

# COUNTER POINT

## RETURN TO THE ANCIENT SPORT

BY SANDY SEATON

PICTURED HERE WITH HER RED-BONES, ROSIE, GATOR, RODEO AND TROOPER.



The hunter was exhausted. She trudges through the whirling blizzard, stopping when her legs and lungs ache almost unbearably. There, ahead - was that Rosie she hears? She listens, willing the voice of her beloved hound to float down the canyon. Yes! It's definitely the energetic little Redbone, and her owner surges forward with newfound energy.

An hour later, the hunter can definitely hear Rosie's changeover chop at the tree, and best of all, her leggy young pup, Gator, is bawling every breath, too. She thrills to the sound of these cherished hounds working the game they were painstakingly bred and trained to trail and tree. As she pulls herself up the last steep slope to the leaning pine, her eyes search intently for the quarry. There! A long twitching tail and wary green eyes show through the thick branches. She climbs higher as the tail-wagging hounds run to her proudly and bark even harder as she rubs and pets them on the snow covered mountain. At last she is looking straight across at the most efficient predator in North America, *Felis coloratus*, the mountain lion!

I was the hunter on this December day, but it could as easily been Theodore Roosevelt or Boone and Crockett themselves. Man has hunted a vast variety of species with his four-legged companion dog since as early as 2000 B.C. The Valley of the Nile cultures left us pictorial records of dogs that strongly resemble the running dogs we know today, and it

seems reasonable the first "sport of kings" was hunting with coursing dogs, aided by falcons and horses. However, like the humans who inhabit the North American continent, hounds have European ancestors. As early as 1200 A.D., ticked hounds were used to hunt stag and boar. The original foxhound, brought over by such colonial gentlemen as George Washington, was developed into an American dog who adapted to the game, conditions, and climate on this continent.

Today more and more Americans are returning to the ancient sport of pursuing game with hounds. Cougar hunting is done almost exclusively with hounds. One cannot successfully still-hunt Boone and Crockett quality tom lions; he cannot take

them from stands; and he cannot bait them. One uses dogs to catch lions. Without dogs, there is little or no chance of penetrating the places these great cats live. Cougars are too wary to be stalked, too far-ranging to be tracked by man alone, and too particular to be baited. If cougars are to be experienced at all, one needs the services of our time-honored friend, the long-eared, loyal hound dog.

Let me take you through the training of one of my hound pups. I love all hounds, but Gator is a registered Redbone, just like the dogs in, "Where the Red Fern Grows." This long-eared pup with the velvet brown eyes and scarlet coat shone from the beginning. Our hounds are UKC registered, and we show them on the bench; Gator's uncle qualified for the World Competition. We also field trial competitively, and all our dogs have swimming and night hunt titles. Gator's early training consisted of *sit*, *stay* and *come*, and he enjoyed the run of the place. Soon he was in the river with our Lab, and even fetched a few tennis balls for me! At six to eight months, we laid scent drags for him, and beamed like proud parents when he *opened*, or barked on the track and treed with his feet hugging the tree.

I don't like to let a hound on a lion track until they're close to a year old. The weather is cold, the terrain is tough, the exertion is extreme, and the trail is usually

## A DOGGING QUESTION

BY M.R. JAMES  
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I'm convinced that at times we're our own worst enemy. Hunters, I mean. Take the subject of dogs, for example. In my latest book, *My Place*, I devoted an entire chapter to the subject. Here's a sampling:

"Some people can't stomach shooting an animal put into a tree or brought to bay by dogs. They call it unsporting and cowardly. Although I think they're confused about what's sport and what's shooting, I can understand their concern. But I'm also eternally puzzled by some moral criticisms regarding what's fair and what's not when dogs are involved.

"Why is it that dogs are encouraged for scenting, trailing, pointing out, and ultimately retrieving a ringneck rooster or a ruffed grouse, yet swap feathers for fur, and dogs and their owners somehow are taking unfair advantage of game? The answer, I suspect, has to do with the belief that game birds have a chance — what some call a sporting chance — to get away, while a coon or cat or bear does not. And then there's the fact that birds are shot mostly for meat and animals for their hides. Seems to me to be another of those emotion-versus-logic arguments that are for the most

part impossible to win.

"Were I a better writer or debater, I could argue and perhaps convince critics that I've yet to see a flushed bird out fly a shot string. And though I can't speak for every wing shooter, I'm generally surprised when I don't walk past a dog on point to drop a double of every covey rise. Single targets are easier still... And to my way of thinking it was the bird dogs that did the hard part.

"At the same time, I've been in on too many hound chases to believe for a moment that using dogs on game animals is a sure thing. Watching bird dogs work a patch of likely cover is no different to me than listening to a pack of hounds on trail. And though following a trace of bird dogs on an afternoon afield can be tiring, chasing a dog pack can be the most physically demanding hunting there is. Bar none. I've been there. I know.

