



Socialisation

Before the development of mountaineering and hiking as leisure activities, shepherds worked with livestock guardian dogs on remote pastures: such areas included the Alps.

Among other things, the role of these dogs was to protect the herd from cattle thieves: they would therefore also react aggressively to human presence. Today, the owners of livestock guardian dogs aim to ensure that their dogs only react to certain disturbances, while ignoring familiar stimuli: even as puppies they become accustomed to walkers and cyclists, to people with dogs and to traffic and machinery noise.

Recommended behaviour

- Keep your distance from grazing animals (300 metres)
- Never approach a herd head-on
- Never walk through a herd or group of animals
- Keep your distance from livestock guardian dogs
- Never walk through a herd where you can see livestock guardian dogs
- Walk past slowly and avoid any hectic movement
- Runners and mountain runners should go at walking pace
- Get off your bike and push it past the herd

Livestock guardian dogs display multi-stage defensive behaviour patterns. First they give a signal by barking. Persons not familiar with the herd should stop at this moment.

Only move on when the dogs have stopped barking (as the dogs now see the situation as harmless). Avoid eye contact with the livestock guardian dog but do not turn away. Try to remain calm. Do not shout, do not throw objects and do not point a walking stick or pole at the dog.

If the dogs do not calm down, turn back. Walk slowly backwards and go round the herd (in an arc of at least 500 metres).



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What to do when encountering livestock guardian dogs



in co-operation with the AG Weidekultur in Südtiroler **BL** Bildungszentrum



Livestock guardian dogs are working dogs. They protect the herd, whether sheep, goats, cattle, horses or chickens. Livestock guardian dogs live within the herd of grazing animals. They are extremely vigilant even when dozing. If they detect a danger, they are very quickly back on their feet again to defend the herd.

Livestock guardian dogs have been bred for such work for over 2,000 years now. Their coats are very dense, keeping them warm and repelling moisture. These dogs feel most comfortable outdoors with the herd: they have no need for a kennel. They are part of the herd and they move with it.

Information signs

These provide information at the entrance to pastures where livestock guardian dogs are present. There exists no standard signage in South Tyrol, so signs may look different: the behaviour rules are however the same.

Livestock guardian dogs can have very different roles:

- on their home pasture, usually behind a fence
- on all pastures in valleys where grazing is licensed
- on mountain pastures:
 - free with the herd during the day;
 - in a fenced-in night pen;
 - where wolves, jackals or bears frequently occur, there will be more than two dogs, some inside and some outside the night pen.

Carefully selected and socialised dogs always stay with the herd. Short forays for investigative and marking purposes are normal. Livestock guardian dogs leave their mark near the herd: this alone can deter predators.

Do you have a dog with you?

Livestock guardian dogs see unknown dogs as a threat to the herd, as dogs and wolves are descended from the same species.

Jan Boner, Advisor at the Plantahof in Graubünden/ Grisons, recommends checking on the presence of livestock guardian dogs in herds before any tour (see interactive map Herdenschutz Schweiz www.protectiondestroupeaux.ch/map).



To be on the safe side, choose a different destination for an outing with your dog.

The areas where livestock guardian dogs work in South Tyrol are not always indicated, so observe the following advice: Keep your dog on a short lead when walking past a herd. Dogs can run after grazing animals and frighten them, or confront animals that can defend themselves, such as cows.

If livestock guardian dogs get in your way, go round the herd (in an arc of at least 500 metres). If this is not possible, turn back.

Never hold your dog in your arms when a livestock guardian dog approaches.

Only in an extreme emergency, i.e. if livestock guardian dogs are approaching in a threatening manner, should you let your dog off its lead so that he/she can communicate freely or escape.