
Protecting against predation – sheep and goats

For sheep and goats, stock loss from predators can be an ongoing issue, particularly with the arrival of lambs and kids.

According to the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), wild dogs are the major predators of sheep, lambs and goats in Queensland. Domestic dogs are also responsible for some attacks on sheep and goat herds.

However, DAF does recommend caution when attributing predation as the cause of death. This is because livestock can disappear for other reasons or have other health issues, and predators may scavenge on animals that have died from other causes. The best way to be sure of the cause is to examine carcasses soon after death – before they decompose and before scavenging birds and animals remove evidence.

Importantly, there are several things that can be done to reduce predation or minimise the risk of predation.

ERECT AND MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE EXCLUSION FENCING

Well-designed, well-built and maintained dog/pest exclusion fencing can provide an effective first line of defence against dogs and other pest animals. Wild dogs are intelligent animals that quickly identify and then take advantage of breaches or weak spots in a fence. Research demonstrates that when a wild dog approaches a fence it will try to:

- push through the fence, at or below snout-level
- burrow under the fence (usually where the fence meets the ground)
- climb or jump the fence (although this is learned behaviour and rarely seen in wild dogs).

To effectively control wild dogs, fences should:

- be at least 950mm high
- incorporate an effective barrier at and below snout-level (450mm)
- incorporate an effective barrier along the bottom of the fence
- address potential weak spots such as those at gateways, public roadways, gullies and flood-ways
- be regularly monitored and maintained, especially for the first three months while local dogs become accustomed to any new fencing.

KEEP VULNERABLE STOCK IN WELL-FENCED ENCLOSURES AT NIGHT

As predators attack mostly at night, another effective strategy can be to enclose stock at night near buildings and by using an extra protected enclosure. If this space is well-lit, the risk can be further reduced.

SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING FOR PREDATORS

Regular monitoring of property for signs of possible predators (e.g. scats, territory marking, or scratchings) can be useful. Some sites use electronic surveillance and sensor lighting to help reduce the number of unwanted visitors. Camera traps can also be a useful tool in detecting and identifying predators when placed along roadsides or tracks.

DEVELOP A GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE NEIGHBOURS

Having a good relationship with neighbours is another way to ensure you have an extra means to monitor the safety of stock. Neighbours are a great source of information and can be an extra layer of local vigilance.

USE GUARDIAN OR PROTECTION ANIMALS TO HELP PROTECT THE HERD

Using livestock guardian animals is a natural and humane way to limit predators. While guardian animals are occupying a territory, the probability of predators re-invading is low. The types of guardian animals often used include dogs, donkeys, alpacas and llamas to guard sheep, goats and breeding cattle from wild dogs and other predators.

It's important to remember that no single strategy alone will ensure success against predation. A combination of practices such as those suggested above can provide effective predator control and protect livestock.

For more information contact the DAF Customer Service Centre on 13 25 23 or email info@daf.qld.gov.au.

ELIMINATE ATTRACTANTS SUCH AS OPEN COMPOSTS

Sometimes predators are attracted to a property for other reasons, such as food scraps left on composts. Speedy removal of food scraps can help reduce the risk of attracting other animals. This does not include removing food from your livestock.