

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Patrol Wildlife Detector Canine Program

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Abstract: The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission began a study in 1987 to determine the possibility of creating a canine program especially designed to meet the demands of wildlife law enforcement. As a result of this study, the Commission began a pilot program in 1988 to evaluate the use of canines in the field. Due to the success of this pilot program, the decision was made to expand in October 1995. Through proper training and deployment, the Commission's canine program has become a successful and innovative law enforcement approach directed toward the detection and apprehension of wildlife law violators.

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With the success of canines in traditional law enforcement, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission began a study in 1987 to evaluate the feasibility of creating a canine program especially designed to meet the demands of wildlife law enforcement.

Although the New York Natural Resources Department had been using canines in conservation law enforcement since 1978, our research indicated that there were many areas of canine use that had not yet been explored by wildlife agencies and that few, if any, programs were custom tailored specifically for a wildlife agency. Budgetary restraints, liability issues, agency policies, and image problems all contributed to the lack of canine programs. With these concerns in mind, the Commission developed a canine program that would operate within the agency's existing budget, require all canine teams to be certified by the United States Police Canine Association annually, and comply with agency policy.

A cost study indicated that maintaining a canine would be in the area of \$550 a year. This would include all food, vitamins, heartworm medicine, daily care needs, veterinary expense, physical examinations, yearly upkeep, and replacement of equipment.

The Commission also realized that with no training or case law guidelines, each area of intended use would need to be carefully reviewed and areas of training involving court credibility would need detailed daily documentation.

In November 1988, the Commission launched a pilot program to evaluate the use of canines in the field. It was decided that 1 canine team would be formed and would receive training in obedience, human tracking, wildlife detection, article and building search, apprehension, and handler protection. Canines trained in these areas would be an asset in apprehending suspects who had fled a crime scene, for searching vehicles and vessels for hidden game, and for locating evidence which had been hidden or discarded.

During the test period the canine team was involved in >300 major wildlife violations. Among these violations were illegal bear traps, recovering a number of deer and spotlights from night deer poachers, and bait on wildlife gamelands. They also recovered the weapon used in the attempted murder of a law enforcement officer. The team was recognized in the search and rescue of a lost child and received the top honor from the United States Police Canine Association for the best-trained canine in North and South Carolina. Based on the success of the pilot program, the Commission decided to expand its canine program to 9 teams.

Instead of the traditional law enforcement canine school, the Commission decided to select an instructor within the ranks of the enforcement division to provide training. Master Officer Michael C. Criscoe and K-9 Link had previously completed 14 weeks of initial training from the Mid-Atlantic Canine Consultants School in Angier, N.C., in November 1988. The Commission elected to enroll Officer Criscoe in the canine instructor program at the Mid-Atlantic Canine Consultants School to receive his instructor certification. The instructor's course consisted of training canine teams in obedience, agility, article search, human tracking, building searches, wildlife and narcotic detection, criminal apprehension, handler protection, and canine legalities. The instructor's course met or exceeded the United States Police Canine Association standards.

North Carolina Wildlife Officer Canine Training School

In January 1996, 8 new handlers were selected to attend the first Wildlife Officer Canine Training School at the North Carolina Justice Academy in Salemburg, North Carolina. During the 14-week school, handlers and their canines received approximately 560 hours of basic and advanced training in the areas of obedience, agility, article and building search, human tracking, wildlife detection, handler protection, and criminal apprehension.

Emphasis was placed on 2 specific training areas: wildlife detection and human tracking. It was felt that by training a canine to detect wildlife, it could locate wildlife in vehicles and vessels much faster and more thoroughly than an officer could. A canine capable of locating game would also be beneficial in recovering game of evidential value.

It was also felt that a canine trained to track people would be an asset in checking suspicious vehicles, problem areas, and apprehending suspects that fled a crime scene. Such a canine could also play an important role in search and rescue missions.

In specialty training each canine was started in a specific area and trained until complete proficiency was obtained before any other training or cross training was attempted. It was imperative that all training exercises be performed under a variety of conditions to ensure consistent performances. At times remedial training was needed in areas already mastered in order to maintain proficiency while new tasks were being learned.

