

SECOND EDITION

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# LIVESTOCK PROTECTION DOGS

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*Selection, Care and Training*

Orysia Dawydiak  
David E. Sims



**Livestock Protection Dogs — Selection, Care and Training**  
Second Edition

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Dawydiak, Orysia, 1952-

Livestock protection dogs : selection, care, and training / Orysia Dawydiak and David E. Sims.-- 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Sims's name appears first on the earlier edition.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-57779-062-6

I. Livestock protection dogs. I. Sims, David E., 1950- II. Title.

SF428.6.S56 2003

636.737--dc22

2003063705

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Cover Design: Laura Newport

Cover Photo: (top) David E. Sims; (bottom) Agostino Molinelli.

Editing: Deborah Helmers

Photographs: All photographs by the author unless otherwise indicated.

First printing of the Second Edition, February 2004

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Printed in the United States of America.

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To our parents, Marion Sims, and Walter  
and Olga Dawydiak

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## *Preface to the Second Edition*

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This edition of *Livestock Protection Dogs* offers many new photographs, and some of the best from the first edition. Readers of the first edition spoke well of our “quiz photos,” so we’ve added more of them. Training methods have been refined, notably with heavier emphasis on rewarding correct behavior instead of punishing inappropriate actions (negative reinforcement does have an important role, however). The range of animals that livestock protection dogs may protect is increasing, so a new chapter on unusual livestock has been written (not that llamas seem so unusual anymore).

With the growth in popularity of livestock protection dogs, there are more breeders. A chapter has been added to advise potential breeders on the rewards and headaches that lie ahead. Breeding two dogs is easy. Successful, long-term breeding is a challenging combination of applied psychology, art and science that we cannot specifically define, but can allude to. Most would-be dog breeders burn out after one or two litters. We hope we can help to alleviate this situation by helping breeders be better prepared and make better decisions.

Our societies are increasingly urban. The separation of town dweller from farmer, previously no more than one or two generations removed, is now on its way to being complete. City dwellers no longer know how animals are kept in agriculture, and don’t care to empathize with the needs of farmers and ranchers. Livestock protection doesn’t get singled out in this separation; it is but one more example. Dogs that look gorgeous and have been selected to work in an agricultural setting are being acquired as pets, and the demands for a domestic pet are being brought to bear on breeders. In fact, some livestock protection dog breeds have been used in home and show for so long that there are now sub-types of the breeds, for companion or for farm work.

We were astounded one day when a message we posted on a livestock protection dog list that we thought was an innocuous piece of training advice was blasted by a breeder we had not met. This breeder offered the opinion that she would never expose her dogs to harsh weather conditions or the danger of predators. “Her” dogs would only be sold to good suburban homes, and those of us who actually put dogs in danger of attack from other canids were being cruel. Shortly after, another breeder offered the same opinion and suggested that in North America the time had come to stop using these dogs to protect

livestock. She was of the opinion that livestock protection dogs belonged exclusively in the show ring and in safe homes.

Livestock protection dogs have indeed been killed while defending livestock. They have been outnumbered by wolves or coyotes, and overpowered by bears and cougars. We do not refer to fatal incidents to glorify death or fighting. However, these magnificent breeds have been selected for millennia to protect. To deny a livestock protection dog the opportunity to be a part of an extended pack or grouping is the mental equivalent to chaining that dog alone in the backyard. While fatalities rarely happen, and most protection work is accomplished with barks, growls and posturing, we should acknowledge and celebrate that our livestock protection dogs are willing, if needed, to give their lives in protection of their charges. Is this a heritage we want to dilute or remove from these breeds? (By our estimates, work-related fatalities are less common than urban hit-by-car deaths.)

