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# WHO LET THE DOGS OUT? ASK THESE RANCHERS

BY STEPHEN STARR • JUL 21 • 2016

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## WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

Because all over the world, dogs are being told to do more than fetch.

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Dogs. What are they good for? Barking till 4 a.m. Chewing up your sneakers. Retrieving the newspaper. Maybe. Sure, they're man's best friend, but increasingly they're playing a new role — one that could have a real impact on people's livelihoods.

Ask Nizam Akbabaoz. In the rural hamlet of Bozkale in eastern Turkey (<http://www.ozy.com/rising-stars/figen-yksekdag-the-feminist-leading-turkeys-pro-kurdish-political-movement/41509>), huge dogs, including the indigenous Kangal breed, are saving farmers thousands of dollars —by scaring the crap out of wolves that has been crossing city limits in search of food. Several months ago, a pack of wolves came in the dead of night and tried to attack some of his livestock, says Akbabaoz, whose 20-acre farm is home to dairy cows, cattle and geese. “But when they hear the Kangal bark, they dare not come close,” he says. Neither would you. Listening to the insistent, deep growl of Akbabaoz’s 3-year-old Kangal, Gammaz, you’d think he’s more lion than canine. At close to 140 pounds, Gammaz is a powerful animal, muscles undulating in his shoulders, chest and back.

For centuries, ranchers and farmers have battled wolves and bears. In Yellowstone National Park, for instance, ranchers with livestock grazing on the fringes of the park rage against the encroachment of wolves, which have been gaining ground in the

region. Across North America, where conservationists have successfully managed wolf reintroduction projects, embattled ranchers have fought back, and their opposition has resulted in culls being rolled out in Montana, Idaho and British Columbia, to the anger of animal welfare groups. A recently published study from the University of Utah surveyed nearly 1,000 farmers, shepherds and townspeople across 58 villages in eastern Turkey with large predator populations; 77 percent reported “experiencing harm” from wildlife. “This harm includes the loss of crops, especially to boars, the loss of hives to bears and the loss of livestock and dogs mainly to wolves,” says Cagan Sekercioglu, a National Geographic explorer and co-author of the report.

## We sat and listened as the dogs ... drove off the cat with amazing force and persistence.

Lauren Dixon, farmer

Hammering out a solution that will please both conservationists and farmers is no small task. Poison, while frequently effective, is indiscriminate and its use in control programs has been highly controversial. Guns work, but keeping guard night after night in often freezing temperatures isn’t sustainable. Nonlethal control methods — such as movable electric fencing to protect cattle (<http://www.ozy.com/true-story/a-california-familys-quest-to-raise-grass-fed-cattle/65548>) and sheep from bears (<http://www.ozy.com/fast-forward/why-spain-is-feeding-the-bears/39042>) and wolves — have been tested, but fences are blown over by strong winds or get damaged by falling trees or heavy snow. And that’s not to mention the cost and labor involved in installation and upkeep.

All of which points to the appeal of livestock guardian dogs, such as Gammaz, in preserving the well-being of farm animals and predators alike. Lauren Dixon, who farms goats, chickens and pigs surrounded by 2.5 million acres of wilderness in Montana, is a recent convert. The problem started years ago when a cougar began showing up nightly and stalking Dixon’s goats. Then a visiting friend’s 120-pound malamute was attacked and dragged over a high fence by the cougar. Desperate to remedy the situation, Dixon responded to an ad in the local newspaper offering a pair of unworked Great Pyrenees livestock guardian dogs free to a good home.

Like clockwork, the cougar made its nightly appearance. “We found the big cat sitting outside of the goat pen, looking quite perplexed, as there were two very large, very vocal Pyrenees standing in the way of her meal plans,” Dixon wrote on her blog. When the cougar refused to leave, Dixon opened the gate and the dogs took off after it. “We sat and listened as the dogs’ barks became more and more distant, as they drove off

the cat with amazing force and persistence, giving her a run for her life.” That was the last Dixon and her farming partner saw of the cougar.

Dixon’s experiences have been echoed by farmers (<http://www.ozy.com/fast-forward/africas-farming-revolution-starts-here/36849>) all over the world. The University of Utah’s Turkey study found LGDs to be “an excellent example of a nonlethal technique to reduce depredation.” Similar investigations at sheep farms in Colorado concluded that those not using LGDs lost six times as many lambs as those deploying dogs. It’s not only in the wilds of Turkey or Montana that guardian dogs have been brought in to protect livestock — and they’re not guarding against just wolves and mountain lions. In South Africa, hundreds of LGDs are being used to keep the peace between farmers and all sorts of spotted creatures. At Cheetah Outreach, a conservation organization based in Western Cape province, dogs have defended against leopards, brown hyenas, black-backed jackals, caracal, lions, cheetahs and even baboons, says Cyril Stannard, an LGD project manager. After 230 Kangal LGDs were deployed in the Bushveld and the Kalahari Bushveld wildernesses, depredation rates fell by an astonishing 95 to 100 percent, he says.

As communities around the world continue to expand into the wild, the potential for clashes between ranchers and predators will only grow, stirring the debate about who’s right, who’s wrong and what to do about it. Hopefully, that’s when someone opens the door for the four-legged peacemakers.