



GUARDIANS

CanOvis Project Update Wolf–Dog–Flock Trinity

Wolf researchers with the CanOvis Project continue to study the relationships between wolves, domestic sheep, and livestock guardian dogs in France, focusing on sheep grazing operations in two areas:

- Mercantour's alpine landscape of grasslands, moors, wooded meadows and larch forest is home to five wolf packs (minimum of 15-24 wolves) and 145,000 head of sheep. In 2014, there were 675 wolf attacks with 2,353 small ruminant victims.

- Canjuers is a high plateau of small valleys, hills, steppe, meadow, scrubland, and forest. It's home to two wolf packs (minimum of 10-13 wolves) and 15,000 of sheep. In 2014, there were 276 wolf attacks, with 804 small ruminant victims.

According to CanOvis, "these two areas account for over 50% of damage nationwide and il-

lustrate all the difficulties with overcoming flocks' vulnerability to predation, despite the high level of livestock protection and the concerted efforts of breeders."

CanOvis has prepared its annual report and findings from the 2014 field season, printed below. The CanOvis Project, led by Jean-Marc Landry, focuses on the following field research:

- LGD behaviour monitoring (individual behaviour, relationships within the pack of dogs and behaviour in their environment; interviews with the livestock breeders who own them and the shepherds who use them).

- GPS monitoring of LGDs and flocks (analysis of night- and daytime animal movements).

- Monitoring of wolf-flock-LGD interactions (night-time viewing using infrared equipment – night-time hides close to where the flocks sleep).

- Reading of the contextual and circumstantial parameters (topography, weather, pastoral activity, etc.).

- A collection of testimonies and experiences of partner livestock breeders and shepherds.

Preliminary Results

The information gathered in 2013-2014 enables us to make some initial observations, which are gradually identifying the avenues of work to be explored.

Some results are set out below, in a non-exhaustive way, classified by which is the central figure interacting with another player:

1. On wolves

- Wolves "occupy the territory": Wolves pass through observation areas regularly and not necessarily out of interest in flocks.

- Some wolves are persistent: on the other hand, individuals (one or two wolves together) focus on

a flock for hours on end (waiting, observations, attempts ... not necessarily with any result).

- Some wolves seem inexperienced: most of

these persistent wolves seem daring but ineffective.

- Always one single wolf (maybe two) during the "unsuccessful" attacks that were observed.

- Wolves and LGDs can have "peaceful" relations: whereby each seems to recognise the other's limitations and they tolerate each other.

2. On flocks

- The livestock are relatively tolerant of LGD movements, but some restless stages amongst the LGDs cause significant disturbances (panic, movement, etc.).

- The approach or very close proximity of wolves generally does not cause livestock to panic.

- When sleeping unenclosed, if attacked, the flock may move in bunches and create a "flocking" effect (like a shoal of fish), which disturbs the predator and gives the LGD time to intervene. This means sleeping unenclosed is not necessarily a vulnerability factor.

- Adding fences (even non-electric) could be effective on open sleeping spots by limiting key access points to the flock while reinforcing the work of LGDs.

- After a disturbance, calm generally returns quickly.

- In a 24-hour cycle, some periods proved more vulnerable (grazing, scattered animals, flock split up, easy access to the sleeping spot, etc.).

3. On guardian dogs

- LGDs are not necessarily on guard all night – they sleep at night too!

- LGDs are relatively tolerant towards the sur-

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rounding wild animals. Very few incidences of chasing observed.

- Whether dogs are excited or calm does not necessarily correlate with the presence of wolves in the surroundings.

- Dogs' "marking" and barking have little or no effect on wolf frequentation.

- The dogs are sensitive to sudden movements of the flock (and unusual ringing noises): LGDs only seem to demonstrate agonistic ("aggressive") behaviour towards wolves in the event of trouble/attack on the flock and, to a lesser extent, on a carcass (defense of resources). They are more "tolerant" to the presence and movement of wolves when there is no disturbance (even close to the flock).

- LGDs return to calm relatively quickly after a variety of attacks or trouble.

- Some pursuits can be sustained: up to 2 km where the LGDs "will not give up," with tracking work equivalent to a hunting dog, while other pursuits are abandoned after a few dozen meters (simply putting them to flight).

