Livestock Guardian Dogs

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Resources:

Facebook pages: Learning about LGDs (closed group, by request only); USA Working Dogs Classifieds; Livestock Guardian Dogs—Pacific Northwest

Yahoo!Groups: workingLGDs; stockdogs4sale

Books: Livestock Guardians and Farm Dogs, both by Janet Vorwald Dohner; The Kangal Dog of Turkey, by Lesley Tahtakilic and Maraget Meilor

The purpose of a Livestock Guardian Dog is to protect its stock from predation. An LGD does this by:

- Being large enough to intimidate a predator on looks alone
- Being vocal and barking when anything appears suspicious or out of the ordinary
- Their barking will accelerate as a threat grows larger
- As a last resort, good guardian dogs will engage the predator directly, and win
- LGDs win by running the predator off or by killing it



Physical defining characteristics of a Livestock Guardian Dog:



- A powerful, athletic, & agile build, able to soak up, as well as dish out, a great deal of damage
- Thick, loose skin (thicker than any other canid) which is difficult to pierce
- A harsh, all-weather, double coat which protects them from heat, cold, injury, wetness, dirt, & debris
- A physical morphology which gives them a softer expression, that serves to make them less intimidating in appearance to livestock, but a large size that is more intimidating to predators



- A naturally calm, submissive demeanor around flighty prey animals
- **Low prey drive**
- An affinity for weak & small animals (including children)
- A high territorial defense drive that causes them to stand their ground rather than flee from a threat



- An instinctive ability to evaluate threat level & respond accordingly
- The ability to think independently, problem solve, take quick stock of any situation, & make effective decisions at a moment's notice
- An instinct to conserve their energy so they are always ready to take action
- A lower metabolism that requires less food for their size

The single, most important defining characteristics of a Livestock Guardian Dog is a LOW PREY DRIVE.







Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGDs) protect their stock by defining and defending their territory and everything within it.

Over time, with consistent defense, the LGD will convince all the predators in the area that this territory is his/hers, and there will be far fewer challenges (and less barking).

LGDs define their territory by

- Doing perimeter patrols = walking the perimeter of their territory
- Marking the perimeter of their territory by peeing
- Barking at suspicious or threatening scents and noises that approach their territory
- They appreciate a good fence

LGDs defend their territory by

- Barking at suspicious or threatening scents and noises that approach their territory
- Determining whether a stranger (human, dog, animal) is friend or foe
- Driving off or killing anything unwelcome that trespasses within their territory

LGDs consider themselves 51% owners in the farm. Their handlers have several responsibilities:



- Provide good fences
- Determine the perimeter of the territory by doing perimeter patrols
- Clearly communicate who is welcome and who is not
- Be wise about welcoming strange people or dogs
- Have realistic expectations about barking at night
- Communicate clearly that no playing is permitted with the stock
- Seriously consider providing a partner/companion. LGDs work best in pairs. ("Inside" & "outside" dogs = one goes to the stock and the other goes to the fence = they decide who does which)

Livestock guardian dogs are serious work dogs. Over the course of thousands of years, they have been bred to fulfill a clearly defined purpose. As stock farmers who are farming adjacent to residential communities, rather than on open range, we have a couple of responsibilities to our neighbors:

- Our LGDs should not run loose. Good fences make good neighbors.
- LGDs bark at night. Make certain your zoning code permits farming. The "Right to Farm" provision only protects you from barking ordinances if you are within a farming zone and you have livestock that is at risk from predation. Go out yourself, periodically, to be a team player, and help assess the danger level.
- Have a heightened awareness of visitors and visitors' dogs
- Think long and hard about keeping your dog(s) intact. Half-cross LGDs are NOT work dogs and can be very challenging pets.
- Be prepared to appropriately discipline your LGD. LGDs are big dogs and have a strong sense of justice. They must not be permitted to think they are the king or queen of the estate, but they will not tolerate harsh or arbitrary treatment. You do not want to yourself become the bad guy or the perceived threat to their stock.

There are at least five kinds of barks:

- The low, serious bark or roar is really clear: don't come near my place! The aggressive bark speaks for itself. You can influence it, for example, in the case of the postman, but that's their work bark. It is usually accompanied by raised hackles and an appearance of being even larger.
- Then there is the urgent repeated single bark. That's the one you need to check out; it means "Hey! ... Hey! ... Hey! ... Help! ... Here! ... Here! ... Here!". My dogs have alerted me to a lambing ewe in distress, a cornered opossum that they couldn't reach, a horse with a leg stuck in the fence, a flooding water trough, and a smoking heat lamp.
- High pitched barks, that sound annoying, can be corrected. Mine used it when a sibling wouldn't share a bone, or they were awake at night and wanted to go check out something on the other side of their fence and they couldn't, or during day, ditto. I rarely here this bark anymore.
- A fourth kind of bark is the tattling bark. It is pitched between the high nuisance barking and the single urgent bark. It is usually a series of barks as the dog runs stiff-legged towards whomever they are telling on: another one of our dogs on the wrong side of the fence, a horse loose in the backyard, a higher dog in the pack playing with the stock. That bark demands justice; I go to settle the dispute and correct whoever needs correcting.
- A fifth bark, which is also usually single, is pitched in the medium range, call it a "woof", and it usually is directed at me, and, if I look out through the window, the dog(s) is looking me straight in the eyes: "Uh, hey! We haven't been fed out here. Did you forget us?" "It is past time for xyz; did you forget?" "Uh, the lambs are in the chicken yard; it that okay?"

