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Abstract: Livestock-guarding dogs provide a method of non-lethal predator control which protects farmers' livelihood while also conserving the predator species. These dogs can be a viable solution to reducing the conflict between farmers and predators in Namibia. In January 1994, the Cheetah Conservation Fund and the Livestock Guarding Dog Project, collaborated to begin a pilot project on the farmlands of Namibia. Four Anatolian shepherds, a traditional livestock guarding dog breed from Turkey, were placed with separate flocks of goats and sheep on a working commercial livestock farm. During the two-week stay, they gave lectures and talked with farmers about incorporating dogs into farm management practices. They also oversaw the initial introduction of the Anatolian shepherds on the farm.

Update On Livestock Guarding Dog Project

by Becky Sartini

The use of livestock guarding dogs is a long-standing tradition that has proven its effectiveness in many parts of the world. Livestock guarding dogs provide a method of non-lethal predator control which protects farmers' livelihood while also conserving the predator species.

These dogs can be a viable solution to reducing the conflict between farmers and predators here in Namibia. The Anatolian Shepherd, a traditional livestock guarding dog breed from Turkey, was chosen because they are well-adapted to an arid climate similar to Namibia's and because they work well unsupervised on the vast open spaces--the same conditions a working dog can expect in Namibia.

In January, the CCF and the Livestock Guarding Dog Project, based at Hampshire University in the U.S., collaborated to begin a pilot project on the farmlands of Namibia. Dr. Raymond Coppinger, Professor of Biology with 20 years of guarding dog experience, and Dr. Benjamin Oke, Professor of Animal Science, travelled to Namibia with five students and four Anatolian Shepherds. These dogs, two adults and two puppies, were then placed with separate flocks of goats and sheep on a working commercial livestock farm. During their two-week stay, the professors and students gave lectures and talked with farmers about incorporating dogs into farm management practices. They also oversaw the initial introduction of the Anatolian Shepherds on the farm.

As one of the students, I stayed in Namibia for five months to record the progress of the dogs on the farm, talk with farmers about livestock guarding dogs and collect information on the native protection dogs already working here. All of this data will form the basis of my honors thesis for Hampshire University.

The Cheetah

There once was a herd of cows. They were having a lot of trouble. Every time a cow gave birth to a calf, a cheetah would come to the farm and attack the newborn calf. So, one day the farmer decided to buy a dog to see if it would protect his cows. A few months after the dog had been with the cows, a cheetah came. The dog started barking loudly. As soon as the cheetah heard the dogs bark, he turned around and ran. The farmer learned that he could save his livestock from the cheetahs and also save the cheetah.---

Mackenzie Miles, Grade 4, St. George's School

I also studied the native protection dogs that are working on farms. I sent out a questionnaire to many farmers identified by CCF as using dogs with their smallstock to determine physical characteristics and general working behaviors. Because these dogs are not a traditional livestock guarding dog breed, I am correlating this information with predation losses to determine if these dogs are actually being effective and reducing losses to predators. I also conducted on-site assessments of some dogs to collect detailed data on the behavioral interactions between the dog and the livestock. I hope to determine what characteristics are necessary for a guarding dog to be effective in Namibia. So far, most farmers have said that a larger dog would be more effective. This information will be useful when choosing and placing our guarding dog pups in the future.

GUARDING DOG BEHAVIOR

One important distinction to make is that a livestock guarding dog is not a herding dog. Each type of working dog has been specifically bred to do a job--one dog cannot do both. To be effective, a guarding dog needs to be nondisruptive to a flock and must peacefully coexist with them. The purpose of a herding dog is to move a flock from one place to another. Therefore, a guarding dog cannot be taught to herd smallstock.

An effective livestock guarding dog must show attentive and trustworthy behaviors in order to be protective. Attentiveness begins with the bonding process. Research has shown that the critical period during which a dog forms its social bonds is between the ages of 8 and 16 weeks. Because these dogs were bred to perform a specific job, they mature more slowly than other breeds. For Anatolian Shepherds this usually occurs at about one year old. An "attentive" dog will become a member of a flock and will follow the flock wherever it goes.

Trustworthy behavior, the other crucial behavior in the development of protectiveness, occurs when the dog does not show disruptive behaviors towards the livestock. A trustworthy dog will not chase or injure any stock. When a dog has developed attentiveness and trustworthiness, it will be protective.

