

STICKS AND STONES

The exact origins of many dog breeds are unknown. The documented origin of Weimaraners fall into this “unknown” category, but the most prevalent theory suggests a combination of a variety of breeds that existed in Germany during the early 1800’s.

After a very recent incident, I have a brand-new theory. I think those crafty Germans bred some beaver into our dogs. It’s the only way to explain the incessant (and often inappropriate) bouts of gnawing, chewing and swallowing. What brings me to this theory? I awoke one sunny morning and my first look at my Weimaraner elicited a, “Yikes!” (Actually, the language was a bit more colorful, but you get the idea). Under his left eye was a lump the size of half a golf ball and his eye was watering heavily. His face looked terrible. When I tried to open his mouth, he screamed in pain. I live within a half hour of the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary Hospital and know only too well the most direct route to their Emergency Service.

We arrived and quickly learned they had a Dental Department that would be seeing us shortly. In the space of a few hours, dental surgery was performed. The doctors told me that my darling dog had wedged a piece of wood, which was three quarters of an inch long, between his palate and his jaw bone. As these things go, it was a simple surgery with no puncture of the sinuses and no interrupted blood flow to the teeth which might have necessitated extraction. My first reaction was relief, followed by the eternal question, “Why do they have to chew on everything?”

As we all know, the Weimaraner’s chewing menu is extensive; including the most dreaded ... rocks. Chewing rocks destroys their beautiful, white teeth and worse yet, when rocks are swallowed they can be lethal. I’ve know many an owner who has had surgeries done to remove rocks. Note that I use the plural of “surgery”

because for many owners they have had multiple rock eating incidents that led to surgical interventions. If you own a rock eater you're only too familiar with the drill of watching them like a hawk but eventually not being there to intervene when a rock slides down their gullet. I've talked about this problem with a number of frustrated owners and only two viable solutions have emerged.

The first tactic is to prevent contact with rocks. To do this, owners make an investment in basket muzzles. Unfortunately, basket muzzles have drawbacks. First, there's the constant on-and-off of the muzzle – an exercise akin to bundling kids into snow suits. The moment you get it on, they want it off. And then there's the learned behavior of using the basket muzzle as a battering ram. Once this behavior is learned you should consider your Weimaraner to be “armed and dangerous.” They'll bull their way through, using the new-found protection of their basket muzzle to clear the way. People, other dogs, and outdoor furniture will bear the brunt of your muzzle wielding Weimaraner.

The second solution is one that I've successfully used with generations of my dogs. I start them out as puppies. When they have something in their mouth, I encourage them to bring it to me and I'll “buy” it from them. Initially I'll barter with a food reward and quickly they find more value in food than chomping on a yucky rock. We trade the rock for a snack and it becomes a game. What's the drawback to this one? You'll have little collections of rocks and pebbles deposited at your feet or waiting for you on your porch. I've gone out my back door and found little heaps of rocks, some of them still warm from being carried around. Come to think of it, it's not much of a drawback and it beats having emergency surgery, and maybe I can start that rock garden that I've always wanted.

Carole Lee Richards

PO Box 516, Collingswood, NJ 08108

y-mar_column@yahoo.com