

DONKEYS AS LIVESTOCK GUARDIANS

MEREDITH HODGES - LUCKY THREE RANCH

- Learn how to manage jacks
- How to work with your Longears to establish boundaries
- Donkeys don't make good “pets”
- How to protect yourself from aggressive donkey behavior
- Never turn your back on a jack, or jenny donkey with a foal
- Using herd dogs to protect your animals and more!

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Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

The mules are in the corral. Welcome to Mule Talk!, and I'm Cindy K. Roberts, your host. And our author, TV personality, and world-renowned mule trainer, Meredith Hodges of the Lucky Three Ranch.

Meredith Hodges:

Well, it's always good to be here, Cindy (laughs).

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Well, you know, I'm very excited about today because we're gonna talk about donkeys as livestock guardians and I, for one, have had the perspective that they would make good guardians for your herd. You're gonna share with us what, what you have learned. So, take it away.

Meredith Hodges:

Alrighty. Well, there are a lotta people that really believe that they're good livestock guardians, but these people that think that are not really privy to the information about donkey behavior and what a donkey is inwardly, instinctually all about. And you really, really need to know that.

Now, in my experience way back when, I, I bred and showed donkeys and mules for 20 years. And in doing so, I learned quite a bit about their character, their temperament. And, you know, you see articles written about, "Oh yeah, well, you don't wanna use a jack because, uh, a jack is a very aggressive animal." In fact, when I first moved to Colorado, uh, there was an Appaloosa horse breeder that

lived a little ways away, and he was asking me what I was doing on my farm. And then when I told him that I was gonna breed mules, he goes, "Well, you have a jack?" And I said, "Oh, yeah." He said, "Girl, don't you dare go in the pen with that jack. You're gonna get hurt if you do." And I told him, "Well, this jack was born on my mom's ranch. I've known him since he was just a baby and he'll be fine," you know? And this guy goes, "Just don't turn your back on him." He says, "You better pay attention to him all the time."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

And so in articles that I've written, I tell people, "A donkey jack can be your best friend or your worst enemy."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh.

Meredith Hodges:

Because, because donkeys possess all the wonderful characteristics that are particular to donkeys, intelligence, strength, easy maintenance, suitability for many equine sports, and probably the most important, the innate affectionate attitude that grabs us all. You need to realize though, that he's still, jack is an intact male, often governed by the hormones in his body. When his nature takes over, the jack, the jack's conscious thought is greatly diminished, and he can become quite hazardous to your health. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

Yeah, and a lotta people say, "Oh, well, like, you know, Little Jack Horner, I raised him. Oh, that, that's fine." But after this guy told me about that, I started looking at Little Jack Horner a whole lot differently, and his training became even more important. Because a lotta jacks are kept in solitude if they're breeding animals, and that's all they're used for. And you know, the jack's aggressiveness is often masked by his sedate and affectionate attitude, but his attitude can arise in a split second and do more damage than even a stallion can do.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

Um, usually in a horse, there's an awkwardness, indecisive, in an agitated stallion that will allow you time to get out of the way. But the jack reacts strongly, swiftly, and right on target, allowing you little or no time for retreat. By keeping a few simple things in mind, you can greatly reduce your chance of injury when handling jacks.

But I gotta say at this point, it's not just jacks. I remember when I was breeding my jennets, I had one, Serendipity, and when she was three years old, I bred her and she foaled when she was four. That donkey had been in my pocket, the sweetest little girl ever. And when she had her baby, I went, "Oh, Sera, this is so cool. Look at your little baby."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

And I walked into the stall. That donkey came after me, teeth bared, front feet striking, and I cleared that four-and-a-half-foot wall like a pole vaulter getting-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

... out of the way.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

And then I realized, "I have to catch this girl and tie her up if I'm gonna do anything with the foal."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

And at that first point was when the foal needed to get the enema and get cleaned up right after birth. And I thought, "I gotta do this right now." So, I got two of my guys to help me, and we managed to get her cornered, and I pushed the foal right up into the front, right? So, she knew we weren't trying to take h- the foal away, and it was a little jackhold.

So, she was, she was okay with that. His name was Excelsior. She let me put the halter on then, and I just immediately tied her. You know, the guys were waiting right there just to back me up. And I tied her up, and then we did what we had to do with the foal. And then from that time forward, every time I had to do anything with either one of 'em, I tied her up. She knew she was gonna be tied. So, that became the routine.

