

CLEARFIELD STOCK DOG NEWSLETTER

“Using dogs with Instinct for livestock management.”



The Keys to Stock Dog Success are

- A Dog with Instinct
- The Right Training
- Allow the dog to use its Mind
- Commitment
- Respect
- Trust
- Good Stockmanship

This newsletter is designed to fill a need in the agriculture - livestock production sector. Raising livestock comes with a myriad of challenges. We are limited by a vast array of conditions – Time, Space, Infrastructure, Knowledge, Management Skills...

Each and every trainer approaches training and working livestock with stock dogs differently. My 20 years with stock dogs and 25 years raising sheep has taught me the best method is to enhance the natural instincts in the dog to allow Them to think and feel stock, be responsible for their own choices, and work with and for us to accomplish the needed tasks.

Telling the dog a bunch of commands makes You responsible for reading and anticipating the thoughts and movement of the stock then placing the dog where he needs to be when he needs to be there.

There is nothing better than heading to the pasture with a capable willing partner beside you. Knowing that whatever awaits you – you and your partner will be able to handle gives you incredible peace of mind. This piece of mind comes through your relationship with your dog.

Make No Mistake - it takes Real Work on your part but the rewards are well worth it.

The use of herding dogs to assist us with livestock management can save us time, reduce the number of steps we take each day, lessen the stress of health management tasks and make moving stock easy- both for us and the livestock. Good stock dogs enable us to manage more stock in less time than one person could handle alone. Herding dogs are ready, willing, and on-call 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Every management task is easier with a good dog.

The Challenge Then Lies With US.

To capitalize on the incredible abilities of stock dogs we must

- Understand how stock and dogs think
- Understand how stock interacts
- Understand how herding dogs and livestock interact
- Learn what a stock dog is capable of
- Learn how to communicate with both dog and stock
- Watch
- Listen
- Understand the difference between making the dog do something and encouraging the dog to think for itself and use its instincts

With the support of SARE (sustainable agriculture research and education grants), I am able to produce this newsletter.

Please submit questions and topic ideas to rackleydenice@gmail.com

We will start at the beginning and work our way through-



HERDING TERMS

GATHER - To bring the livestock to the handler. This is instinctual in Border Collies. It consists of three parts:
OUTRUN< LIFT< FETCH

OUTRUN - The first part of a gather. The dog runs out looking for stock to the left or right of the handler and getting behind the stock at an appropriate distance so the stock is not upset/ doesn't bolt.

LIFT - The moment the stock begins to move from where they were standing. This is the first 'communication' between the dog and stock and where they size each other up. This 'meeting' sets the tone for all that follows. The dog should approach the sheep calm & confidence.

FETCH - This is movement of the sheep toward the handler. The dog should bring stock calmly and nice even pace.

DRIVE - The dog moves the stock in any direction away from handler, ideally in a more or less straight line.

WEAR - Wear is used to mean two different things. One is when the dog is keeping the stock bunched and moving toward the handler and the handler is also walking. The other is used to describe when the dog is going back and forth behind a large group of stock to keep them in a group and moving forward.

FLANK - The movement of the dog around the stock to the left or right. A flank should

not make the stock move. Flank- to turn off line and move around stock.

COME BYE/ Go Bye – Clockwise movement

AWAY TO ME/ WAY TO ME/ WAY – Counterclockwise

TERMS DESCRIBING HOW DOGS WORK

SQUARE FLANK - The dog turns squarely off the stock releasing some pressure because he turns his head away from stock. **Out** and **Keep** are often used for commands

(**OUT** – move wider clockwise **KEEP** – move wider counterclockwise)

INSIDE FLANK - When the dog is asked for an inside flank he comes between the handler and the stock. This is mostly used to get ready for driving the stock away from the handler.

TIGHT FLANK/SLICING - When the dog does not keep appropriate distance off the stock and his closeness and speed upset the stock as he is flanking.

COVERED - A dog has covered his stock when the dog has gone far enough around to have affected all the animals in the pasture or has the group of animals you want. A dog that does not cover can potentially leave animals behind or split them off.

