

The Anatolian shepherd dog

¹ Cyril Stannard

Anatolian shepherd dogs have been bred in Turkey for the past 6 000 years to guard livestock against predators such as wolves and bears. They were bred to survive under difficult conditions and temperatures. They vary in height from 71 cm to 90 cm and can weigh between 40 and 75 kg.

When one buys an Anatolian, one should make sure that it is from a reputable breeder who has experience with these dogs and who can produce appropriate pedigrees. One should also ensure that the puppy has a clean bill of health and that its parents are Hip dysphasia free. This condition will affect the dog's hips and may inhibit mobility as an adult, which limits the length of a dog's working life.

The bonding process starts at six weeks of age and is a very important part in the whole habituation process, as it will determine the success of the dog as a guarder. Placed with livestock at six to eight weeks of age, the pup should spend the next six weeks in a small kraal (about 15m²) to ensure adequate bonding with the livestock. It is important that there is adequate cover and a safe place for the puppy to eat, drink, sleep and hide in order to prevent injury from inquisitive livestock. The livestock should not have access to the puppy's food as this can be quite costly and might lead to resource guarding by the dog in the future.

During this initial introductory period, the puppy might exhibit some forms of undesirable behaviour. Things that the

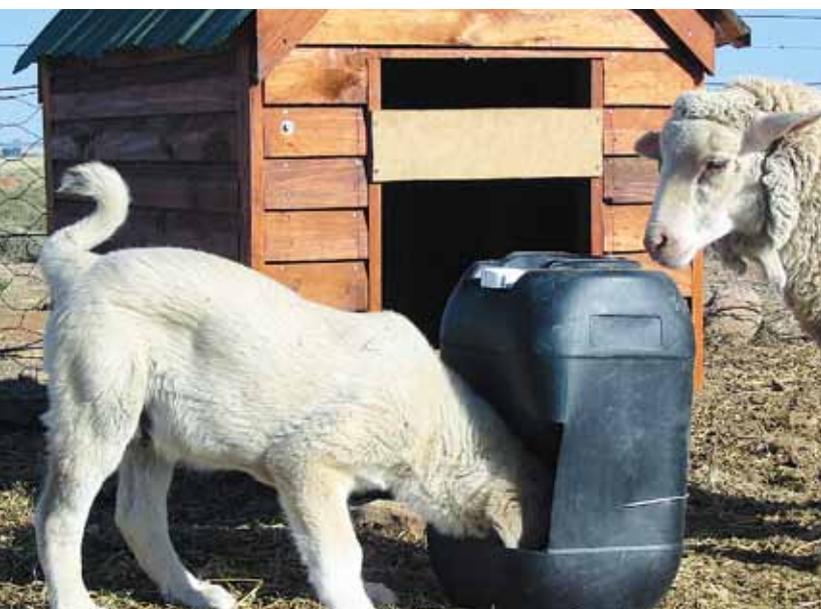
owner should look out for are rough play, ear biting of young animals, pulling wool and chasing. This is typical puppy play behaviour. It is important that all of these are corrected immediately by voice and body dominance, as they could lead to future problems. The dog should never be hit or beaten, as this can destroy its guarding instinct. Verbal reprimanding will usually be enough, but in cases where these problems persist, commercially available veterinary deterrents like Avert (a bitter tasting product) can be made use of in order to stop the biting and wool pulling. In some cases the pup will start to show its willingness to work and force its way out of the small kraal to join the bigger herd. In reported cases puppies as young as 12-14 weeks old joined their herds and kept up with them. In one case a 14 week old puppy kept a leopard away from a sick calf!

During the training stage, care must be taken to introduce the puppy to everything it might come into contact with on the farm i.e. goats, cattle, other dogs, horses and labourers. There is no need for physical contact. Sight and smell will be enough. Care must be taken to ensure that the puppy's veterinary health care is up to date

and that internal and external parasites get treated regularly. Large-breed dog food of superior quality must be fed according to the specifications on the packet to ensure correct bone and muscle development of the dog until at least eighteen months of age. The owner of the dog must not encourage bonding of the dog to any human, but rather to the herd. However, the dog must be able to be handled and preferably collar-trained for easy veterinary care.

The next stage of the pup's development, depending on the strength of the bond between it and the herd, involves the puppy and the training herd going out into a small camp. This is done to boost the pup's confidence and to check the bond between them. During this stage the puppy will get to know the area around him. The bigger herd can also now be introduced to the pup. This can be done by placing the pup and its herd in adjacent camps. The introduction into the herd must be done under close supervision because when the dog enters the camp there is a chance that the herd will scatter and the dog may instinctively chase after them. This will result in the vicious cycle of the herd not trusting the dog and consequent chasing. The young dog might also start to roam. The solution to this is to keep it with the herd and when found away from its herd, chase it back to the herd where it belongs. Make this a very unpleasant experience - the young dog has to learn that any place other than with its herd is not a nice place to be.

When the time for lambing arrives, one ought to pay extra attention to the young dog to ensure that it does not interfere with the lambing and that the right foundation and principles are laid for future lambing behaviour. One can walk the dog on the



Good cover and food are essential



A training kraal

leash amongst the ewes that are lambing or spend some time in the vicinity of the dog and ewes to check what the dog is doing. If the dog bothers ewes that are busy lambing, verbally reprimand it from a distance (a rugby whistle might help). Also make sure that the dog is not keeping ewes away from

their lambs. The second lambing season should be better but one will still have to keep a watchful eye on the event.

The dog should be spayed or neutered when it is eight months old. This will remove the hormonal effect of sexual maturing dogs

and will ensure that the male does not go wandering after females and that the female does not attract strange males to the herd.

When the dog is close to a year old, it should have started to guard its livestock in the veld. If care was taken with the training and bonding processes the dog should be working well, but one should be aware that there are still possible problems to look out for. One of these is roaming. If this becomes a problem, one should make use of a run wire in the kraal. The dog should be tied to the run wire for at least 3-5 days, ensuring that it cannot injure itself. This should teach the dog to stay in one place.

Anatolians grow into calm, mature dogs which will be loyal in protecting the animals they have bonded to. They keep predators away by their barking, marking, presence and ultimately by fighting. They are bred as livestock guarding dogs but, ultimately, their success will depend upon the training they received from their owners. These dogs will gladly offer their lives for their herd in order to protect what is theirs. ■



A well bonded young dog and herd

¹ Cheetah Outreach, The De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust, 082 927 2729, anatolian@vodamail.co.za

