



SOUTHERN OREGON  
SOAY SHEEP FARMS  
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# Viewpoint

FROM THE PREMIER BREEDER OF BRITISH REGISTERED SOAY SHEEP

## Livestock guarding dogs

by Kathie Miller

**It was love at first sight. Those big brown eyes, sly smile, and shocking white hair enchanted me.**

He walked up, looked straight into my eyes and licked my face. This beautiful, snow-white Maremma puppy, Chivo, and I had, in those first few seconds, forged a bond for life.

We had lost our first LGD (livestock guarding dog), an eight-year-old male Kuvasz, shortly before we moved back to Oregon and I needed a replacement for him. "Buffalo" had protected my birds from urban coyotes in L.A. and I knew that I could not contin-



Chivo using the spring gate

ue to raise livestock and Nene geese in the country without one. In addition to the usual wandering neighborhood dogs and coyotes, I would be dealing with raccoons, foxes, cougars, and possibly the occasional bear.

LGDs are amazing working dogs, worth their weight in gold. However, they are not for everyone or every situation. Some breeds are better suited for farms with lots of visitors and children and some are best on remote ranches where they are more isolated and there is stronger predation (cougars and bears). They are all very large. Ours have ranged between

90- and 150-pounds and are extremely strong-willed and independent. They bark a great deal at night, especially when young, and they develop selective deafness that is perfected with age: "Come" is a command that all have refused to obey. When young, a slight tick of the head revealed that I had been heard but was being ignored. As they matured, they didn't even give me that clue. To test Chivo, I used to whisper the word "cookie" which would bring him running for a treat from 300 yards.

Strangers (by the dog's definition) are treated as unwelcome intruders. Unless socialized when young, LGDs can be a problem as adults when guests come to the farm. I found a basic four-week obedience class helped me

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## September Calendar

- ❑ Its time to start thinking about breeding season, especially breeding groups and where you are going to put them.
- ❑ Continue barnyard clean-up in preparation for winter. Correct trouble spots, areas of poor drainage, etc.
- ❑ Make repairs to your barn. Bash-proof rams' quarters as best you can and repair fencing in preparation for breeding season.

## A stinging truth

by Kathie Miller

Galadriel, an older ewe, had lost a lot of weight after lambing so I had her confined. One morning, one side of her face looked like a balloon.

My first thought was an abscessed tooth, but there was no visible abscess or open sore. Having learned to never overestimate my diagnostic skills—and wanting to spare old Galadriel a trip into the clinic—I called my veterinarian hoping for some help over the phone. After listening to the list of symptoms—

swollen face, no temperature, eating and drinking normally, etc.—Dr. Rebecca confirmed my suspicion: an allergic reaction, most probably to a wasp sting. It had happened to one of my sheep only once before.

I was advised to continue the penicillin I had started as a precaution against secondary infection, and to pick up two doses of injectible antihistamine. I gave the first dose when I got home and the second one 12 hours later.



Galadriel's swollen face

The following morning, the swelling was down. By day three, things were back to normal.

I was shocked that sheep could be allergic to bee stings. But they can be.

## Resources

The Coppingers of Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, and Jay Lorenz, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Oregon State University, Corvallis, were early researchers in the use of LGDs as Protection Dogs in the US and are an excellent source of information.

*Raising and Training a Livestock-guarding Dog* by J.R. Lorenz and L. Coppinger, <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/ec/ec1238.pdf>

*A Decade of Use of Livestock Guarding Dogs* by Raymond Coppinger, Lorna Coppinger, Gail Langeloh, Lori Gettler, and Jay Lorenz, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1042&context=vpcthirteen>. NOTE: the bibliography alone is worth the read.

Two excellent books:

“Livestock Protection Dogs: Selection, Care and Training” by Orysia Dawydiak and David Sims, second edition, ISBN 9781577 790624

“Livestock Guardians: Using Dogs, Donkeys, and Llamas to Protect Your Herd” (Storey’s Working Animals series) by Janet Vorwald Dohner, ISBN 978-1-58017-695-8

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All advice in this newsletter has been used successfully on our farm. It is important to remember that every animal and situation is different. Before you try any of our suggestions, we urge you to consult your veterinarian.

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## LGDs *continued from page one*

with this and, in spite of the fact that we always flunked because I couldn’t be bothered to do the homework, I found the experience very useful. It socialized the puppies by exposing them to a strange environment where they encountered other people and other dogs. They learned to walk on a leash and, more importantly, they got used to riding in the car. If the dog won’t get in your vehicle when there is an emergency, you have a serious problem: you cannot ask your vet to drop everything at the clinic and race to your farm to help in a crisis.

LGDs also have their own idea of territory and *your* fence line does not necessarily mean that this is *their* boundary. Chivo had an amusing habit of lifting his leg and shooting as far as he could into the neighbor’s field to mark his territory, which obviously was beyond the confines of my property.

Occasionally, you will encounter a climber. This is a frustrating habit that one of my current dogs, Foula, has mastered. At seven weeks she climbed out of a barn stall and has climbed through gates ever since. Managing her in the usual manner of running with the flock has not been an option: she simply won’t stay. I finally decided I had two choices: view this as a useful trait—any pen she could climb out of, she could get back into—or find her a new home. I opted

for the former and now she is over the gate and into any pen whenever she perceives there is a problem.



Ella and assistant at the back fence

Of all my dogs, Chivo had the strongest will and was the biggest challenge. There were days when I wondered if we would survive his adolescence together. But he was very effective and the most creative. Between us, we developed a gate system that allowed him to pass from one paddock to another without climbing. My contribution to this was cutting a porthole in the fence, but it wasn’t long before the sheep discovered they could pass through it too and get into the



Doggy porthole

alleyway between the pens. Next, he invented a “spring gate”. I had hung a small piece of cattle panel between two posts at the end of the alley and latched it near the top of one side for my easy reach. Chivo discovered if he put his nose between the panel and the post near the bottom he could open the gate and it would spring closed behind him, a trick the sheep have never figured out. Unfortunately, he died before he

could pass on the lesson to a younger dog.

Each dog has its own personality and its own issues. Many dig, and a 135-pound dog can dig big holes. Milo, my current male, will not accept anyone else living on my property when he is penned with the sheep. However, when he is outside the pen, he is fine. So, instead of living with the flock, he now patrols in a corridor around it.

To keep my livestock from sharing a border with neighbor dogs, I have double-fenced my farm with a passageway between my boundary line and my pasture. This allows the dogs to guard the outside of the sheep paddocks without leaving the farm. With Foula’s ability to get into any pasture, I have excellent protection for both the Soay and the geese.

LGDs are not normal family dogs and, I reiterate, they are not for everyone. But if you have predator problems you cannot find better protection for your livestock.

NOTE: While some LGD breeds are found in the UK, they do not seem to be used for livestock protection.

## Tip of the Month

**Consider re-homing an adult working (not pet) LGD that has lost its farm or flock.**