COVER- to bring stock **under control**

SHED – Dog comes through group of sheep, sorting off and keeping control of the ones you want.

FEEL/ STOCK SENSE – The ability to understand what pressure to use to move stock and how to apply it. Ex: Dogs work Mama cows and baby calves differently from hair sheep.

BALANCE- Dog Positions himself where he needs to be to get job done. Young dogs naturally balance stock to you. As you move around, stock dog is opposite you holding stock to you or keeping stock in a group headed where you want them. Pressure from various places/reasons can change where dog is. Balance isn't necessarily at 12 O'clock.

POWER- Relates to the confidence a dog has. A powerful dog can move stock by slowly and calmly walking toward sheep. He may grip appropriately if needed, but may not need to grip at all.

PRESENCE-Is the ability to move stock by just being there-

EYE- Some dogs move stock with a hard-fixed stare and crouching body position, seems predatory. Head lower than shoulders.

--Tense eye vs relaxed eye

--STYLE - Has "eye", often much "eye."

-- PLAIN- a dog with no eye is hard to balance sometimes.

UPRIGHT – Dog without eye that works standing tall

PUSH/ PUSHY- Desire to come forward into stock and move them on quickly.

KEEN – Wanting to work

GRIP – Many dogs grip out of insecurity or fear. Need to look at entire dog disposition and body language to know if fear, pressure, insecurity, confidence... bite is often appropriate on nose or heal, bite then release. But they should not hang on.

COURAGE- To keep coming into stock even though it is tough.

SEARCHING CAST-- To run out and search using eyes, nose, ears for stock, casting ever wider. Natural ability bred in, cannot really be taught.

LINE- The ability to walk behind stock in a straight-line pushing stock forward, driving, without flipping back and forth (wearing) behind unless there are stragglers.

WISDOM- Comes from instinct and experience – ability to reading stock and troubleshooting problems without commands.

PRESSURE—Can work in many ways. Can be from the dog on stock. It can be from us to our dog. It can be from us to the stock or from the stock to the dog.

KEY>>>

ALLOW YOUR DOGS TO THINK AND ACT!!!

Correct if Wrong

Encourage if Right

COMMUNICATION with Stock Dogs – Not Just Words

Communication is much more than words. True for us, truer still for animals.

Being aware of how dogs process their environment we can begin to understand how to communicate effectively with them. Dogs take sights, sounds, and smells into consideration. They know by smell if people and animals are confident or nervous, content, or angry...

Dogs communicate with body language and posture more often than they communicate verbally. We need to be aware of what our posture, movements and the tone of our words are telling them as well as be observant enough to 'Hear' what they are telling us.

Think about our conversations. You convey positivity, encouragement, tension, worry, frustration, anger, authority, weakness, and uncertainty all with Tone of voice. When speaking with someone in person all those emotions are further illustrated in their movements and gestures. Think of someone you have recently met, as they walked into the room, before they spoke, you had an immediate impression of them. The way they walked - speed, focus, posture... You assess the situation taking in all those small pieces of information. We don't take time to realize the different information we receive and evaluate.

If our goal is to build a great partnership with our stock dog we need to see and understand the world from their perspective. Walk a mile in their paw prints so to speak.

SOUNDS AND MOVEMENT

When I start working with a dog –pup or older dog either way- I tend to use sounds and my body movement to help them do the correct thing rather than using a command that asks for a specific action. This enables me to allow the dog to continue thinking about sheep- the movement of sheep and how their body position affects the sheep -*Rather than* asking for a specific action then needing to correct if their response is not what I asked for.

When a young dog is first working their confidence, attitude, and willingness are the things I concentrate on.

Simply by sounds and my movement I can get the dog going right or left, speeding up, slowing down, and working closer or farther away from sheep.

Lessons become more about working sheep well and less about doing what I say and obedience. This is a Huge difference in the dog's mind. This gives the responsibility to the dog to use their instinct while our responsibility is to allow that to happen.

Using sounds like 'AH' or 'Hey' and 'Ssss', 'Sshhh', or an 'Atta girl/boy' in the correct TONE enables the dog to understand the intended message. Higher tones and spoken faster equal encouragement. Slower words and deeper tones represent a correction.