Training each canine in a separate task allowed different areas of canine use to be monitored early in the program. This allowed the instructor to determine the best training patterns for future canines. When the canines were completely proficient in their initial task, they were then cross-trained in the other specialty tasks.

While training the canines in wildlife detection (i.e., deer, dove, duck, and turkey) it was found that it was possible to reach each canine to be species specific. The methods and techniques used to train for wildlife detection were the same as those used to train narcotic detector canines. It was found that training in wildlife detection is a much faster process than narcotic detection. This is probably because of the canine's natural desire to alert to wildlife and the fact that the odor produced by wildlife is stronger than that produced by narcotics. Canines were taught to search vehicles, vessels, structures, and open areas.

Some problems were experienced with residual odor; however, continual work in areas previously contaminated seemed to resolve problems. On occasion canines would alert to vehicles containing wildlife at distances up to 10 m. They could also easily detect wildlife inside a sealed passenger compartment.

When training canines to track people, dogs were taught to find a track and then follow it regardless of distractions, complexity, or cross-tracks. They were also taught to alert to articles on the track that were dropped by the tracklayer; this can be extremely important in evidence recovery. Distances and ages of the tracks were gradually increased during the training. Under the right conditions, it was quite evident that the canines were able to follow very old tracks. They were trained up to 8 hours old. The Commission felt that the need for a canine capable of running older tracks was much more prevalent in the wildlife field. The canines, through distraction avoidance training, learned to track through numerous distractions. Tracking was done over a variety of terrain and under different environmental conditions.

In addition to training in wildlife detection and tracking, the canines were trained in article recovery and fundamental areas searches. Article recovery training taught canines to search areas and alert to article with human scent on them. This training is useful in evidence recovery.

Training in area searches taught canines to scout areas and to locate and alert to humans.

In-Class Instruction—20 hours

Instruction covered the history of canines in traditional and wildlife law enforcement. It also covered the behavior of dogs, anatomy and physiology of dogs, health care and first aid for dogs, scent and scent characteristics, working dogs on

scent, principles of dog training, legal aspects of canine use, record keeping, and field procedures and deployment. By the end of this class, handlers had received the basic principles of dog training that would enable them to create a successful canine team.

Obedience and Agility—50 Hours

This block of instruction gave the handlers an opportunity to develop a close bond with their canines. This bond was essential if they were to become a successful canine team. Handlers were taught how to give the proper voice commands and hand signals to their canines. Canines were taught the basic commands of heel, no, sit, stay, down, and come. This was accomplished first on short lead and later off lead. Canines also received training in social behavior and distraction avoidance. After learning basic obedience, canines were introduced to the confidence course. The obstacles on the confidence course provided exercise for the canines while at the same time building their confidence. This course taught the canines not to be afraid of any place their handlers may take them. This was important since the training and deployment of canines in wildlife law enforcement entails their being exposed to a variety of different areas.

Human Tracking—260 Hours

This block of instruction taught the canines to track a subject under a variety of conditions and over multiple terrains. While on the track, the canines were taught to discriminate between scents, avoid cross tracks, and alert to any evidence that had been discarded by the subject. Canines also received advanced training in the tracking of multiple subjects.

Wildlife Detection—60 Hours

This block of instruction taught the canines to search, locate, and alert to hidden game such as duck, dove, deer, and turkey under a variety of conditions. The handler was taught to recognize the canine's alert once the evidence had been located.

Article Search—20 Hours

This block of instruction taught the canines how to search, locate, and alert to evidence that had been discarded or hidden. Handlers were taught the proper search techniques and to recognize their canine's alert. Articles such as firearms, shotgun shells, knives, leg hold traps, bear bait, animal hides, and corn were some of the items used in this training.

Building and Area Search for Humans—10 Hours

This block of instruction taught the canines how to enter a building to search, locate, and alert to concealed suspects. Handlers were taught the proper search techniques and how to recognize their canine's alert. Handlers and their canines received this training to assist them on search and rescue missions when there was no longer a track available.

Handler Protection and Apprehension—135 Hours

This block of instruction taught the canine teams how to recall their canine after deployment, apprehend a suspect with a firearm, protect the handler in life-threatening situations, and to guard a suspect or multiple suspects. Canine teams received instructions in making and maintaining an arrest of suspects with only the force that is needed.

