A few tips on raising Chukars for dog training



Dog + birds= Birddog! Not any new revelation, it takes birds to make birddogs. The more birds the better, wild birds even better. A few very lucky folks have year round access to wild birds. The rest of us have to supplement with captive raised game birds to achieve our training goals. Therefore we have to buy and/or raise our own birds. Trying to find birds to buy can be a real pain the A$$. They are expensive and always difficult to find when you need them most. If you got the time and space consider raising a few as it's not that difficult. Chukars are a good choice to raise and work well for dog training. They are a hardy bird and require less space than pheasants. Here are a few tips to help you get started.

Start with 1-3 day old chicks in early May. Check with your local feed store to get chicks or check the internet. Shipping chicks is very common. Chicks are available seasonally. Typically you only get one shot to get them as most sources will sell out. Order accordingly, it's not uncommon to loose 10% - 20%. The first few days are when most losses happen.

A garage, shed or barn will work fine for a brooding area for the first 3-4 weeks. At 4-5 weeks they can be outside in a fight pen. Brooding areas and flight pens are sized based

on number of birds. Plan 5-8 birds per square foot for brooding areas. A 10’x10’x15’ flight pen would hold 50+ adults.

Make sure there are no corners in the brooding ring(s). Chicks will pile up in corners suffocating the bottom ones. See picture of brooding ring. Most importantly the brooding area has to be clean and disinfected! Cleanliness is usually the difference between success and failure.



Brooding area with rings, propane hood heater and drip water system.

Before your chicks arrive turn on the heaters and make sure everything is working. Chicks are unable to regulate their body heat for the first 4 weeks so you will need supplemental heating. Start with 95 degrees below your heat source. It should be dropped 5 degrees each week for a month. Heat lamps or propane heating hoods work great.

Don’t disturb the chicks too much but check on them frequently. If possible peek in every couple hours the first day or two. You want to see how the chicks are acting without disturbance. Healthy chicks are active and evenly dispersed in the brooding ring. If they are piled up under the heat source, it’s too cold. It’s to hot if they are pushed to the outside edges away from the heat. See photos.



You want to see chicks active and evenly dispersed throughout the brooding ring.



Chicks pushed to the edges of the ring indicate it's too hot.

Turkey starter food works fine for chicks. Use heavy cardboard paper plates as feeding trays. Straw or wood chips works well for bedding. Never use sawdust or fine ground bedding materials. Change out the bedding as needed keeping it clean and dry. Be sure to provide fresh water. A drip water system is best for young chicks, poultry waters will also work.

It's important to read how the birds are acting. Sick birds are lethargic and typically have puffed up feathers. Early diagnosis and quick treatment will reduce the spread and loss. Coccidiosis is a common bacterial infection found it captive birds. It will usually show up around 2-3 weeks of age. If things just don't look right get it checked out as quickly as possible. Medicate through the water system and always follow recommended doses. Vets and or feed stores should have everything you need to keep them happy and healthy.

Hopefully this has sparked the interest to raise a few chukars. It is well worth the time and effort. Your dog will sure appreciate it. The biggest down side is that all your training buddies are going to start wanting your birds. Expect the call, "You got any extra birds? I need to get Fido on some birds!"
Be sure to check out the internet for detailed information on raising game birds.

Good luck! John Arkins Laurel, MT



Chukar flight pen