

The Gundog Project

[In italiano qui](#)

The Gundog Research Project is a scientific research focusing on gundogs actively used for hunting and field trials. The project has been tailored on pointing dogs, but we are accepting contributions from spaniels and retrievers owners as well. The project stems from two elements: my love for gundogs and, on a more practical side, the need to write a research dissertation to graduate in Veterinary Medicine. Writing a dissertation is mandatory in Italy and, as it might require months of research, I opted to devote them to something I like, and from which animals and humans could benefit . Dogs have always played a huge role in my life, and certainly helped me to grow into a better person, this is how I am trying to give them something back.

Animal behaviour is intimately linked with animal welfare which, on its turn, is affected by animal management. Most of the animal welfare studies carried on so far, focus on farm animals. Furthermore, working dogs such as hunting and field trials dogs, cannot even be considered “pets”. They are canine athletes, they have their own peculiar needs and they are among the few dogs that can truly be considered working animals. As far as my tutors and I are aware, there is no scientific literature available on hunting and field trial dogs management and welfare: the studies we could find are centered on military, police and shelter dogs and on dogs for the blind. Feel free to [e-mail us](#) if you want to know more about the project scientific design and about the scientific literature behind it.

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If you are interested in supporting this project and help giving it more visibility (through magazines, websites or your club's activities), please do so or contact us. We appreciate and need your help!

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How to fill out the

questionnaire

Unfortunately we need you to fill out a [questionnaire](#) for each dog and, unfortunately, we are also very interested in those of you who own and handle many dogs. The questionnaire was created ONLY for dogs used for shooting or competing in field trials (pointing dogs, spaniels and retrievers). These dogs must be purebred and have a pedigree. If your gundog is a pet, or a show dog, I am sorry but he cannot be included in our sample. The questionnaire might seem long at a first sight, but you can fill it out in a few minutes. We decided to have only a few compulsory questions, to make you feel at ease: you can skip the questions that do not apply to your situation, or that you do not feel comfortable about. Remember, however, that the questionnaire can be as anonymous as you like, and all your answers will be stored respecting the laws on personal privacy and will not be passed on to other people. The more details you will be giving us, though, the more you will help this research and my dissertation, I will therefore appreciate detailed and honest answers. Please specify the units of measure in open questions (year, months, hours...). An e-mail address, whereas not compulsory, is equally appreciated in case we need any clarifications concerning your answers. We also need an e-mail if you wish to be included in the drawn for the [prizes](#) we are giving away. For those who prefer working on a printed version of the questionnaire, a [pdf file](#) can be downloaded, printed, given to those who do not have any internet access and then [emailed](#) back to us.

If you wish to receive a feedback about the outcomes of this survey, please let us know: we will send you a report at the end of the project!

We will also be grateful if you could give visibility to the project by sharing or forwarding these pages, or the questionnaire link, to anyone who could be interested or otherwise able to help us in this research.

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The team behind the project

Some of you already know me, but I am going to introduce myself again to make you feel at ease. My academic background is the following: I have a Laurea Specialistica (equivalent of an MA) in Foreign Languages and Literatures (British Literature) earned with a grade of 110/110 cum laude from the [University of Pavia](#) (Italy); a Certificate of Asian Studies earned with Distinction from [Mount Holyoke College](#) (Massachusetts, USA) and I am going to graduate in [Veterinary Medicine](#) from the University of Milan (Italy). I also attended the Italian Veterinary Acupuncture Society School and several extracurricular courses on dog behaviour, neuroscience, wildlife management, writing, photography and more.

Work & Hobbies: I started writing about dogs and hunting in 2002, became a professional journalist in 2005 and published two books on dogs. At the moment I am still freelancing for Italian and foreign magazines and my pieces can be read in each issue of Sentieri di Caccia, Beccacce che Passione and Cinghiale che Passione. I have been active around dogs since my childhood, volunteered at a no-kill dog shelter for five

years and got my first English Setter in 1999, my first shooting license came in 2004. Years have passed, but I still enjoy the countryside, training, trialing, rough shooting and anything gundogs related. I currently manage the blog [Dogs & Country](#)

My supervisors in this project are Professor [Silvana Mattiello](#) and Professor [Clara Palestini](#), one of the few veterinarians who obtained a diploma from the [European College of Animal Welfare and Behavioural Medicine](#). Both teach and research at the [School of Veterinary Medicine](#), University of Milan (Italy).

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Why and how to benefit from the Gundog Research Project

[The Gundog Research Project](#) has carefully been designed with dogs, hunters and trialers in mind. Understanding how the dogs are managed is a preliminary, yet a fundamental step to discover which practices are the best and which ones could be implemented. Hunters and all the activities related to hunting and shooting are often misunderstood and criticized by public opinion: a change is needed and hunters, as well as gundog

trainers and handlers, can give an important contribution. Gundogs need you and your answers matter!

As animal welfare has been increasingly becoming an area of public concern, we think that hunters, gundog lovers and gundog related organizations would benefit from being “proactive” (showing a positive image of fieldsports) rather than reactive (trying to defend themselves from accusations). Your participation to this project can help outsiders to understand that you care about your dog’s welfare (I am sure you do!) and also help them understand the gundogs’ true nature and deepest needs. At the same time, your answers will help us to identify the weaknesses that might exist in gundogs management and see if and how they could be implemented. Previous studies on working and shelter dogs, in fact, tell us that very minor changes in management can reduce the dogs stress levels, improve their health and... also enhance their performance in the field!

Ps. We are working on getting a few [prizes](#) which will be drawn among those filling the survey.

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