Courts and the Wildlife Enforcement Officer/Handler—10 Hours

This block of instruction taught the canine handlers how to maintain proper canine records and be able to qualify as an expert witness. The handler would be fully knowledgeable on the use of physical force, especially as it pertains to the use of a law enforcement canine.

On 6 May 1996, 8 new canine teams graduated from the Wildlife Officer Canine Training School at North Carolina Justice Academy. This gave the commission a total of 9 canine teams that had received approximately 580 hours of specialized training. This school allowed the Commission to instill a single philosophy upon the canine teams, create continuity within the program, and ensure that all of the canine teams were able to meet the requirements established by the judicial system within the State of North Carolina.

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission requires all canine teams be tested and certified by the United States Police Canine Association. This certification provides a national standard against which canines are tested and assists in determining court credibility. The United States Police Canine Association will, after testing, provide expert testimony in court if needed.

In the State of North Carolina, the admissibility of evidence located by a trained canine depends on the following 4 factors: 1) the standards or criteria employed in selecting a canine for training; 2) the standards that the canine was required to meet to successfully complete its training program; 3) the exact training that the canine has received; and 4) the track record of the canine up until the use in question, with an emphasis placed on successes and failures. As of July 1999, 100% of the evidence that has been located by the Commission's canine teams has been ruled admissible, resulting in a better than 99% conviction rate.

In-service Training

In-service training begins where the initial training ends. Commission canine teams continually train to ensure proficiency in all applicable areas. This training ensures that all canine teams remain credible with the courts, agency officers, and with Commission polices. By spending 10%–15% of their time training, canine teams solve most minor problems before they become major problems that could negatively affect deployment.

From May 1996 through May 1999, the Commission's canine teams have logged a total of 4,085 hours of training: 753 hours of track training; 378 hours of

wildlife detection; and 1,093 hours of training on article, building, and area searches for evidence and humans. Other training, such as seminars, canine team training meetings, and obedience accounted for an additional 786 hours of training.

From May 1996 through May 1999, the Commission's canine teams have been used a total of 2,722 times. These uses have included tracking people, wildlife detection, area searches for evidence, wildlife road check points, search and rescue, and assisting other wildlife officers and other law enforcement agencies.

The canine teams have issued 1,969 hunting and fishing citations, 321 boating citations, 78 boating/fishing access citations, 11 trapping citations, and 1,073 written warnings for a total of 3,452 violations related to the canine program. The canine officers also issued 1,122 nonrelated wildlife violations and felony arrest.

During this time, a total of 333 public demonstrations have been given with approximately 17,385 people present.

In addition to their responsibilities as canine handlers, the officers are still required to perform traditional duties such as boating and hunting safety programs, hunting and fishing license requirements, bag and creel inspections, boat patrol, and answering public complaints.

Creating a Successful Canine Program

If a canine program is to be a success the agency must select the appropriate teams, properly train both handlers and canines, ensure proper deployment, and obtain public support. Failure to achieve success in any one of these areas of development will cause problems for the agency's program in the future.

Selecting a Team

Selection of the team requires the procurement of a suitable canine, the choosing of a handler, and the location of team deployment.

Before obtaining any dogs, the agency must first define the objectives of the program. If the main emphasis is to be placed on search and rescue, the agency might want to employ the use of the bloodhound. If the objectives are more along the lines of a traditional canine program, including aggression training, the agency's choice might be that of a German shepherd.

The German shepherd breed has been selected over other breeds for use as a law enforcement dog in our program for many reasons; the more important reasons are his availability and his adaptability to climatic conditions. In addition, the German shepherd possesses other characteristics which are necessary in dogs used for law enforcement work. He has a long, tireless gait; he is a strong, agile, and well-muscled dog, alert and fearless. Generally speaking, he is not a vicious animal; however, all German shepherds have a natural distrust of strange persons or strange situations. The breed has a double coat: the outercoat is long, coarse, and somewhat water resistant; the undercoat is soft, furry, and thicker in the winter than in warm weather. Other breeds have been tested and found acceptable for use as law enforcement dogs when required.

All German shepherd dogs are not physically or temperamentally fit to become law enforcement dogs. The North Carolina Wildlife Enforcement Division has established rigid specifications which each dog must meet before he is accepted for training.

