**DONKEYS ARE NOT GUARD ANIMALS**

by Paulette Quiroga-Jacklin

 It's a myth that ALL donkeys will naturally act as guardians. We've heard and seen firsthand donkeys becoming victims themselves and/or flocks being seriously injured or even killed because of the assumption that all donkeys will act as guardians. Sad to say it, but some donkeys themselves have been known to injure and even kill newborn sheep, calves or goats because of playing too rough with them or in thinking the newborn is an intruder.

It is true that some (the operative word here is "some") donkeys have made excellent guardians and are successfully used for herd protection for livestock. However, there remains a lot of mis-information associated with this claim. It is our hope that the following information will clarify a few misconceptions:

\* Donkeys that make good herd protectors against small predators are inherently wary of any canine (foxes, coyotes, etc.), and in many cases, that includes your family pet.

\* Some donkeys may bray out and focus their attention on the intruder but will not make any attempt to oust the intruder from the enclosure.

\* Some donkeys have been known to chase, stomp and even kill newborn livestock if not accustom to new comers in their territory. This is especially true of jacks and geldings.

\* Donkeys can fend off and even kill most predators, but they cannot protect themselves or other livestock from predators larger than they are or predators attacking in packs.

\* **Donkeys should NEVER be left out on a pasture with livestock 24/7 if in a lush pasture environment. Too much access to plush green pastures is detrimental to their health.**\* Some donkeys (especially the younger males) may play too rough with small livestock and end up accidentally injuring or killing them.

\* Donkeys do not thrive without the company of at least one other donkey (some live well with horses, some do not). They are herd animals. This is important for a multitude of reasons, but the most important one is rest and sleep. Donkeys will not be able to get in adequate sleep without another equine standing guard. This lack of sleep results in deprivation; which can create health and behavioral issues.

\* Donkeys enjoy interacting with humans. If left alone without daily human interaction, they may become more difficult to handle.

\* Minis are often wanted as guardians (probably because their size is similar to their charges). Minis have that "killer donkey" mindset and are willing and ready to take on any predator. Problem is, their size is their worst enemy. There's no way they will be able to successfully take on a larger predator and they end up being victims themselves.

I'm giving you this information because you CAN get a good donkey guardian but there's a lot of things you have to know first. I know of a few people who have donkeys as guardians and they are very successful. However? I've also seen the unsuccessful ones and it usually always ends in death or maiming of the livestock that someone is trying to protect. I hope I've given you enough information so that you can be well educated in the prospect of using donkeys for guardians and I wish you Good Luck with your search.

**Predator Contro**l       By Kim Baerg     www.eaglehillequine.com
The whole guard donkey system revolves around imprinting the natural social ability of the donkey and the donkey’s natural dislike for members of the dog family. Donkeys are herd animals; if they lack the company of other equines, most donkeys will adopt sheep or other livestock as their own. However only careful selection, training and care will make the project a success. Selection should be based on socialization and acceptance to stock, size, gender and general personality.

Types of livestock that have been successfully used with donkeys include sheep, goats, poultry, cattle, pigs, llamas, horses and fallow deer. Predators that they are effective against are coyotes, foxes, bobcats, eagles, feral hogs, domestic dogs and feral dogs, NOTE, NOT BEARS, COUGERS, and WOLVES ETC!
Donkeys protect by vision, hearing and smell. They need to be alert and detect intruders with these senses. They physically attack a dog with ears back, teeth bared and savage bray and psychologically by just being an alert presence between stock and a predator. Predators avoid the area. Loud, noisy braying works against bears and cougars and also alerts the farmer, particularly at night. Donkeys are afraid of these larger predators and will not physically attack them, but will bray loudly and run to safety.

GENDER: Jennies are commonly used with success but can be unpredictable during heat cycles. A jenny with a foal will sometimes chase sheep away from her baby being very distracted with the baby. Foals sometimes chase the sheep in play. One solution to this problem is to temporarily separate for up to one week after foaling. Jennies can be more costly and more difficult to find.
GELDINGS: are preferred as they are usually stronger, louder and more aggressive in chasing away predators. Placing two geldings together with the sheep during training works well as they become used to the sheep and have each other to play with. Make sure they are gelded as immature animals, and be prepared to try various solutions during the rough playing stage [1 -3 years].
JACKS are usually too aggressive and unpredictable to be promoted as good guard animals. They should be kept by knowledgeable breeders.

Raise guard donkeys away from dogs, and do not test the donkey by teasing it with a dog. Do not allow farm dogs to become too friendly with the donkey. Avoid or limit the use of stock dogs around donkeys. Buying from a specialized breeder might be a little more costly but will reduce the risk to livestock and increase the chance for a successful program. Donkey’s aggressive tendencies towards familiar dogs can be tamed, and they will eventually tolerate the farm dog.

**NO BABY IS A GUARDIAN**
By American Donkey and Mule Association Staff

When it comes to livestock guardians, there are some simple truths. CAPS used on purpose here, as we cannot word this strongly enough.
NO BABY ANIMAL OF ANY KIND is a guardian. Not donkeys, not dogs, not llamas, not human children. You would not put your five year old child out to guard a flock with a shotgun, would you? Would you put your four week old pup out to guard the henhouse? Your newborn donkey? The answer is no, you would not.
NOT EVERY DONKEY WILL GUARD. Many will not!!! Jacks should never, EVER be used for guarding!!! Yes, we know there are people that say their animals are just fine and they have used a jack for years…they are the lucky ones, or they don’t see the missing lamb/kid/calf and realize it might have been the donkey, not the stray dog or coyote. Jacks will often traumatize and kill smaller livestock. There are more records of it happening then ‘’ not ’’ happening. Just as every dog will not guard or scent track or whatever their breed purpose is [not all German Shepherd dogs are good police dogs], not every donkey will guard. Period. Your choice for a livestock guard donkey should be a jennet or gelding over the age of three [past the teen years] that has already been raised around livestock and proven itself.
Young equines of any kind, be they donkey, horse, mule, or zebra hybrid, are overly playful. They haven’t finished growing in body or in mindset. This rough play is what causes injury and death to smaller animals. Don’t use youngsters. Period. Younger donkeys with a steady, reliable mom and contact but not necessarily immersion with a mixed flock are the best candidates for later guard duties.
No guard animal of any size or type is proof against packs of feral dogs. Feral packs can kill for bloodlust and fun, and your guard animal may be taken down as well. For this reason, smaller donkeys, larger slower donkeys, single llamas, all of these animals can be targets. Each situation, location, flock/herd dynamics and potential guard has to be weighed and studied.
Don’t risk the life of your potential guard animal by making mistakes that will endanger lives. We have plenty of reports that show what goes wrong – read them, learn, and don’t repeat.