

Anatolian Shepherd Dogs Guard Livestock in Namibia

Nearly 30 Anatolian shepherd dogs are protecting smallstock from attacks by cheetahs and other predators in Namibia, according to the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) newsletter (December 1996), and there is a waiting list of farmers wanting to join the program.

The newsletter said that a farmer's time and investment with these special dogs will be returned many times over. Farmers indicated that incorporating a livestock guarding dog into their farm management program has had a positive financial benefit. The dogs discourage most predators, including cheetahs, caracals,

jackals and baboons. Some farmers report that the mere presence of the dog in the herd deters predators.

The Anatolian shepherds were introduced to Namibia by the Cheetah Conservation Fund in an effort to protect livestock and remove the incentive for farmers to kill cheetahs to prevent losses. Ninety-five per cent of Namibia's approximately 2,500 cheetahs live on farmlands and many are eliminated because of the threat to livestock.

Responses to questionnaires indicate that most farmers were happy with their dogs and many reported a total end to or sharp reduction in smallstock losses. Some farmers reported that their dogs were uncomfortable in severe heat, but predators feel the same discomfort and are generally not hunting at these times. Also, stock is not inclined to move as far and is easier to guard.

A few farmers reported that their dogs chased game. Chasing is not an acceptable behaviour (unless as a last sort to discourage a predator), and must be corrected immediately, the newsletter said.

Puppies are placed with young stock at between six and eight weeks of age to bond with the stock, but some training must be done by the farmer and the herder. Initially young pups should be introduced to travelling with the herd on a leash. This allows the herder to help the dog discriminate between actual threats and acceptable animals around the herd.

A good diet, daily tick checks and standard vaccinations are necessary to ensure a long life for a livestock guarding dog.

The CCF says that the guarding dog is not a herding dog, and is the result of quality genetic background and proper learning. The dogs act independently and instinctively and aggressively confront intruders. They are trustworthy, attentive and protective.