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Current Topics

[AgriLife Livestock Guardian Dog Study Numbers Are In.](#) *Excerpt from article by Steve Byrns*

The numbers are in from a yearlong experiment pitting 18 inexperienced young livestock guardian dogs and their neophyte dog-handling owners against a hoard of native sheep and goat predators ranging over thousands of West Texas acres.

“Predation is and always has been one of the most significant problems in the sheep and goat industry in Texas,” said Dr. Reid Redden, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service state sheep and goat specialist. “And the problem is getting worse.”

Redden, along with Dr. John Walker, Texas A&M AgriLife Research resident director, and Dr. John Tomeček, AgriLife Extension wildlife specialist, led the work. All are headquartered at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at San Angelo.

“It’s reported we lose somewhere between 10 and 20 percent of the lamb and kid crop annually in Texas to predators,” Redden said. “Because of this significant loss, AgriLife is working with local ranchers to improve our understanding of livestock guardian dogs and their effectiveness in this part of Texas.”

In January 2016, six cooperating ranchers across West Texas agreed to take part in the experiment. None had any previous experience with livestock guardian dogs, but all had significant predator issues and operate large pastures ranging from 500 to 2,500 acres. Each rancher received two to four livestock guardian dogs purchased from 5R Stock Dogs of Billings, Montana. The dogs were 6 to 12 months old at the start of the experiment and had been bonded with sheep.

Redden said livestock guardian dogs have been used for thousands of years in other parts of the world where sheep are herded, but less is known about how to use them or their effectiveness in sheep and goat producing West Texas. Some work was done in the 1980s in the area, but interest soon waned, possibly from lack of knowledge of the dogs.

Redden said livestock guardian dogs are not herding dogs, but rather stay within the proximity of their sheep and/or goat charges, thus creating an effective and constant predator deterrent.

Redden said unlike other parts of the sheep and goat producing areas in the U.S. and world, West Texas ranchers don’t often see their animals on a daily basis, meaning the dogs must rely on their own intuition and instinct to remain effective. So were they effective?

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Half the ranchers reported the dogs were having a significant positive impact resulting in improved lamb crops within the first year," Redden said. "Averaged across all the cooperating ranches, the livestock guardian dogs improved lamb crops by an estimated 25 percent.

However, the livestock guardian dogs were not foolproof. In the first year, two of the dogs went missing, three were removed for preying upon livestock, and four were relocated due to neighbor conflicts.

Tomeček used GPS-locating collars to track the dogs' movements. The collars revealed the dogs traveled an average of 2.5 miles a day, with the distance ranging from a low of 1.5 miles to a high of 3.5 miles depending on the dog, pasture size and terrain.

"We also looked at the home range of the dogs, which was determined by where they spent 95 percent of their time, and found it to be about 600 acres per dog," Tomeček said. "And depending on the dog and location, that ranged from 200 to 1,200 acres." Tomeček also noted home ranges were not always one large area, saying, "It can be two areas separated by a wide gap, or have holes in it...usually dependent on where livestock would or would not be on a particular ranch."

He noted the dogs didn't wear the collars all year long, and the collars were moved among the dogs.

"We were able to use one collar's beacon on one place to find a 'missing' dog that ended up still being very much on the job. Some sheep had broken away from the flock and he had stayed with them."

Tomeček said game cameras were used to monitor predators, and there was strong evidence pointing to a marked reduction in predator traffic through the pastures the dogs patrolled, but there was no significant impact on non-predatory wildlife traffic.

"So bottom line is, with this particular scenario — ranchers new to livestock guardian dogs coupled with young dogs on unfamiliar and often rugged country — this unlikely combination can be a useful tool. But not all dogs work out, so we plan to continue to increase our understanding through multiple projects we have planned here in San Angelo at the AgriLife center," Redden said.

To see the complete results, go to <http://sanangelo.tamu.edu/livestock-guardian-dogs/>.

News From the Wild side

Distemper

An above-average number of canine distemper cases have been reported in Texas lately. Canine distemper cannot infect humans, but can infect any canid, including domestic dogs, as well as racoons and skunks. Most of the cases lately have been in racoons.

