

Why we dock tails and remove dew claws

While we do have many families that purchase puppies from us for pets our **main** purpose of breeding Vizsla's & Weimaraner's at *NoSam* is to preserve the breed as hunting dogs within the breed **STANDARD!** To produce dogs that EXCEL in the field! We hunt and train our dogs for AKC hunting events throughout the year!

I think it is easy to forget that many people who are unfamiliar with working gundogs, have no idea why we dock the tails of some of our working breeds. Many people who don't understand the idea of a gundog find this practice "cruel" or "unnecessary".

Without the benefit of knowledge, this is quite understandable. We wrote this piece to explain why we dock the tails and remove the dew claws on our Vizsla and Weimaraner puppies and why it is nonnegotiable on all of our puppies.

The purpose of docking

The original purpose of tail docking was to prevent damage to the ends of working dogs' tails. The owners of hunting dogs discovered that the adult dog was less likely to injure its tail at work, if the end of the tail was removed soon after birth. hundred or more years ago, such a dog would probably have been discarded or left to suffer.

Nowadays of course, we provide treatment for tail damage.

And the injured dog will often require an operation and amputation. Sometimes more than one which increases risk of infection.

Working gundogs, particularly breeds used specifically for hunting, are far more likely to damage the ends of their tails than dogs that do not work, due to prolonged contact with undergrowth. These are the breeds that are docked for a purpose! This is **NOT** purely cosmetic. Until you have firsthand worked many different breeds of pointing dogs in the field you can't imagine the possible problem's tails can cause.

Dew Claw Removal

While many breeds have dew claws that are left intact the Vizsla and Weim standard states that dew claws are undesirable and for good reason. I have THREE dogs who did not have dew claw removal in my entire kennel 1 Weim and two Vizsla's. Each of those dogs are missing dew claws on one or both feet. All of those dogs have been subject to multiple injuries causing bleeding that was not easy to get under control and could have led to infection. These three dogs are all dogs that are **A)** breeding females who aren't being actively hunted or **b)** pets. These are dogs who haven't even been hunting or haven't hunted in years and have **STILL** gotten dew claw injuries within recent years. Therefore, I couldn't fathom the amount of injuries on dew claws of active hunting dogs and feel for health benefits the dew claw is not needed on the breed. The benefit outweighs the risk.

AKC Standard & Puppy Choosing

Vizsla Standard: Tail set just below the level of the croup, thicker at the root and docked one-third off. Ideally, it should reach to the back of the stifle joint and when moving it should be carried at or near the horizontal, not vertically or curled over the back, nor between the legs. A docked tail is preferred.

Weimaraner Standard: Tail: Docked. At maturity it should measure approximately 6 inches with a tendency to be light rather than heavy and should be carried in a manner expressing confidence and sound temperament. A non-docked tail shall be penalized.

Why not just dock the tails of the puppies that are going to working or show homes?

While that sounds like an easy solution the fact is that tails are docked when puppies are no older than 3-days of age. It is physically impossible to get a proper assessment of each individual puppy by three days of age. The point of our program is to properly match puppies with their “ideal” home. We don’t ever match puppies until they are at least 7-weeks. It would be unfair to subject a puppy whose desire is to hunt or a puppy who is the ideal show puppy in the litter to a life as a pet because of an undocked tail or subject him to a life of surgeries to fix a tail that has been damaged in the field. Therefore, the solution is to dock the tails of the entire litter by three days of age since this is the ideal time frame provided by the AVMA and causes minimal pain and stress to the litter. You’ll be hard pressed to find a reputable breeder (*someone breeding healthy, quality puppies in the set standard*) willing to alter the breed standard and let you pick your pup out at birth and leave its tail intact. It’s simply **not** responsible to be matching families with puppies that early before they’ve had time to even evaluate the litter.

On another note as breeders we cannot breed for a quality that isn’t there. Tails in the breeds have been removed since they were created as a hunting dog. Many tails on puppies are born crooked, and brittle anyways so leaving the tail intact would be very painful for the pup as it matured. Since 99% of American Vizsla’s and Weimaraners tails are docked there is no way to see the tail to breed for a stronger tail within the breed. You can’t improve something that isn’t there in the majority of the population. Plus, if you compare the breeds intact tails to other breeds you’ll easily spot how thin and wispy the tail is and see how easily it would be damaged in a working situation.

Common beliefs

Of those that object to docking and dew claw removal for our working gundogs, there are a number of common premises or beliefs that underlies their opinions.

Here are some of the arguments that I have heard recently

“Not all dogs get tail damaged, so just dock when they do.”

This is true, some dogs don’t damage their tails, no matter how hard they hunt. The problem with therapeutic docking in response to persistent damage, is that it is a much more serious operation. Often preceded by months of discomfort whilst other remedies are attempted which leaves the dog out of the field and unable to work! This is comparable to telling a kid they don’t need to wear a helmet or a seat belt until they get injured. “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cures”!

“My dog goes for long walks and hunts and hasn’t damaged her tail! So that proves that docking is not necessary.”

Not only do we know that some dogs are more prone to tail damage than others, taking a dog for a very long walk is not the same as working the dog in a field.

Dogs used for hunting do so in thick cover for extended periods of time and do so at a rapid pace. They are typically high drive dogs that crash through cover at speed, and their tails are highly prone to damage.

“You can just bandage the tail up”

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to bandage a dog’s tail in such a way that the bandage will remain in place throughout a working day and could introduce a nasty infection with dogs entering water and trampling through mud.

“If it means cutting off puppy’s tails, you should not work your dogs”

This is quite a common response from someone whose other concerns have been addressed. The answer is that working dogs are an absolutely essential part of producing game for the table without causing suffering. They flush game that would otherwise not have been found, and they ensure that quarry species can be retrieved and dispatched humanely. The reason we love the breed so much is because they are bred to standard and carry the qualities we desire in a dog. Changing those qualities would change everything we strive to produce in the breed and then we might as well not even get said breed of dog.

In short, we strongly believe in preserving the Vizsla & Weimaraner breeds as they were bred and intended for. A dual-purpose dog that can hunt all day long and become a part of the family. It is not our job to alter the purpose of the breeds or change the standard. As reputable breeders we believe the breed should be preserved as their original purpose intended. If you feel that a docked tail isn’t something you want then you probably should consider a breed with an undocked tail!