

WORKING-DOG.CO.UK

Reprinted with kind permission of Sporting Shooter magazine

Author: Jackie Drakeford

The foundation bitch of my line came to me scared and starving, and with an unacceptably high worm-to-dog ratio, which was how she acquired her nickname of 'Wormy' (also because she was long and wriggly). She was literally a living skeleton, and I had a difficult decision to make over whether to worm her before feeding her up, risking pushing her stressed system right over the edge, or trying to get some condition on her before clearing out the lodgers. (are you eating while you read? Sorry). She exacerbated the situation by refusing to eat. Deerhound crosses are not really into food at the best of times, and to her, this was not the best of times.

I gave her the food she had at kennels. No, she didn't eat that. I tried her on all sorts of food, dog and human, all of which was tasted and then refused with an apologetic wag. After four days of this I was really worried, and so I wormed her and realised why she hadn't been eating – she didn't have any room for food in that pot belly. I took her to the stables with me that afternoon, letting her potter about as usual while I sorted out the horse, and found her with her head in a bucket, wolfing down Dobbin's grub. Of course, you must feed little and often with a starving dog, so I had something else to panic over, but she held it down and she didn't split, and although she never did eat what the kennels had been feeding, she had only been there a few days, just long enough to get kennel cough, so she had probably not eaten at all during that time. Once she started eating, she went from strength to strength. Like all lurchers, she was a consummate thief, and it is fascinating how high a dog with long legs and a long body can stretch, even more so if there are long toes on the end of long paws as well, the kind of paws that can open things designed only for human hands. There I was doing my best to feed her small amounts of carefully chosen food to build her up slowly, and she was helping by eating anything she could reach – half a pound of

WORKING-DOG.CO.UK

Reprinted with kind permission of Sporting Shooter magazine

Author: Jackie Drakeford

butter, six eggs (was she trying to make a sponge?) a giant tub of yoghurt, a weeks' worth of cheese - you name it, she stole it. All her life, she loved bread above everything, and I suspect that in at least one of her previous homes, that was all she ever had. A well-buttered doorstep slice and she was in heaven, holding it between her paws – she had fantastically mobile dewclaws which she used like thumbs -.and eating with the delicacy of one who has been properly brought up before she fell on Hard Times.

She peaked not long after she took a turn for the better, again down at the stable yard, where, innocently grooming my horse, I saw a pear-shaped lurcher gallop past followed by a ranting groom. I braced myself for certain blame.

Turned out the groom had left his cottage door open, and while he was in the shower, she had sneaked in and devoured an entire roast dinner. A decent-sized joint of pork (with crackling – he was a good cook) roast potatoes, cabbage and carrots, and she's drunk all the gravy as well. It cost me another joint of pork and lunch at a restaurant to mollify him.

.....

Getting a dog that has been starved back into condition involves more than just giving more food. If a large parasite burden is shifted all at once, it can cause intestinal blockages as well as damage, so always work closely with your vet. Food should be easy to digest and given frequently in small quantities. Plain bio yoghurt fed with honey is invaluable for healing a sensitive gut and restoring a correct bacterial balance. Roast dinners are not recommended!