



BREED COLUMNS

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Curly-Coated Retrievers

What better way to celebrate the exceptional scenting ability of the Curly-Coated Retriever than to allow her to become a search-and-rescue dog? This month expert SAR handler Bree Berner shares her experience training Curlies in this lifesaving role, working with the Connecticut Canine Search and Rescue unit. Bree is now working her third Curly-Coated Retriever in search-and-rescue. Delta, at age 2, is certified for human remains detection with CCSAR and with the International Police Work Dog Association.

SEARCH-AND-RESCUE WITH CURLIES

SAR work can involve various disciplines to find lost and missing people, alive or deceased. Between Delta, Diamond (still working at age 8), and Sapphire (Rest in Peace), these disciplines have included area searches in wilderness settings, human remains



Curly-Coated Retrievers Diamond (top) and Delta work in search-and-rescue with owner-handler Bree Berner. Berner notes, "What matters most is strong physical capability and strong drive for a job that relates to search work. The more naturally responsive the dog is to humans, the easier training will be. Tolerance for heat, cold, and various weather conditions is helpful, as is comfort around water."

detection, water search work for drowning victims, and trailing.

Delta showed a natural preference for trailing, so

this will be our first attempt at certifying in this discipline. We have been training in Connecticut and Maine, and we hope to be ready

SARAH GENTRY

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to test this year. Like all members of CCSAR, I do this work as a volunteer in my “spare” time, outside of work and family obligations, and of course other dog activities. Delta and Diamond are also family dogs, along with Dewey, our Flat-Coated Retriever. So training happens near home during the week, and with the team throughout the state every other weekend.

It takes many hours and diverse training environments to achieve certification. I am often asked how long it takes to bring a dog to certification level. Of course there are many variables, but it is usually about two years. In Connecticut, while some searches involve woods or forests, requests are often urban, or involve the numerous bodies of water that exist in the state.

Law enforcement or family members have asked us to work cold cases that have been given up on over the years. It takes a lot of confidence in your training to

read a dog working ground that may contain just fragments of bone or tissue that has been buried for years.

All dogs have good noses, but some are genetically more sophisticated than others. What matters most is strong physical capability and strong drive for a job that relates to search work. The more naturally responsive the dog is to humans, the easier training will be. Tolerance for heat, cold, and various weather conditions is helpful, as is comfort around water. Noisy, scary things like fire trucks and crowds, sometimes in the dark, are conditions the dog might encounter in the course of a search. His temperament must be sound enough to stay on task.

Breeds represented on the Connecticut team include German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers, Springer Spaniels, Golden Retrievers, Portuguese Water Dogs, and others. Handlers must enjoy working in the outdoors, investing in their own necessary equipment,

and becoming part of a team that can fully support searches.

For all team members, being a part of CCSAR includes training in search management, radio communications, and boating, as well as human and canine first aid. A handler and her partner never search alone. There is always at least one other human backup, and full communication and navigation techniques are always in place.

CCSAR never charges for its services, but we welcome donations via mail or at ccsar.org. We are not law enforcement, so we do not search for dangerous criminals. Safety for humans and dogs comes first in any scenario the team accepts.

When a find is made, credit goes to the entire team. The team supports and enables every canine team working their individual sector to do their job. The missing person is only in one place, but it's just as important to eliminate areas, locate clues, and cover as

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much ground as possible.

Some searches go on for numerous days. Some do not have the desired result, and a person might remain unfound for decades. Team members study searches from around the country, learning more about lost person behavior and successful techniques, such as the relatively new use of drones. Success depends on many elements working together. —B.B.

Many thanks to Bree for her information and her dedication to this wonderful work.

—Ann Shinkle (with Jenny Dickinson)

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Golden Retrievers

JUST A LITTLE MORE TIME

Of all the conversations we have with our dogs, the hardest is the last one, when we must say goodbye. Whether our Golden friend is 6 or 16, it's always too soon. There is no fountain



Golden Retriever

of youth or magic pill, for our dogs ... or their human partners.

Thankfully, veterinary science is always moving forward and hopes to help dogs and people increase their healthspan (a new word for me!) which is that period of middle life (usually) spent free of disease.

Currently, a nationwide, long-term study known as the Dog Aging Project

(DAP) is recruiting dogs from all over the country to participate in this study of canine longevity. To date, more than 32,000 dogs of all sizes, breeds, and backgrounds have joined what the researchers call their “DAP Pack.” The study is expected to run for 10 years.

One group of DAP researchers and their “citizen scientists” (the dog owners) are conducting a

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