

## **Water Search (Index 5)**

The purpose of the “Water Search” discipline is to evaluate the willingness and effectiveness of a dog for finding downed game in a water environment where it would be difficult or impossible for a hunter/handler to go. It is the next step in revealing how a young dog has built on its confidence and desire to swim as tested in NA, to actually working in a water environment in pursuit of game.

The test is similar to a hunting situation where a crippled duck has been lost, unseen by the dog, and the hunter must send his dog into the area where the bird was last seen. It provides an opportunity for a young dog to demonstrate its natural abilities in scenting, searching, and desire for game contact, in addition to its present hunting and trained skills. The test also evaluates the dog’s ability to work independently from the handler, while serving cooperatively with the handler, to bring downed game to the bag. This discipline is, in essence, a demonstration of a cooperative search in water.

**Judging this discipline begins when the Senior Judge tells the handler to send his dog into the water to search for the lost duck, and ends when the dog either successfully locates the duck, or after the Senior Judge has determined the judges have seen enough to make a suitable evaluation of the dog’s performance (typically 10 minutes or less is sufficient).**

Set-up for this water test is all important because it is the site that provides the test structure. The ideal pond or marsh for the “Water Search” will have at least some swimming depth water along with considerable vegetation to hide the duck. The chosen pond or marsh should be of a sufficient size to allow the dog to demonstrate its desire, perseverance, and use of nose while searching the area for downed game. A pond or marsh that is small enough to allow a dog to run the entire perimeter shoreline without entering the water is not acceptable.

A live, well fed, and watered duck of dark coloration must be used. White domestic waterfowl cannot be used. The duck is rendered flightless. A few feathers are plucked from the duck and placed at the edge of the pond. The duck is then released into the water and harassed into cover out of sight from the dog and handler. Rocks may be used to assist the duck moving into cover quickly. Dragging a duck on a string by hand, boat or fishing pole to lay a track is not allowed.

The handler and dog team will be out of sight when the duck is released. Each dog will be given a fresh duck for their water search, regardless of the search outcome of previous dogs.

Once the duck is hidden, the handler and dog will be directed to stand at a designated starting point nearby, but not directly at the feather pile at the edge of the pond. The handler will carry an unloaded shotgun, but will not shoot. The handler can have their dog on a leash and the dog may be standing, sitting, or lying down next to the handler at the start position. The dog is expected to wait calmly by the handler's side. Although the dog is not required to remain steady at the start area, excessive barking, lunging, or whining may be penalized under obedience.

When the handler signals that they are ready, a gunner located several yards away from the dog/handler team will fire one shot into the air from a conventional gauge shotgun using blank shells. The blank shot must be directed away from the area that the duck is hidden, so as not to influence the direction of the dog's initial search. After the shot is fired, the handler will show the dog the feathers and entry point of the duck and will command their dog to search for the duck. After the search begins, the handler may hand the gun off to a judge if that is their preference.

The dog should enter the water willingly when commanded and begin to search for scent. The dog may locate the duck by searching, tracking, or a combination. As in the field search, the dog is expected to search likely spots that could hide a duck, persevere in its attempt to find the duck, and use available scent on air, water, and vegetation to expand their search area. If scent is lost, the dog should begin systematic searching the pond or marsh to relocate scent and not mill about aimlessly.

The dog is not required to find the duck during the Water Search discipline, but does have to demonstrate it has desire to find game, be perseverant in its search for game, and be able to expand its search area away from the starting point to likely areas that might hold a wounded duck. It is emphasized that this is a test in searching and not a test for tracking, chasing of the duck or even finding the duck, though all of these things may occur.

If the duck is flushed into open water, it should be dispatched as soon as safely possible. If a duck is shot in front of the dog the dog must retrieve it and this can be considered fulfilling the discipline "Retrieve of Duck from Deep Water". If the dog manages to catch the duck without shooting, it should retrieve it to the handler. This retrieve would be scored under cooperation.

While the dog is working, the handler should stand quietly at the release spot and not interfere with the dog's search until time is called. If desired or needed, a handler is allowed to walk a short distance (10 yds/30 ft) in either direction along the bank from the start area to encourage their dog. This action however, may be construed as a command and could adversely affect the dog's score. Since this test is an evaluation of independent search and perseverance by the dog in water and not a blind retrieve, the handler should not give additional hand, whistle, or voice signals once the dog is commanded into the water. Hand and voice signals are to be avoided during the active search portion as they can interrupt the independent action of the dog. The handler will be advised that repeated hand, whistle, or voice signals, if given, will lower the dog's score. Rocks may be used at the Senior Judge's discretion to help a dog in its search, although such use will also lower a dog's score.