Now, you know, if routine is important for a mule, it's even more important for a donkey.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh.

Meredith Hodges:

Because donkeys need to know what to expect. Otherwise, they are going to get defensive in a split second, like I told you about the jacks. And even if you castrate them and their geldings, they still have that instinct inside of them that is tempered when you geld them-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

... but it doesn't get rid of it. They're still gonna have a lot of male tendencies. And a lotta people like to use donkeys as pets, and particularly the mini donkeys. But let me tell you something, a mini donkey can be every bit as vicious as the bigger ones. In fact, you're better off with a mammoth than you are with, say, a large standard or a mini male-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

... becau- or, or even a female, because, uh, the smaller ones are more agile and they're quicker. They can be a whole lot more dangerous than your larger, more cumbersome mammoth donkeys. And so, you know, you need to keep these things in mind when you're dealing with a donkey.

And if you watch donkey behaviors, now I had a lot of, uh, animals in a rather large space, and the space makes a big difference too. When you have a large space and you a lotta animals in it, you will notice that your donkeys will hang out in their own group. They like their own family groups, and they don't often mingle with horses and mules. They don't really like that. You'll see a donkey mingling with horses and mules, and other livestock, when they're the one and only donkey in the group.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

Once they have ano- another donkey, then you'll see them beginning to hang on the outskirts by themselves in a pair. They, they don't like to mingle with other animals. You know, you gotta keep this in mind too. And these, these guys, if they... The reason that I went ahead and decided to do all the things with Little Jack Horner, like training him in the way that I was training the mules, it was because he was running the fence and indicating to me that he wanted to participate. But that wasn't the only reason, because I thought he was getting a little bit psycho and a little bit bored with things.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

And I was afraid that that was going to start turning into some more aggressive behaviors when he's handled.

The other thing I might say at this point too is that I do not put halters on my animals when they're unsupervised in a pasture or in their pens or whatever. They're very dangerous. They can end up getting snagged on something and they can hurt the animal. But with these overly aggressive behaviors that Little Jack Horner had, I had to have a way to get some leverage with him. And a lotta people told me, "Oh, well, put a chain over his nose." And I did that for a little while, but then I noticed he was getting a knot on his nose-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

... from the chain. And when you start looking at donkeys, you will see that there are a lotta knots on the noses from people using chains over their nose.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

Yeah. Well, I was showing Little Jack Horner, and that was rather unsightly for showing, but it was too late to do anything about it. That, those kinds of knots will never go down once they're established enough.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

Other people were telling me, "Well, put the chain under his chin." So, I tried that, and then he got a knot under his chin.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Uh-oh.

Meredith Hodges:

And then I figured out that the only way that you could really use a stud chain would be to go through the left ring on the halter, under the chin, through the ring on the other side, and then attach the chain up at the throat latch, which keeps that chain more balanced around his face and doesn't put that much pressure underneath the chin-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

... which was fine for showmanship. But prolonged use of it, like, everyday stuff, it was gonna do the same thing under the chin-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

... as if you just looped it under the chin. So, that brought on my creative thinking on how can I do this and get the leverage, not only from my donkeys, who a lotta times would just decide they were gonna go somewhere I didn't wanna go, but the mules were bolting and running and, and stuff with me too.

And so I discovered that if I just took the cotton lead rope and twisted it, taut it, and brought it forward through the noseband and up and over their nose so that when I pulled on it, it would kinda crunch onto and squeeze their nose down lower than the noseband, it wouldn't hit those fragile bones as hard as the chain did, and it didn't put any marks on 'em, but what it did do is it cut off the air supply somewhat and restricted their ability to breathe.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

And when I did that, then I would just, you know... They would go up against it and pull it tight, and it would come down and restrict the airflow going in through their nostrils. And I would just stand still and hold the slack. And then what they, figuring it out, of course, would walk back towards me and realize that it was a quick release. So, that's what I call that restraint that I use is a quick-release restraint.

And that's how I got their attention. And once I did that, I didn't have to use the chains anymore at all. And those ropes, you know, their lead rope, soft cotton lead rope, never put any marks on them or anything, but it did afford a negotiation, if you will, between the two of us. And as long as I wasn't pulling on it, and as long as I was standing still, it was a fair negotiation because they had control over how tight it was gonna be.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

You know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

So, that really helped quite a bit.

