

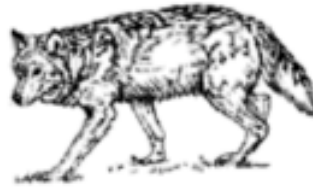


Wildlife conflicts are complex. If you need assistance, careful planning and consultation with a qualified wildlife damage-management professional is available by contacting USDA, APHIS, Wildlife Services.

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Guard animals are not a cure-all for all predator problems. Although the use and effectiveness of guard animals has increased, some livestock producers continue to require other animal damage control measures in addition to their livestock guardians.



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Livestock Guardians



“Choosing a Guard Animal”

Animal Health and Food
Safety Services
Animal Health Branch
Wildlife Services

LIVESTOCK GUARDIANS

A growing number of livestock producers are using guard animals to reduce predation on livestock. Llamas, donkeys, and dogs are animals most commonly used for this purpose. The best guard animals stay with the livestock without harming them and aggressively repel predators. The unique characteristics of each livestock operation will dictate the type and number of guard animals required for maximum effectiveness.

Llamas

Llamas can provide an effective, long-term, and economical alternative for predator control in a variety of farm and ranch conditions. Llamas have ideal characteristics for protecting sheep and goats, which include:

- minimal training required and they don't have to be raised with sheep and goat flocks
- graze the same pasture; no supplements or special foods necessary
- require similar vaccinations, worming, and hoof trimming
- can be effective guarding animals for 10-15 years
- instinctively dislike canines

Llamas' responses to predators include: becoming alert, alarm calling, walking to or running toward the predator; chasing, kicking, or pawing the predator, or positioning themselves between the sheep and the predator.

They have also been known to herd the sheep together into one area to try to keep them safe.



Characteristics that should be looked for in selecting a guard llama include: independence, curiosity, awareness of surroundings, not fearful of unfamiliar things, and not afraid of dogs, but wary of them.



Donkeys

Donkeys are gaining in popularity as protectors of sheep and goat flocks in the United States. Here are some key points in using a donkey for predation control:

- Use only a gelded jack or a jenny (female); intact males can be aggressive towards livestock.
- Use only one donkey for each group of sheep.
- Allow 4 to 6 weeks for a naive donkey to bond with sheep.
- Remove the donkey during lambing to prevent accidental injuries to lambs.
- Use donkeys in small, open pastures.
- Use donkeys with small flocks (less than 300 head of sheep).
- Test a new donkey's response to dog species by challenging it with a dog in a pen or small pasture.



Donkeys are extremely intelligent, with acute hearing and sight. They do not like change in their surroundings, and will drive off a predator by braying, baring their teeth, running and chasing, and attempting to bite and kick an intruder.

Dogs

Livestock guarding breeds originated in Europe and Asia, where they have been used for centuries to protect sheep. Some of the most common breeds are Great Pyrenees (France), Komondor (Hungary), Akbash dog and Anatolian shepherd (Turkey), and Maremma (Italy). Guard dogs have been bred and trained to enhance many traits. Here are some key points in using dogs for predation control:



- Minimize human contact at 8-12 weeks of age. To be useful, they must bond with the flock they protect, rather than with the owner.
- Avoid pups that seem overly shy, or one that dominates its litter mates—it may later try to dominate its owner.
- It may take 2 years for the dog to mature, therefore, manage the livestock in accordance with the dog's age and experience (e.g., use smaller pastures while the dog is young and inexperienced).
- When considering owning a guard dog, research the characteristics of the different breeds.

Owning a guard dog requires a significant amount of investment and patience in training. Some potential problems with guard dogs include dogs that wander and do not stay with sheep, chasing or playing with stock, harassing or injuring stock, and aggressiveness towards people.