

Big Dogs Save Big Cats in Africa

An endangered species gets help from man's best friend.

• Gigi Ragland



THE BIG DOGS IN THE PICTURES MIGHT look like your regular farm dog protecting sheep or herds of goats except they have a special mission. These Anatolian Shepherd dogs perform double-duty; not only do they guard livestock but in doing so they help preserve an endangered species—cheetahs to be exact.

Dogs saving cats? And not just your ordinary house cat, but big cats in Africa? As unlikely a scenario as that might seem, the Livestock Guarding Program developed by Dr. Laurie Marker, founder and executive director of the Cheetah Conservation Fund has achieved great success with the livestock and wildlife management technique in Namibia.

Dr. Marker explains, “It’s important to understand that if you want to secure a future for the cheetah, you need to secure the livelihoods of the people who live in close proximity to cheetahs. So we had to find a way to help the communal farmers that lived in cheetah country reduce their losses to predators. Anatolian shepherds and Kangal dogs have been bred for millennia to guard flocks of sheep and goats from bears and wolves in Turkey, and it occurred to me the dogs could be very effective here in Africa with our predators.”

Standing at 27 to 29 inches in height, the massive Turkish Anatolian Shepherd dogs appear quite intimidating due to their large, muscular stature. Anatolian Shepherds are bred for guarding livestock making them a good choice for the program reinforcing CCF’s main mission of the conservation of cheetahs and their ecosystems.

“They scare predators away with their imposing presence and ferocious bark,” says Liz Georges, CCF communication coordinator. “That includes ALL predators,” she adds (including leopards, cheetahs, and hyaenas). The dogs move between the stock and the predator or threat, then fiercely bark until the predator leaves to seek out an easier meal. Since the dogs are raised with sheep and goats as a puppy they exhibit attentive, loyal and protective behavior towards the livestock. Their short-haired coat adapts well to the hot and arid climate of Namibia. Plus, their keen ability to work unsupervised in the vast savannah and open spaces of the countryside makes them well suited for the job of a livestock guarding dog.

The CCF breeds, places and monitors Anatolian Shepherds, and now has added Kangal dogs to the program. Puppies are usually placed at eight weeks so they can bond with their herd and begin learning how to guard their furry friends. “The dogs are very effective, reducing loss to predation in the herds they guard by 80-100 percent,” confirms Georges. The organization has placed over 450 dogs since 1994 when the program began.

Dr. Marker believes the farmers hold the cheetah’s future in their hands. Chased out by

larger and more formidable predators from their natural and protected vast habitats, the cheetah has moved onto agricultural lands in many parts of Africa preying on small animals like sheep and goats for meals. For the most part, farmers saw cheetahs as pests reducing their livelihood. Now, with the educational programs that CCF has in place, subsistence and communal farmers are discovering non-lethal solutions to the wildlife conflict. With the success of the Livestock Guarding Dog program and other education programs reaching more and more farmers, the CCF is making a significant difference in helping to reduce the harmful impact of livestock/wildlife conflict in Namibia. The happy ending to our story is that CCF is now assisting other countries to begin programs. So there is hope for curbing the reduction of the endangered cheetahs.

Georges exclaims, “This year we had five litters and placed over 40 puppies! Which is good because there is a two-year waiting list currently for dogs. We’ve also expanded the program, sending four puppies to Tanzania to the Ruaha Carnivore Project. This makes the fourth country that we’ve exported dogs to so that they can start their own Livestock Guarding Dog program.”



◀ GIGI RAGLAND is a fan of Bluegrass music, wildflower hikes and wild animals including fidos and felines of all breeds.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CHEETAH CONSERVATION FUND



PHOTOGRAPHY: KOBUKI TIBBY OF THE MAASAI CONSERVATION FUND. COURTESY OF INFINITE SAFARI ADVENTURES (SIDEBAR)

Just another day on the job for this big dog.



DOG COLLARS FOR AFRICA

Avid dog lovers, Alan and Diane Feldstein found there is plenty of wildlife to love in Africa, but they still have plenty of Fido love to give too. The former Los Angelenos moved to Tanzania and now operate a successful custom adventure and wildlife safari company Infinite Safari Adventures (infinitesafariadventure.com). But their enthusiasm for the personable and friendly people of Africa led them to a new venture: Handcrafted Maasai Beaded Dog Collars where 100% of the proceeds will go back to the village funding needy projects such as building a water well and providing a school for the children.

After meeting with Patrick Olepapatiti a Maasai warrior and visiting their village in the Amboseli region of Kenya, Alan Feldstein worked with Olepapatiti on developing a small business plan that would benefit the people of the Ongata-Rangai village. On multiple visits, Feldstein and his wife were showered with beautiful beaded gifts of jewelry, belts and cellphone carriers handmade by the women of Ongata-Rangai village. "They are amazing bead artists," he says. Since the Feldsteins are such big dog lovers they brainstormed the idea of creating dog collars. "I told Patrick and the women that I would fund all the supplies and that 100% of the proceeds would go back to the women to use to contribute the cost of the well. I would also match any other donations," Feldstein adds. The cowhide collars are individually beaded and no two designs are alike.

If you would like your pup to sport one of these colorful works of practical art, look for more information on the Infinite Safari Adventure's website at: www.ffdo.gs/OcnP6t