

## **Influence of Shepherd's Attitudes on the Efficiency of Livestock Guarding Dogs: A Case-study with a Castro Laboreiro Dog Puppy**

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### **Abstract**

Livestock guarding dogs (LGDs) are a non-lethal traditional method to protect flocks from carnivores, minimizing predator impact on rural environments. An efficient LGD is attentive, trustworthy and protective. In order to be most effective, it should be socialized from puppyhood with the livestock they are meant to protect, remaining near it at all times. Proper genetics, breed type and environment are critical for the development of an efficient LGD, but shepherd's role is fundamental in education. A case study in Portugal with a Castro Laboreiro Dog puppy shows the shepherd's influence in LGD's behaviour. The animal was placed in a flock at 9 weeks of age, as part of a research project where shepherds were given LGDs in exchange for abiding certain rules regarding their education. Due to non-compliance, the pup was temporarily placed in another flock/shepherd between 20 and 27 weeks of age, for re-education, being returned to its flock after it. Between 13 and 30 weeks of age, the dog was sampled 7 times, in a total of 32.7 hours and was visible 60.6% of the time. We used instantaneous sampling to determine dog's and shepherd's distance and position regarding the flock and each other and used Spearman correlation coefficient to determine correlations between variables. Up to 20 weeks of age, the dog remained near the shepherd, ignoring the flock and even abandoning it. During re-education, the dog remained near the flock and away from the shepherd. Despite *in situ* education of the original owners, their attitudes remained essentially the same and after returning to its flock, the dog's behaviour soon regressed to incorrect. This shows that although correct LGD behaviour may be possible, its display also depends on the shepherds' attitude towards the dog. We also compare this behaviour with that of other same breed LGD puppies properly educated.

Poster

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