

Livestock Guard Dog Case Study

Dobbins Ranch,
Val Verde County

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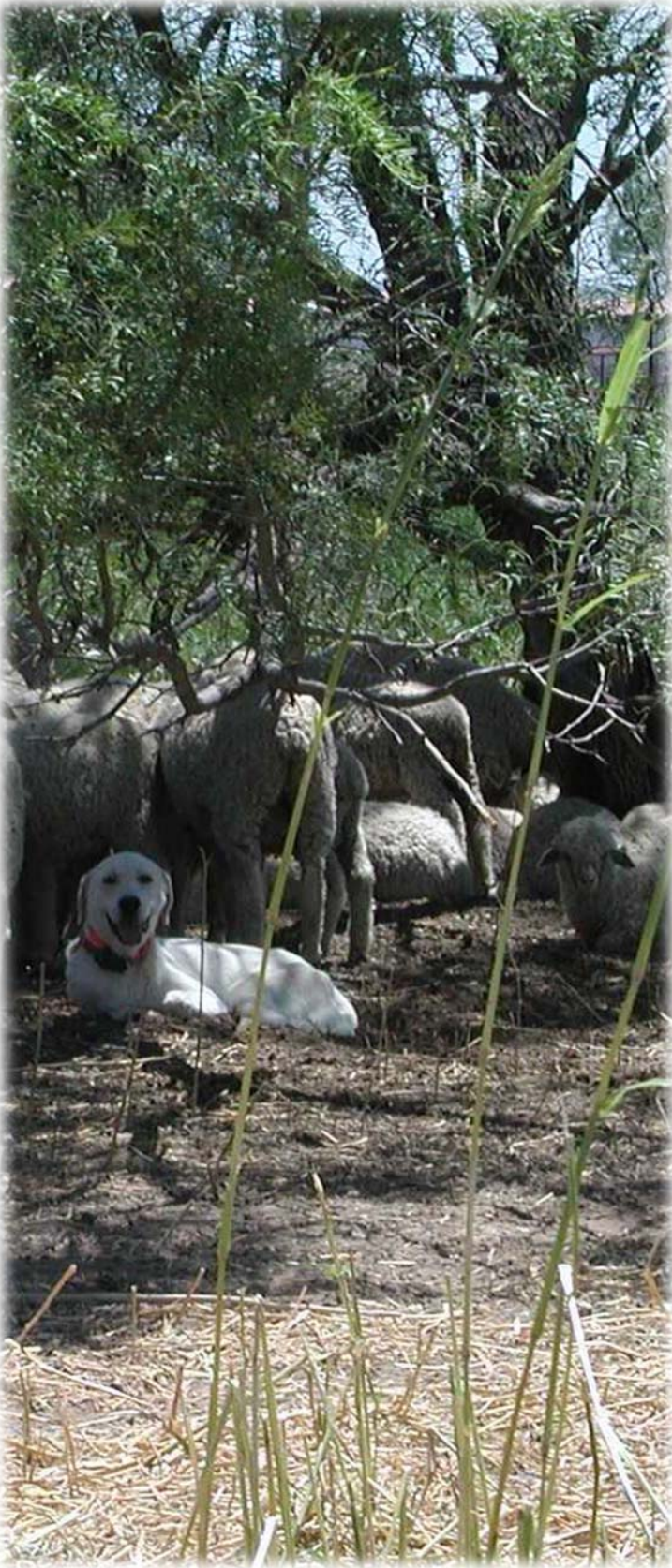
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Scenario

A ranch near Comstock, Texas, was used in this project. The ranch consists of four large pastures that are all within a contiguous area. Dogs were placed with newly purchased ewe lambs, which started lambing toward the end of the project. Much of the ranch is accessible, with fences in moderate condition.

