The Best Survival Dog

For anyone who has lived (or still lives) in the countryside, the terms livestock guardian dog (LGD) and livestock herding dog (LHD) are probably familiar. What these two terms refer to are the two types of working dogs one might expect to find on a typical working farm.

The terms indicate what role the dogs play, though both livestock guardian as well as livestock herding dogs may simply be referred to as sheep dogs or working dogs.

Dogs of all shapes and sizes have enjoyed the special distinction of man's best friend for thousands of years, but many modern pet owners don't realize the true potential of their canine companions.

Whether they are acting as vigilant guardians, aiding in the location and management of livestock, assisting in search and rescue, or laying down their lives to defend their human master, a well-trained dog can be worth its weight in gold.

Indeed, on working farms and in rural communities around the world, livestock herding and livestock guardian dogs, the quintessential working dogs, retain immense popularity to this day.

The best livestock herding dogs and livestock guardian dogs come from specific breeds that have been bred and raised to perform certain tasks, as in the case of the **Australian Koolie** (a herding dog) breed or the **Great Pyrenees** (a guardian) breed from France. As their names distinguish, LGDs and LHDs have distinctly different purposes when working with flock or herd animals.

Livestock herding dogs are bred, raised and trained specifically to work with a farmer or shepherd. As such, these breeds generally have an abundance of energy, are highly

intelligent, and are really at their best when they have a job to do or a lot of mental stimulation. The effectiveness of a LHD stems from the fact that it uses predatory behaviors (ex. nipping at the heels, moving fast, barking, circling, etc.) to herd prey animals by bunching and flocking.

Some of the most renowned breeds of **livestock herding dogs** are:

The **border collie** is famed for its intelligence and is a popular breed chosen by families around the world as a pet, border collies are known for their ability to learn many tricks and they excel in agility training and competitions. All these traits stem from the fact that border collies have traditionally been the go-to shepherding dog in many localities for literally hundreds upon hundreds of years. To see a pair of border collies in action with sheep, please see the link to a short video I've included in the notes below.

Australian shepherds, despite their name, originated in the western states of the US on ranches and farms, working alongside their owners to herd sheep and other livestock. Like most herding breeds, Australian shepherds are highly energetic, with eager-to-please temperaments, and they've become quite popular as family pets as well as in agility and training exercises. Unfortunately, they can become highly destructive if they get bored, so they need a combination of either a lot of attention and daily training/play/exercise and/or a large area to roam, such as a

farm or ranch.

The **German shepherd** is famous for its use as a working dog alongside police and military detachments the world over, but this breed (like so many others) has its true roots in the rural countryside, working with sheep and other livestock alongside humans. Capable herding dogs with great intelligence and capacity for obedience, German shepherds are one of the most popular breeds chosen as pets as well as show and competition dogs . They are very protective and can be quite fierce toward strangers, predators or other potential threats, but with proper socialization they can be quite safe to handle and have around family, friends and of course livestock.

Lancashire Heelers, more commonly known simply as heelers, are an example of a rather specialized livestock herding breed. Built long and short, heelers have traditionally been bred to maintain their low-to-ground stature for use in herding cattle. Because these effective little dogs are so small, kicks from cattle traditionally go right over the dog's head rather than striking and injuring or killing the animal. They might be small, but when properly trained these little dogs can prove quite useful as a working breed. Another similarly small-statured herding breed is the **Welsh corgi**.

Typically trained for use with sheep, cattle and goats, livestock herding dogs can also be used (with adequate training and supervision) to handle chickens, ducks, geese and other fowl and smaller animals as well as pigs and llamas.

In addition to their skill and usefulness as working dogs, many LHD breeds also make loyal family pets, often with an innate, super-alert guarding instinct to boot. Unfortunately, because of their more predatory instincts, LHD aren't as well suited to being left alone or otherwise unattended with their flock or herd, as they may slip up and eat their charges.

That's where LGDs come in. With their more relaxed, patient temperaments, well-trained livestock guardian dogs can be left unattended amongst your sheep, cattle, goats or flock of fowl. Indeed, it's what they have been bred and trained for, because the main purpose of a LGD is to protect your herd or flock from other predators by staying with them at all times.