- LGDs may interrupt wolves' predation behaviour, but they do not teach the wolves not to come back to the protected flock. This means that dogs may be similar to a "disruptive-stimulus tools."

- The presence of one or several females in heat in the flock and surroundings seems to make protection less effective (reduced vigilance, males injured by fighting amongst themselves and dogs wandering off from their home flock, sometimes far from the flock).

Field research is set to continue in 2015.

The CanOvis Project annual report includes some fascinating infrared photos of guardian dogs interacting with wolves and other animals, as well as maps of the route of the flock grazing and the route of its guardian dogs. Contact The Shepherd at theshepherdmagazine@me.com for an electronic link to the report.

History of the Suffolk Breed

Provided by United Suffolk Sheep Association

The Suffolk breed, an original English breed, was the result of crossing Southdown rams on Norfolk Horned ewes. The product of this cross was determined to be a great improvement over either one of the parents. Although the Suffolk was a recognized breed as early as 1810, the flock book was not closed until much later.

In 1930, Southdowns were described as large sheep without horns, dark faces and legs, fine bones and long small necks. They were gray to mouse brown on the face and legs. They were low set in front with high shoulders and light forequarters; however, their sides were good, rather broad in the loin and were full in the thigh and twist. Today's Suffolk derives its meatiness and quality wool from the old original British Southdown.

The Norfolk Horned sheep, now rare, were a wild and hardy breed. They were black faced, light, fleeced sheep. Both sexes were horned. The upland regions of Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridge on the southeastern coast of England are very rugged and forage is sparse. It was this dry, cold and windy area in which the Norfolk breed adapted itself to traveling great distances for food, thereby developing a superbly muscular body.

It was said at that time of the Norfolk Horned, "their limbs are long and muscular, their bodies are long and their general form betokens activity and strength." This breed and its crosses were valued highly both by farmers and butchers. However, sheepmen of that day did not like the long legs,

flat sides, nor wild nature of the Norfolk Horned. They noted that Southdowns crossed with Norfolks produced a progeny that reduced most of the criticisms of both breeds.

In 1886, the English Suffolk Society was organized to provide registry service and to further develop the use of the breed.

Through selection and careful breeding by many great English sheepmen, the Suffolk brought to this country retained the qualities for which they were originally mated.

The first Suffolks were brought to this country in 1888 by Mr. G.B. Streeter of Chazy, New York. During a visit to England the previous year, Mr. Streeter had been greatly impressed by Suffolk sheep. These prize breeding animals had belonged to Joseph Smith of Hasketon, and one 21 month old ewe weighed exactly 200 pounds when she came off the ship. A 9 month old ram weighed 195 pounds and in the spring of 1890, a 7 week old twin weighed 85 pounds. That spring Streeter had a 200% lamb crop.

The Suffolk did not make its appearance in the western states

until 1919. Three ewes and two rams had been donated by the English Suffolk Sheep Society to the University of Idaho. One of the rams was to be sold at auction at the National Ram Sale in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Several leading sheepmen saw these sheep at the sale and they liked what they saw. After several rounds of bidding, the ram was finally sold to Laidlaw and Brockie (developers of the Panama breed) of Muldoon, Idaho, for \$500. These men were so impressed with the offspring from their Suffolk ram that they made several importations and were consistent buyers at the National Ram Sale.

Suffolk Traits

Mature weights for Suffolk rams range from 250 to 350 pounds (113-159 kg), ewe weights vary from 180 to 250 pounds (81-113 kg). Fleece weights from mature ewes are between five and eight pounds (2.25-3.6 kg) with a yield of 50 to 62 percent. The fleeces are considered medium wool type with a fiber diameter of 25.5 to 33.0 microns and a spinning count of 48 to 58. The staple length of Suffolk Fleece ranges from 2 to 3.5 inches (5-6.75 cm).

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HEADS UP!



- Suffolks repeatedly out-perform other breeds in performance trials.
- Suffolks work in a wide variety of sheep operations throughout the country.
- The United Junior Suffolk Sheep Association offers outstanding youth opportunities.
- Contact the United Suffolk Sheep Association to learn more!

United Suffolk Sheep Association

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