Overall Management Plan

Two bonded livestock guardian dogs (5R Stock Dogs, Billings MT) were placed with 30 hairsheep ewe lambs. The sheep and dogs were held in a small working pen (2,000 sq ft²) for three nights, after which they were released into a 14-acre trap for three more days. Then they were released into a 900-acre pasture with 200 head sheep. The sheep distribute across the pasture and are typically seen in small groups.

General Observations

The sheep and dogs were checked every couple days or when possible. Both dogs stayed around the set of pens for six weeks after the initial release of sheep into the pasture. One dog was taken into town for treatment due to a dramatic decline in body condition around week six. After a week of proper medication and monitoring, the dog was returned to the initial bonding area. Following their separation, the dogs began to travel more and have bonded with small groups of sheep since.

Predation

No predation has been noticed, as lambing did not begin until nearly the end of the one year trial.

Problems

Initial bonding with sheep didn't succeed but once dogs started to be noticed with sheep, things have been running smoothly.

Lamb Crop

N/A

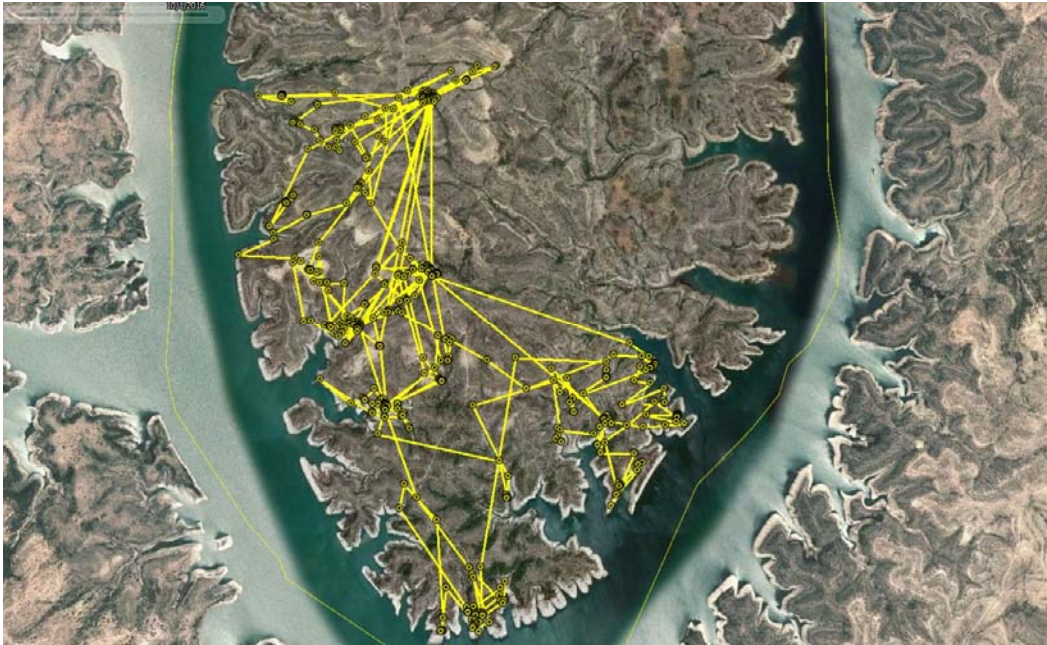


Figure 1. The map contains the hourly GPS locations of one dog during a 45 day period in late fall. The pasture is a peninsula along the Rio Grande River and is approximately 800 acres.

Guard Dog Movement

At minimum, the LGD travelled an average of ~2.25 miles per day. This was determined by measuring the distance between points taken every hour. Their home range was calculated to be ~521-acres. Home range was determined by assessing where 95% of the GPS points were located.

Question and Answer

- **What were the most positive benefits of the program?**
Knowledge gained about the project and peace of mind knowing that something is always around.
- **What was the greatest challenge with the program?**
Keeping feeders full and coons from tearing them up.
- **What are your plans for the future related to guard dogs?**
Keep with the program as I feel it is very beneficial towards my operation.
- **What would you have done differently?**
Nothing everything seems to be running smooth.