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Author: Jackie Drakeford

Sorry about the silly grin on my face, but I do love to see them play. The Colly and the Bedlington Thing whirl and wrestle and pelt after each other, twisting and turning, mouths wide open in that 'rrrrah' growl of pleasure. Video it, add the soundtrack of growling and roaring, and the ignorant could think they were seeing a vicious fight. It is anything but: this is dog training dog.

If you were training a foxing lurcher, which obviously you would not be doing right now but might want to know for when the ban is lifted, you could do a lot worse than let two well-matched lurchers play. As the Colly has matured, so the play becomes more urgent and instructional. Where once her father would run just a length in front of her, allowing her to think she could catch him and so teaching her how to stick to quarry in the turn, now he teaches her the shoulder-charge, the neck-grip, how to follow through when he somersaults and takes her with him, how to parry his raking back legs when he is on the ground. Now she chases him, and he jinks at full pelt or whirls and snaps to throw her off, less and less successfully these days. There is the 'lurchers of the Serengeti' game, where she crouches behind a blade of grass, and he strolls innocently by, to be bombed by a flying blur of fawn fur, all legs and teeth. When you have had several generations of the same breeding, you see family traits come through over and over, and many a time I see the shadow of another dog in their games. Not so long ago, the Bedlington Thing showed a trick that I remember from his dam, the fawn bitch, for when the Colly charged him at full chat, he deflected her by spinning repeatedly on his hindlegs so that she could not deliver a blow that would have flattened a far larger opponent. The fawn bitch disliked other dogs (and had little time for most people) and I have seen her tackle and best two dogs with a repeated snapping pirouette that defied the eye to follow, she was so fast.

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Her mother, the gentle, introverted Worm, had a sideways skip that sent many an adversary skiing past on its shoulder or rump.

Lurchers being the madcap things they are, there is potential for injury in play as in work, but you cannot cotton-wool them completely or they will learn nothing, and instead hurt themselves through inexperience. Smart owners take a few precautions, though. Little pups and powerful young dogs are not a good match for play because the pup can be splattered and damaged in a moment, and I know of more than one pup that broke its neck or back through charging into a bigger, stronger dog. Similarly, an elderly dog can be hurt by a sassy young one barging into it and making it stagger on legs that are not as strong as they once were. The little pup can play with the oldie, though, and will learn manners from being grumbled at gently if it oversteps the mark. Some old dogs hate pups, others get a lot of pleasure from playing with them, so respect your senior warrior, neither letting the pup become a pest nor depriving each of something if they both enjoy it.

With a lot of miles on the clock, the Bedlington Thing is not always up for a game, so I have to deflect the Colly if he is having one of his less mobile days. Normally, though, find them an open space and he is the one to initiate the game, a glint in his eye and that huge Bedlington grin. Now then, whose turn is it to be the fox?



Be careful where you let your dogs drink when you are out and about, especially on farmland where water can be polluted by agrochemicals, oil or diesel. Anti-freeze is fatal to dogs, and unfortunately is sweet-tasting and readily lapped from the surface of a puddle. Stagnant water carries its own dangers, and there is a type of toxic blue

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algae that flourishes there in summer. It's a good idea to take fresh water with you if you are out for a long spell, not just the container in the car, but a small bottle carried with you. Some coursing people teach the dog to drink from a baby's non-spill feeder cup, which is easy and convenient to carry.