

Retrieving doves can leave a hunting dog with many a burr in the fur

Jameson, our Boykin Spaniel, is famous among friends for his fur's luxurious feathering and multi-tone hues. He wears a mane like a pride-leading lion in the bushveld and sports a prominent, sun-bleached blond cowlick that would do any surfer dude proud. One friend dubbed him, "the Fabio of hunting dogs."

Fabio's glorious tresses are somewhat less spectacular this week after opening day in a Culpeper dove field.

On opening day last Saturday, hunters in well-manicured fields of cut and standing sunflowers reported good shooting. But persistent rain forest conditions in late summer made dove field maintenance an insurmountable challenge for many. Cut cornfields, dove shoot staples of yesteryear, are next to useless anymore since modern combines leave little on the ground except perfectly shucked and stripped cobs.

The field we hunted saw pockets of excellence, as many dove fields do. We were about 150 yards away from the nearest hot zone. Still, we collected a few birds and Jameson, although rusty without any real work since chukar hunting last winter, impressed with his retrieving drive and keen marking skills.

He found every bird for which he was sent—and even volunteered to fetch three birds for my friend Ken Greene, who was shooting 50 yards to my right.

As the afternoon wore on, Jameson constantly scanned the sky with his torso resting under die-cut camo netting. I swear he even learned to differentiate between swallows and doves.

By late afternoon, swallows were flying everywhere and he paid them no mind. Let a solo dove appear over the nearby cornfield, overgrown with

OUTDOORS

Ken Perrotte



morning glory and other weeds, and he perked up, using his canine superpowers to will the bird into gun range.

The routes to downed birds were often difficult. Pernicious weeds—many laden with prickly, stickily burrs and other fur-fouling ingredients—were heavy amid the still-standing sunflowers. Jameson didn't mind, at least not while birds were flying and he had some action.

I tried to remove burrs from around his ears and back after each retrieve but by late afternoon, after five quick retrieves without any follow-up grooming, his coifed tresses were snarled by an insidious array of burrs and other assorted pestilence. Sometimes three burrs would join forces to create a large, tight knot of previously glossy fur, including some near the derriere he is so fond of wiggling.

A clean-up was in order upon arriving home. Trying to rake the tangles was fruitless and any pulling on his fur severely agitated him. The only solution was to use the scissors, that handheld tool he fears almost as much as the fire-breathing vacuum cleaner.

Attempts to soothe him into compliantly holding still while I tried to trim away the damage went for naught. The only way to his fur was through his heart—namely, to bribe him with treats. While "Mommy" held small treats in front of his nose and fixed his attention, "Daddy" snipped away, showing him each fur-wrapped ball, trying to illustrate that he had nothing to fear but fear itself.

So, now, Fabio—uh, Jameson—is somewhat



KEN PERROTTE PHOTO

Jameson, the columnist's trusty companion, got bogged down in the weeds on a recent hunt.

shabbily shorn. His ears and the ample feathering on his flanks look lopsided, his mane has a bite taken out of it and his right hind leg all the way to his butt looks like he is plagued by patches of mange.

We'll get through this. But the struggle is real.