You can also use a drop of scent to make the pigeon smell like a game bird.

During the initial whoa training, it's best to work with a partner. With the dog on a lead rope, have your partner release the bird by taking hold of the Velcro tab and "rolling" the bird free--it takes a flick of the wrist to break the strap loose. After several sessions, when the dog has become fairly steady, you can trade places with your training partner with you flushing the bird, and your partner holding the end of the lead rope. If all goes well, your dog will be steady.



As a general rule, it is not desirable for a young pointing dog to be able to catch a bird. In his mind, we want to foster a team approach where he has his role to play, and we do our part in this process.

The Pigeon Sock is made so that a cord can easily be attached. When using the Pigeon Sock with a cord, it's best to put the pigeon on its back with the tab and attached cord laid out in the direction from which you are likely to pull. A quick upward jerk on the cord causes the Velcro to release and the bird to roll upright, and into flight.



While this device was designed with the pointing dog in mind, it can be used to plant a live bird for retrieving. There may be circumstances when you want your dog to separate game from inert objects (a decoy, for instance) and the use of a live bird will give off a different scent for the retriever to seek (as with upland training, a drop of waterfowl scent may help). This will help him learn to seek out wounded game since he is encouraged to use his eyes and nose to locate the bird. And if he retrieves nicely, the bird will be okay to be planted again and again.

Needless to say, the bird in a sock is easy for even a young dog to pick up. This is why the sock works well as long as the dog is on a check cord or, on the other end of the training process, pointing staunchly or retrieving nicely.

If your dog is between these stages and you want him to run free, you may want to consider other means for planting your birds. The loose running dog which reaches in and picks up the socked bird, then plays Keep-Away, will not be speeding on his way to displaying impeccable manners on his birds!

