

Anatolian Shepherd Dog January 2019 column

To Chase Or Not To Chase : Prey drive in the Anatolian Shepherd Dog

We have all seen the cute videos on Facebook of baby goats leaping and jumping around. Sometimes they're even wearing pajamas! You know the ones I'm talking about – I'll bet you've even shared them.

Those little stinkers are the primary reason the Anatolian Shepherd Dog has a significantly lower prey drive than most of the breeds in the Working group. The last thing you want your working LGD doing is chasing down a baby goat and playing with it the same way it would play with another dog. And it's not just baby goats who will attempt to lead a dog into temptation - adult sheep and goats will also try to entice a dog into playing with them, even though ruminants and dogs play in very different ways.

Sheep and goats play with one another by butting heads. Dogs play by nipping and grabbing. What do sheep and goats do when they're nipped and grabbed? They scream and behave like a dying animal, and it is instinctive for most dogs, especially those with heightened prey drive, to help that dying animal shuffle off this mortal coil. When an Anatolian hears a sheep or goat screaming as if it were dying, the dog's response should be one of concern and protection. It should be looking for a predator to run off or tackle, it should not be playing the sheep or goat to death.

Anatolian Shepherd Dogs have been selected for centuries to have low prey drive. It's not completely extinguished, because the dogs will, from necessity at times, supplement their diet with small game, but it is so low that chasing another animal, unless it is going to run it off from its charges, is not characteristic of the breed. Even when an Anatolian chases a predator away from his flock, he has a boundary that he is unwilling to go beyond because doing so would take him too far from his charges. Dogs with lots of prey drive, such as Greyhounds and Whippets, don't stop til they have chased down their prey, lost it in the bush, or they drop from exhaustion. This behavior should never be the case with an Anatolian.

Sighthound people want dogs that have so much prey drive that they will knowingly chase a plastic bag for the sheer enjoyment of running it down and 'killing' it. They know that a dog that is willing to chase plastic, something that it knows is not real, is a dog with enough prey drive to chase a living animal to its death. We don't want that level of prey drive in our Anatolians. We don't want a dog so keen to chase something that it will go after a plastic bag on a string. We don't even want a dog that is going to be lured away from its flock by a rabbit bounding past. We do want a dog with a bubble that includes its livestock, a boundary, beyond which it is unwilling to go, no matter what the attraction or lure. And when the coyotes show up? We want a dog that will confront the threat and either run the predator away from the flock, or, if there is no other option, kill the predator in order to keep the stock safe, and do it all without leaving its flock unattended.

There are breeds of dogs where high prey drive is a boon. The Anatolian is not one of them. If we, as breeders and owners of Anatolians do not pay close attention to the traits we are selecting for, by the events that we choose to title our dogs in and the characteristics required to succeed in those events, we will lose our breed. This goes for all venues. We must keep the working temperament of the Anatolian Shepherd Dog at the heart of our breeding programs. If you do not have the luxury of keeping dogs with livestock, then I implore you to seek out breeding partners who work their dogs and who select for correct working temperament. No title, in any venue, no ribbon or prize, is worth losing our breed.

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