A good LGD will fight off predators that may prey on your livestock, but in many cases farmers with LGDs among their herd or flock find that they have very few issues with predators.

This is because predators are known opportunists, so once they've identified that your LGD (another predator as opposed to a prey animal) has staked out its own patch of territory with your livestock, the predators will look for easier, unguarded prey elsewhere. This makes LGDs ideal for use when you have free range cattle, goats, sheep or other free-roaming animals.

Good livestock guardian dogs can also protect your stock from theft by strangers, though humans may prove more lethal to your dogs than predatory animals if they should target your stock. In any case, some of the best livestock guardian breeds include:

Anatolian shepherds are a resilient, hardy breed of guardian dogs that historically came from Anatolia, a region in central Turkey. Compared to some of the more relaxed, even ‘lazy’ livestock guardian breeds, Anatolian shepherds are agile and swift, capable of chasing down predators or intruders if they try to flee. They also have exceptional hearing, are quite strong, and generally show good situational awareness. Like several other livestock guardian breeds that originate from Turkey, the Anatolian shepherds descend from dogs with ancient heritage and history as working animals.

The **kuvasz** is a dedicated livestock guardian breed that descends from dogs kept for thousands of years to serve as guardians and protectors. As such, this breed is truly intended for life as a working dog, and they are really only happy when they have large areas to roam in and preferably a flock or herd to guard. With great intelligence and independence, this breed is characterized by great protectiveness and gentleness toward its herd or flock. Wary and potentially even aggressive toward strangers, the breed is intensely loyal to their family and will protect any humans or animals that it recognizes as being part of the flock.

The **kangal** dogs that also originate from Turkey are another popular choice as LGDs. With strong guardian instincts that have resulted from thousands of years of selective breeding and use with livestock, the kangal is a formidable guardian with a relaxed but attentive temperament. In recent years, kangals have gained in popularity as family dogs specifically because of their gentle but strongly protective dispositions.

Great Pyrenees are one of the breeds often referred to as the 'white dogs' of the livestock guardian group. Another, similar breed in the 'white dogs' group is the **Maremma sheepdog** which is often used in tandem with a Great Pyrenees. A properly bred and raised Great Pyrenees will be a calm, relaxed, confident dog with strong protective instincts for its herd but is extremely gentle with livestock and children.

It is also important to remember that, in addition to the training that a good dogs needs to become a great herder or guardian (but particularly a herder), your flock of sheep, herd of goats or other livestock to be handled must also be trained to respond properly to the dog. Ornery sheep, aggressive rams, cattle and even pigs that have never been handled by a herding dog or been in the presence of a guardian dog will need to be acclimated to the new animal.

Another important distinction between livestock herding breeds and livestock guarding breeds has to do with their ability to

learn, and willingness to follow, commands and orders from their owner. Traditional herding breeds are, by necessity of their job and the fact that they **must** respond swiftly and accurately to their master's commands, generally extolled for their obedience and ability to learn new commands and tricks quickly.

By contrast, most livestock guarding breeds, especially those hailing from more ancient lineage, are reputed for their stubbornness, their independence, and their general sense of autonomy and even aloofness towards the human members of its pack.

As opposed to being stupid or particularly disobedient, it must be understood that livestock guardian breeds are actually quite intelligent and have been specifically bred and raised for their capacity to work with livestock wile unattended.

When it comes down to it, while there is some training provided by the owner (and the older dogs if you have older LGDs working your stock), most of what a good LGD does stems from instinct and good breeding. Since these dogs have traditionally been left unattended with the stock, often for days at a time with little or no contact with their shepherds, it is important that they be able to make decisions on their own without relying on the orders of their master.

Additional Notes & Resources:

*Video first seen on **Bob Hinson***

– this is a good video of a pair of sheepherding border collies in action in Scotland.

*Video first seen on **Conservation Media***

– here is a nice, short little video that showcases several breeds of livestock guardian dogs and some basic details about

their purpose.

Secret NASA method helps you get survival fortress for $300

Watch the video

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Photo sources: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8