Meanwhile, increasing numbers of urbanites are electing to move out of the city and live on small rural properties. Obtaining a flock of birds or sheep is a life-long dream that has finally been realized. Small-time property owners, farmers and ranchers continue to need good working dogs. Despite the ready availability of facts in this age of electronic communication, there remains a niche for a book as a single source of advice on a most noble lineage of working dogs, to openly acknowledge the problems they may bring with them at an individual level and in a more global or political context, and to offer training tips that have been previously learned through the slow and sometimes painful methods of trial and error.

We hope you will enjoy your experience of owning or raising a livestock protection dog and request that you will, as others have before you, share any unusual experiences with us to enrich future editions of this book.



Maremma pup bonding with sheep at the Hampshire College Livestock Dog Project barn. Photo by Lorna Coppinger.



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## *Preface to the Original Edition*

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This text is designed to aid people who are interested in, or who have decided to invest in and train, a livestock protection dog. We begin with four assumptions about serious livestock protection dog owners. First, we shall assume that you are aware that no two dogs will behave in an identical manner. Indeed, there is probably as much personality variability within the breeds of livestock protection dogs as there is between them. Therefore you must be flexible in your interpretation of our advice.

Second, we will assume that you have some basic knowledge of canine behavior and psychology. Training a protection dog without any prior experience with dogs will be more difficult, but not impossible. Community libraries contain texts on fundamentals of dog behavior and training. We suggest that you should be able to train a dog to stay, sit and come before attempting to train a livestock protection dog. We offer this recommendation because livestock guard dogs should not be taken to dog obedience schools. Their effectiveness may be diminished if they become overly socialized to other canines.

Third, and perhaps most important, we shall assume that you are firmly committed to making the most of a substantial investment. This commitment includes a willingness to care for the dog's physical and mental soundness, and to attend to problems of behavior as soon as they occur, not days or weeks later. Our assumptions are that you are prepared to build or modify fencing or gates or feeding areas if a need for these changes becomes apparent.

Fourth, while you may choose to invest in a livestock protection dog mainly for financial reasons, you should also just plain like dogs. Livestock protection dogs are only one of many management techniques available for control of predation problems. They probably will not work well for a person who is inherently indifferent, or unfriendly, towards dogs.

If these are reasonable assumptions on our part, we are willing to do our best to help you train a livestock protection dog. You are undertaking a noble challenge, one that will reward you for years.

As this book is being published, widespread use of livestock protection dogs has yet to enter its second decade. Puppy aptitude testing is still in its infancy. Some of the thoughts presented within this book may be out of date within several years. Readers are encouraged to correspond with the authors to ensure that future editions include as many successful training methods as possible. Your responses to this book would be most appreciated.



Photo by Ray Coppinger.

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## *Acknowledgments*

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The writing of this book has been a team effort. Individual photographers are recognized in the photo captions, but for those whose photos are not included, thanks to you as well for taking the time and effort to send photos to us. Dr. Caroline Runyon, veterinary orthopedic surgeon, provided the examples of healthy and dysplastic hips which are shown in the chapter on health issues. Shelley Ebbett, medical photographer, took the photos of the hips for us.

Jennifer Brown, Marsha Peterson and Diane Spisak read and critiqued various drafts of this edition, offering many constructive suggestions. Within the clubs that represent livestock protection breeds are many people who have toiled on behalf of their breeds to present responsible information to the public, to rescue neglected animals, and to advance our understanding of these magnificent dogs. While unnamed in this book, their efforts made the factual compilation of breed information possible.

We thank the livestock protection dog owners who have shared with us over the years the little tidbits of information, the training tips, the motivators, the ways to use positive instead of negative reinforcement, which collectively add up to wisdom. Without such team effort, this book could not be written. The editorial team at Alpine Publications has done a wonderful job preparing out manuscript for publication. For their professional, constructive suggestions, we thank them.



A mature Akbash Dog lives with and guards goats in Oregon. Blackberry bushes are abundant in the Willamette Valley. Goats are an ecological way to control their spread. The farm is visited regularly by coyotes, wolves and dog packs, yet suffers few losses of livestock due to a management system that includes several livestock protection dogs. Photo by David E. Sims.