Stepping the correct direction to release or apply pressure, I can help the dog move where I want him. Applying pressure is a correction, releasing and giving freedom- ie. more room- lets the dog know they are correct. Some dogs feel that one step toward them as a correction even if you are stepping in to help so you must adjust to each dog. Timing is critical, correction or encouragement in the wrong place will convey a different meaning.

The only commands I need are words to call the dog off sheep and to me. I use their name and "here". This one command I insist dogs know before going to sheep.

Dogs are predictable; if you are working in the same spot the dog will likely repeat the same action. This gives you a chance to be more prepared the second time. Simply saying the dog's name in the appropriate tone can get them to engage their brain and alter actions. You can make slight adjustments in tone to give a dog a slight warning, ask for a change of pace or give a touch of encouragement when they are hesitating.

TONE AND INTENTION

It is not so much the individual words you say that is important, it is the way you say those words. Tone is huge. It is also more than tone. It is the Speed and Pitch and Intention behind those words that dogs pick up on.

The tone must convey when the dog is Right and Wrong.

Corrections should be slower and deeper, encouragements higher and faster. Any, all commands should be asked in an even positive conversational tone the first time then change the tone according to the situation. When you speak in short harsh tones everything comes across like it's a correction. This is confusing; it makes the dog Guess if they are right or wrong.

Some people tend to talk fast with a higher-pitched tone; they seem to always be in a hurry. Their speech and actions reflect that constant state of motion potentially making dogs a bit anxious or nervous. We can't expect dogs to be calm and thinking correctly when we are tense, anxious, upset, angry...

People often get louder when making a point. Odds are changing your tone will be more effective than changing volume. This is true for correction and encouragement.

There are times a dog is so focused on stock it doesn't 'hear' you. Sometimes you have to step into their view so they register your presence. **I believe the way we interact daily with dogs teaches them to ignore us or actively listen to us.**

Consistency is key. I try not to ask young dogs for something I can not help then accomplish. We need to learn to say what we mean and mean what we say. If we do that from day one most dogs will happily comply with our wishes.

FEEL

In addition to listening how you say words, **listen to the "feel" of your words.**

Do they *Sound* and *Feel* like what you want? When you say Lie down does it feel like a lie-down? Is it

said fast and high pitched or slowly? Fast and high pitched will not feel like you want the dog to stop. It will feel like you are asking for speed.

Any word can be transformed by the tone, speed, and pitch. When I watch and listen to handlers I have stopped them and asked "Hey, do you like your dog? Sure doesn't sound or feel like it." You need to be a team player so make sure you are being the best team member you can be. **Engage in active listening – to yourself and to your dog.**

CAUTION

I will caution you as to using commands -'lie down' or 'time' or even flank commands like 'come bye' or 'away' or 'here'- for corrections.

You never want a herding dog to *Not Want* to gather and bring you stock. You don't want them to dislike stopping or calling off sheep.

Stopping should be thought of as waiting to work. You can emphasize your commands if needed, but **try to use a totally different word for a correction.** (words like "Hey", 'AAHH').

Adjustments need to be made for the personality and sensitivity of individual dogs. One other caution – dogs are not robots and will not be perfect. You need to be pleased with small steps in the right direction, from both you and the dog. If the dog is starting to act confused or worried you might be using too many corrections. We all work better when someone gives us small corrections along with encouragement that applies to dogs also.

ACTIVE LISTENING = BETTER COMMUNICATION

Learn to listen to how and what you say to your dog. If you have a hard time hearing yourself and hearing tone then put a recorder in your pocket while you are working. You might be surprised what that reveals.

Animals are more tuned-in to their surroundings than we are. Once we begin to actively see and hear the world as they do, we can communicate more effectively with them.

Dogs interpret the intention, feel, and tone of our words. It is up to us to make sure we are sending a correct consistent message. Words must sound and feel like the actions we request. Communication involves much more than simple words.



DEDICATED To A WONDERFUL Boy

MARCO

You will be missed by many...

So grateful for all you taught us.