- o Canine distemper symptoms can be similar to rabies, but because the virus affects the entire body, symptoms vary widely and can also include pneumonia, diarrhea, and skin rash. Respiratory issues are actually the most common symptom.
- o Because canine distemper and rabies cannot be distinguished from the symptoms, avoid contact with any ill animal. If exposed to any of "**the big five**" (raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes, bats), seek immediate treatment even if the animal does not appear ill. Exposure includes bites, scratches, and neurologic tissue contact.
- o The canine distemper vaccine is part of the regular series for domestic dogs, and is nearly 100% effective at preventing sickness. Vaccinate your pets!

Conditions Favorable for Anthrax.

A mild, wet winter and spring is step one in "anthrax-y" conditions. If we have a dry summer, watch for anthrax cases, especially for those who live in the Anthrax Triangle.

- o Do not touch or get close to any animal that is bleeding from its orifices, which is a telltale sign of anthrax.
- o Vaccinate livestock.
- o Report any possible cases to a veterinarian or biologist.

June Horticulture Tips

PLANT:

• There is still time to plant heat tolerant summer annuals. Just be sure to water transplants as needed until roots become established.



PRUNE:

- Removing faded flowers from the plant before they set seed will keep the plants flowering and producing more flowers.
- Frequent mowing every week is best for your grass. Mowing often helps to reduce weeds by preventing seed heads from forming. Alternate mowing directions to keep the turf from developing a "grain".

FERTILIZE:

- A light application of fertilizer every 4 to 6 weeks to annual flowers.
- Fertilize rose beds every 4 to 6 weeks with a high nitrogen fertilizer for healthier plants.
- Continue to spray zinc on pecan trees and fertilize with nitrogen. Check for case bearer and spray if necessary. Do not spray for aphids. If needed, irrigate to improve the health of your pecan trees.

Sonora Fleece Show –June 13-15

For decades, the objective of the June show has been to encourage a profitable production and preparation of wool and mohair. We would be honored to receive a donation, so that we can offer premium money to the wool and mohair champions. If you'd like to donate, please give us a call. Here are some highlights about the youth event:

- ☐ Only individual wool & mohair fleeces will be entered (no bag of wool entries).
- ☐ Fleeces will be received on June 13 at the **4-H Barn** between 10:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.
- ☐ The invitational judging contests will be on June 14th.
- ☐ The national wool judging contest and awards will be on the 15th.

Parting Thoughts.....Don't Forget About Father's Day (June 18)

I Still Can't Say Good-bye (Song by Chet Atkins)

I walked by a Salvation Army store
Saw a hat like my daddy wore
Tried it on when I walked in
Still trying to be like him

No matter, how hard I try
No matter, how many tears I cry
No matter, how many years go by
I still can't say goodbye

Pascual Hernandez

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BE ON THE LOOKOUT

- Check for insects and diseases. In warm weather, spider mites can become troublesome.

Continue to spray roses for black spot and insects. Thrips cause buds to fail to open and petals to brown. Apply an approved insecticide for control.

- Look for problems on tomatoes. Bloom-end rot: This appears as a sunken brown spot on the bottom of the tomato. This is caused from irregular watering. Mulch plants and keep them moist to help prevent this problem. Early blight: Plants have yellow blotches or dark circular spots with concentric markings. Spots occur on lower leaves first. Apply approved fungicide at 7 to 10 day intervals. Curly top: Leaves curl and cup upwards and leaves turn light green to yellow with purple veins on the lower sides. Remove plants from the garden and rotate plants next year.

MISCELLANEOUS CHORES:

- Water lawns and gardens thoroughly but not too frequently. Soak to a depth of about 6 inches. Watering in the early morning or late evening may eliminate problems with evaporation from high winds. Shade trees need more water than the turf areas do. Soaker hoses coiled at the drip line of the tree are the best way to water large trees.



Check us out on the web!
<http://sutton.agrilife.org>