I use time-outs to register my disapproval of certain barking. The nuisance barking in the night is not okay.

1. First, I go out and ask what's going on, or calmly ask from the window
2. Then I go out and tell them to ignore it.
3. Then I open the door and speak sharply and sternly from the porch
4. Then it is a loud, stern single word, usually their name from the window
5. Then they get walked to the garage/shed/isolation chamber and shut in for the night.

It has taken only a couple nights in a row to correct the higher-pitched nuisance barking.

Benefit of the doubt: ALWAYS give your LGD the benefit of the doubt, even if you come upon her with blood on her muzzle and a dead chicken between her paws. Eating the animals that die is one of their jobs. – Darcy story

ALWAYS give your LGD the benefit of the doubt, even if you come upon her with blood on her muzzle and a dead chicken between her paws.

Raising LGD puppies

LGD puppies should be raised with their stock from the day they are brought home. They need a safe place to be protected from harm, get out of the rain, and be able to eat their food in peace. They need to be able to watch baby animals play, be born, eat, & sleep. They are learning normal behavior. Walking in amongst their stock is important. Getting butted by a protective mom is an important learning experience; getting trampled and injured is not helpful.

LGD teen-age months are challenging. They do idiot barking at everything as they learn what is a threat and what is just normal. They need to wrestle and play to hone their fighting skills and instincts, but they must NOT wrestle with the stock. There is NO grabbing, hugging, batting, mouthing, etc.

Eight Truths about LGDs (things that are TRUE):

Truth #1) A good LGD should be handled, be socialized, and be able to be redirected from what it perceives to be its work, and is, therefore, never inherently dangerous.

Truth #2) An LGD is NOT just a big, fuzzy dog friendly dog

:: a friendly LGD will not necessarily allow you on her property

:: Just because you are a nice person, and the LGD is an otherwise friendly dog, does not mean the LGD should permit you to trespass on her territory

Truth #3) ONLY dogs from LGD breeds or mix of breeds will make good LGDs, even if raised with livestock from puppyhood.

Truth #4) Good LGDs need fences. Just because they bond to their stock does not mean they won't leave them to deal with something in the neighborhood. Yes, there weren't any fences in the Old World where these dogs were developed, and the dogs ranged and created a living fence for their stock.

Truth #4a) Even the very best livestock dogs need a secure fence.

Truth #4b) Any LGD can easily jump a 4-5 ft fence. Big and low energy does not mean not athletic.

Truth #5) Although guarding behavior is instinctive, LGDs need training from either their people or an older LGD as to acceptable behavior around the stock (NO playing with, jumping on, or mouthing).

AND, no amount of training can train in the instincts to protect and defend livestock.

Truth #6) LGDs are difficult to train because they are very smart. LGDs can excel at Basic Obedience, but they need to see the point.

Truth #7) An aggressively barking LGD is not just frightened and cannot be “calmed” and is unlikely to back down.

Truth #8) When LGDs lie around, sleeping, in the pasture all the time it is an indication that their job is done. There are no predators in the vicinity.

Truth #8a) A sleeping LGD can awaken in an instant and make it to the pasture fence, roaring, at 35 mph.

The Livestock Guardian Breeds

The European & African LGDs

- Great Pyrenees
- Maremma
- Akbash Dog
- Anatolian Shepherd Dog (ASD)
- Spanish Mastiff

The Asian & Middle Eastern LGDs

- Slovak Cuvac (or Cuvasc)
- Turkish Kangal Dog
- The Komondor
- Russian Ovcharka, or Caucasian Sheep Dog (CO)
- Sharplaninac (Sar)
- Central Asian Shepherd Dog (CAS)
- Tibetan Mastiff

Dogs that are crosses between these breeds will most likely make good livestock guardian dogs, but not always. ONLY purchase from breeders who are using both the parent dogs to protect stock. NEVER choose dogs that are half-cross LGDs.

Acquiring an LGD

- Buy a trained LGG
  - $500-$2,000
  - 14 months to 2-3 years old
- Adopt an adult LGD
  - $500
- Purchase an LGD along with its flock of sheep or goats
- Buy a puppy (or two)
  - $250 - $1,500

Training LGDs

- **No playing** with the stock = chasing, pouncing, batting with paws, chewing on, etc
- Basic Obedience = "Sit" for food, "Wait" inside the gate, "No" jumping up, Walk nicely on a leash, "Load up" into the vehicle, "Stand" for an exam
- Never permit them outside the fence without a leash
- "Come" can be taught, but it requires trust and persuasion
- House-breaking is easy, BUT becomes unreliable if LGDs are kept inside too much of the time

Good Fences make good Neighbors

- Fences for LGDs must be:
  - to the ground
  - 4-6 feet tall
  - Have no "step-ladders"
  - Predator-tight
  - Have no gaps stock can get through
  - LGDs like fences, just as a knight likes his castle walls

LGD Breeds as pets

- The LGD body is not designed to be a jogging companion.
  - Their leg joints and lungs are designed for short intense bursts of activity, not sustained, repetitive activity
- In the LGD mind, a walk on a leash is a perimeter patrol.
- LGDs make excellent hiking companions, if you understand that the dog is along for protection NOT for exercise
- LGDs bark at night

Final recommendations:

- LGDs work best in pairs.
- Try to start with a trained LGD.
- LGDs are not like other dogs. Forget everything you thought you knew about training, bonding, and living with dogs. It doesn't count here.