Handlers who are chosen should be self-motivated and dedicated to the program. They must possess an abundance of patience and be able to manage their time wisely. Because of the time and expense involved in the training of a canine team, handlers who are selected should be content as an officer and not looking to promote or transfer.

Canine teams may be placed either geographically or strategically. Geographically, teams are placed throughout the state, region, or district where use will be maximized. While at first the agency's needs are best met by geographically placing teams, their long-term needs will be best served by strategically placed teams.

All canines are owned and maintained by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Division of Enforcement.

Training

The second step in developing a successful canine program is the training of the team. This begins by educating the handlers with the knowledge necessary to train a dog. There are 5 basic principles that apply to canine training. These are know-how, repetition, patience, praise, and correction.

Know-how is the most important of the 5 principles. In order to train a dog correctly, the handler must first possess the knowledge of how to do so. In every phase of training the pattern or sequence that will be used must be explained thoroughly. Lack of knowledge or a failure to apply that knowledge correctly, will be negatively reflected in the dog's performance. It is essential that a handler knows how to perform an exercise correctly before he puts his dog through it.

Repetition is one method a handler uses for teaching his dog. Because dogs learn through association, the more often he performs a task, the more proficient he will become at it. Although a canine learns through association and repetition, he can lose proficiency if trained too much for too long in only one area. Therefore, it is extremely important that the training exercises be challenging, but enjoyable.

Patience is the most important characteristic that a canine handler can possess. If a handler loses his patience while training his dog, it will create confusion in the dog's mind and possibly limit the dog's ability to learn. To be successful in training, a handler must never lose control of his patience.

It is through praise that a dog learns he has performed correctly. Every time he successfully performs an exercise, even if it takes more time than expected, the dog must be praised and/or rewarded. The timing of praise is crucial. If the dog is to understand that what he has just done is correct, he must immediately receive some praise from the handler.

It is through correction that a dog learns what not to do. If a dog performs a task incorrectly, he must immediately be corrected. A verbal correction is all that is needed in most areas of training. However, during obedience and aggression training,

both verbal and physical corrections are necessary. Timing is the most important factor in the administration of corrections. A dog can not comprehend a reprimand for an error that was committed several seconds earlier. Handlers who administer corrections improperly can severely limit their chances of success in all areas of training.

Deployment

Canines used in wildlife law enforcement may be deployed in 1 of 3 ways. These include aggressive canine patrol (proactive), request for assistance (reactive), and special details.

It is through aggressive canine patrol that a canine team will achieve its greatest success. Due to the nature of wildlife law enforcement, if a canine team waits for a request from the field, its utilization would be few and far between. For this reason, aggressive canine patrol is a must. The term aggressive canine patrol refers to a canine team aggressively pursuing canine related activities. This will ensure maximum use of the canine.

Requests for assistance are the second way that a canine can be deployed. Officers who need assistance in apprehending a suspect who has fled a crime scene, locating evidence, or on a search and rescue will appreciate the help of a well-trained canine team. The majority of the time, when an officer requests a canine team, an arrest will be made as a direct result of the canine.

Special details allow the canine team to be used in geographic locations other than the team's normal area of patrol responsibility. These details are set up by the local supervisors, in the area where the detail is to take place, in conjunction with the canine handler who will be assisting them. These details should target a particular problem in a particular area and involve more than just one local officer. Proper planning of a detail is crucial if it is to be a success.

Public Relations

Like all successful programs, a canine program must have the support of the public. In order to achieve this, the canine handlers must explain the program to sportsmen, give public demonstrations, and actively pursue media coverage.

Canine teams are an asset in promoting the agenda of any agency through public demonstrations and public speaking engagements. By actively pursuing media coverage, an agency will be able to receive positive and sustained coverage of its canine program, while at the same time gaining positive exposure to the general public.

Summary

By acting on an idea back in 1987, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission has created one of the most successful programs ever implemented by a wildlife agency in the field of enforcement. The development of a full-time canine program has enabled the Commission to better carry out its mission in managing and protecting North Carolina's natural resources. The Commission's canine teams are especially trained to meet the demands of wildlife law enforcement.