By constantly living with the livestock that it will protect, a livestock guarding dog will react to any changes in their routine, like the appearance of a predator. A dog will investigate the situation, bark and show approach/withdrawal behaviors that confuse a predator. Predatory motor patterns (the eye-stalk-chase behavior) are interrupted, and the predator is not able to make a successful kill. Anatolian Shepherds, and all guarding dog breeds, are not aggressive and will not readily fight with a predator.

FARMER'S INVOLVEMENT

Raising an effective livestock guarding dog is not just a matter of putting the dog out in the corral with the smallstock and leaving it there. Although these dogs have been bred to show behaviors that allow them to bond to and protect livestock, their working behavior is partially environmentally induced. A puppy will go through developmental stages during its first year. During this learning process, the dog may show inattentive or untrustworthy behaviors. The "training process" for these dogs involves creating an environment where correct behaviors are reinforced and bad behaviors are not allowed to become habitual. The successful use of livestock guarding dogs depends on the people who work closely with the dog on a day-to-day basis and will benefit from their protection. It is ultimately up to the farmers to become educated on livestock guarding dog behavior and take control of the actual management of the dog, including the dog's health. Since all dogs in Namibia are at risk of contracting tick fever (Ehrlichiosis), dogs must be checked on a regular basis. An animal cannot become immune to the disease, and there is no vaccine against it. However, through early detection by the owner or herder and proper veterinary care, the disease can be effectively treated.

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PILOT PROJECT

Although both of the adult dogs had been working guarding goats in the United States, they did not adjust to their new environment. The two adults were brought primarily for breeding purposes and in hopes that we could immediately set up a demonstration. The long term success of this project depends on the puppies that will grow up here in Namibia. The female is pregnant with her first litter and is due the middle of August.

The two puppies, an 8-week-old male and 14-week-old female, were placed at camps at appropriate ages to bond to the livestock. The male puppy was doing very well and showing promising signs of becoming an effective guarding dog. Although he was normally always with a herder, he was left unattended and was unfortunately killed by a troop of baboons three months into the project. His death reinforces the fact that a puppy cannot be left unsupervised in the bush until it is mature and confident enough to defend the livestock and itself from predators. Therefore, farmers need to understand the vulnerability of a young puppy, and practice proper training to reduce loss. CCF and the Livestock Guarding Dog Project realize that there is a risk in raising a puppy in the Namibian bush and are therefore giving dogs at no cost to farms who are willing to take responsibility for the dog.

Although the female puppy was doing well and the herder was learning how to train her, we were asked to move the female puppy to another farm. The transition was smooth despite the fact that the 7-month-old puppy had to adjust to a new farm and new stock. This transition was smooth for a number of

reasons: 1) the new farm did have experience using guarding dogs in the past and understood the basic concepts of guarding dog behaviors; 2) the dog was put into a routine that was similar to the one at the original farm where she had good training and; 3) the dog had daily supervision by the farmer because the flock came to a corral near the house at night.

EDITORS NOTE:

On the first of June, another Hampshire College student, Katie Emanuel, arrived in Namibia with six more Anatolian Shepherd puppies. The Emanuel family has generously donated all the Anatolian guarding dogs to date from their internationally-renowned Anatolian Shepherd breeding facility. Katie has grown up raising these guarding dogs and has placed several hundred with livestock farmers throughout the world.

Since Katie and the puppies arrived, we have placed the dogs with collaborating farmers who are willing to invest the initial time and patience into raising an effective livestock guarding dog which will ultimately reduce their stock losses. All six puppies are developing into successful livestock guarding dogs. Two of the six puppies are already going out with their flocks into the bush. We have talked to many people who are interested in the program and have even received phone calls from people looking for dogs. In the near future, more dogs will become available. If you are interested, please call us, and we will add your name to our list.

The Cheetah Conservation Fund and the Livestock Guarding Dog Project would like to thank the farm where the dogs were first placed for their hospitality and support during the first three months. We are most grateful to the farm where the female puppy is now working for their patience and understanding, and to the farms where the new puppies have been placed.

CCF will provide literature, expertise, and guidance in the proper rearing and care of the livestock guarding dogs. Please call us at 0651 4216.



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