"But, sadly, I also know that it's the simple act of shooting a bayed or treed animal that upsets most vocal critics. Forget the fact that most hound chases end up empty. Forget the fact that it's the chase itself, not the killing shot, that matters most to the majority of hound hunters. Forget

the fact that some bayed animals routinely jump tree and escape before the hunters' arrival. Forget the fact that coon and bear aren't bad eating at all - and that Bridger and a lot of other woodsmen favored cougar over deer or elk, or even beef. There's still the fact that some cornered animals are shot matter-of-factly without a second thought by some who, like less than objective observers, fail to recognize that there is — or should be — a difference between the excitement of the chase and the calculated business of killing. But the heart is stronger than the head in almost every blood sport argument I've heard. That, too, is fact."

My job as editor of *Bowhunter* magazine takes me tens of thousands of miles each year. My pro-hunting, pro-conservation words, both written and spoken, reach hundreds of thousands of sportsmen and women. Judging feedback I receive, I'm convinced that most of these people have the intelligence to make up their own minds about what constitutes ethical hunting practices.

What deeply saddens me are the misguided efforts of some fellow hunters who would impose their personal beliefs on

cold and long. There is a chance of catching a cat in a cave, where the awesome footgear of a cougar is brought in to play. A lion will snag a hound by his swinging ears, and pull him in for a head bite. All our dogs' ears are tattered and drooping by the age of two years! A mountain lion's one to two inch canine teeth and powerful jaw muscles can instantly snap an elk's neck. The thick, one inch long retractable claws on its front feet can shred the thickest hide and rip the windpipe from a deer's throat in seconds. The cougar is an extremely efficient killing machine.

When I turned Rosie and young Gator on his first lion track, the imprint in the snow was faint and slightly snowed in. The big cat had passed that way many hours before. He was making a living hunting, and had likely traveled miles and miles through the sheer cliffs and rocks that were his range. When a hound first buries his nose deep in a lion track and inhales the faint scent, the cougar may be several canyons away feasting on a kill, or still traveling. When and if Rosie and Gator could decipher the track over windblown ridge and the rough frozen creeks, they would finally jump their prey and courageously rush him, whereupon he would retire to the perch where I found him many footsore miles later.

As I sat on a rock on that mountain and considered the tawny muscled form

others. What gives those who elect not to hunt with dogs the legal and moral right to prevent others from heading afield in the fine company of one or more hunting hounds? Such choices, where legal, are private choices. Such opportunities, where they exist, exist because of enlightened wildlife professionals and state or provincial legislators, not indignant citizen hunters with their own bias and personal agenda.

Make no mistake: we hunters face enough problems without becoming embroiled in bitter arguments about whose legal hunting techniques are more moral than the next person's. Such strident public debates serve only to fragment our ranks - and delight the anti-hunters.

Our time is best spent enjoying the hunt, legally and responsibly, and providing the non-hunting public with facts necessary to combat lies spread by the hunter-haters. When we attack our fellow hunters whose personal beliefs and legal practices may differ from ours, we are aiding and abetting those who would end all hunting. At these times hunters are their own worst enemy — and perhaps the best friend an anti could have!

reclining on the limb above me, I thought about the progress we had made. Today's cougar is a descendant of a Pleistocene predator that specialized in small prey and left the horse-like herbivores to the much larger saber-toothed tiger. Over the millennia, the huge hoofed animals became smaller or vanished, and the saber-toothed tiger with them. But the smaller cat prospered and began his reign as one of the most adaptable mammals on earth. For decades, the cougar was regarded as a craven killer and was hunted relentlessly with rifle, trap, and poison. Every cougar-killed sheep became one hundred, and every colt's disappearance was blamed on the cat. The cougar's only enemies are wolves, bears, other cougars, and man; and man paid a bounty as the cougar became a fugitive.

In the 1960s, man realized every predator had a place; including himself. The modern cougar is well protected, not persecuted, and has pulled off one of the greatest comebacks in modern history. Cougars are believed to have a greater range than any other single species of mammal in the world, occupying the bulk of the linear range between Patagonia in South America to British Columbia in Canada - a distance of over 5,000 miles! Few other species of mammal are so widespread.

I studied the cat stretched in the pine, and felt the total exhilaration of sharing the wilderness with this fellow predator.

We hunt cougars with dogs because they are in need of study; because they predate on livestock and wildlife; and they are in need of being regulated, just as they regulate ungulates. We should sport hunt cougars because lion hunting is one of the world's most wonderful experiences. There is absolutely nothing to compare! The clean air, the time-consuming hunt for the track, the conditioning, and the beauty of my surroundings compels me. The total preoccupation of raising and training intelligent animals who want to work for a living and please me with the magic of their voices and desire fascinates me. The startled look in Gator's wide eyes as he bawls his joy at his prowess and pride in treeing such a mighty foe enralls me. And the lion himself? He is a gorgeous, wild, defiant, protected legal big game animal in Montana. I have treed him with my dogs and I have the luxury to savor his presence. By virtue of Gator and Rosie treeing him, I can identify absolutely whether the cat is a male or female, mature or immature, a trophy animal I choose to harvest or even a majestic photographic opportunity. Why do I have the time to make the right decision during the extreme excitement of the catch? Thanks to my incomparable hounds!

I gratefully leash my dogs, pack my camera, and silently thank the tom as I slowly walk away...I'll run him again someday!

PHOTO BY TOM J. ULRICH