You know, a lot of these people are getting younger donkeys out there, and they're so cute and they, they get babies and they're so soft and fuzzy. There is nothing cuter than a baby donkey. I would go along-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

... with that (laughs) completely, you know? And so they think they're really cute and they put 'em in hammocks and they treat 'em like babies, and they let 'em jump up on their shoulders and they hug them and everything. But as I was saying, as they age, this instinct that they have just starts to surface at, like, three to four years old. Sometimes it takes a little longer, but most of the time it's between three and four years old. And the hormones start, start coming out, and they're just like teenagers and they're prone to get in trouble, and if you have allowed them to jump on you, that's what they're going to do. Now you got a bigger animal that you have to get off.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Uh-huh.

Meredith Hodges:

And they don't, they don't back up so easy. You know? Uh, when you're leading them, they don't even hardly go forward so easy, (laughs) you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

(laughs) You know, this is all a negotiation, "If you do this, then I'll do that and I'll do that, and you need to do this." And they're go, "Well, I'm not so sure I'm gonna do that. I'm stronger than you are and I can do anything I want," you know? "And

then I have to think about what you're trying to propose here, and if I think it's okay, then maybe I'll do it, but maybe I won't." You know?

And so that's kinda what you're faced with. So, I would say it's easier to begin their training and establish boundaries at a very young age. Do not let them jump on you. And if they come at you and they try to nip you, it's quite humane to go ahead and take the flat of your hand and smack 'em along the side of their mouth. And you'll get a really good aim after you've had to, had to do this a few times.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

And when they come at you like that, you just slap 'em with the palm of your hand. You say, "No," as loud as you can so it startles them, at which point they will probably decide it's best to just turn around and go away from you.

But in our training, we always carry a fanny pack full of oats, no other treats, no carrots, apples, or anything like that, or horse treats. When they come at you, you say, "No," and you put your hand up like a stop sign right in front of their face. And then they'll turn away from you and start to go away, but then you've done leading training and rewarded them with the oats. So, you reach in your fanny pack and you take a step forward and you go, "Thank you for giving me my space," and you extend your hand forward with some oats in it. And it will, they will kinda stop in their tracks and look back at you and then go, you go, "Yeah, that's right. Come back here. You just keep your space and you get rewarded for it."

And so what that does is after getting slapped a couple of times, they will learn to stop when you put your hand up like a stop sign and you won't even have to slap 'em. They'll come running at you because that's in their instincts too. That's a natural thing for a donkey to do is to come at you with his ears back, not necessarily teeth bared, but he looks like he's mean, but he's just chasing you. And in his mind, that's play. At that early stage, that is what it is. But isn't what animals do in the beginning is play time for sexual intercourse later?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

Those are the foreplay things that they do when they are gonna be trying to attract the females, if it's a jack, and the females respond to that with their own play

behaviors. But all those kinds of behaviors can be very detrimental to human health, unless you set these boundaries and make it really clear what you'll, you know, what you'll accept from them. And it needs to start early.

So, you don't wanna get a cute little donkey as a pet or anything like that because people generally do it with the idea that they don't have to put a lotta time in with these guys, but you actually have to put more time in training if you want them to be safe as they age. Because otherwise, they're gonna wind up attacking you.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, boy.

Meredith Hodges:

And especially if they're in a herd situation and it's feeding time, you can really put yourself at risk. This is also why, when we feed, we don't go into the pen and carry the hay with us and dump it out there. We dump our hay over the fence or into a feeder where that kind of exposure is not even there. You set 'em up for success by, if you've got several animals in a pen, you space at 16 feet apart, but you feed them so that you're on the outside of the fence. Because they're gonna engage in their "pecking-order play," quote, unquote, and you don't wanna get caught in the middle of all that.

The other thing is, is I knew a person down in Texas that showed a jack for probably what, 10, 15 years. The jack was as well-mannered as you would ever expect. And then I heard one day that the gal went out to feed him and he attacked her. He took her down.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

He jumped on top of her, grabbed her by the back of the neck, slung her to the ground, and then stomped her and, and broke her leg.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh.

Meredith Hodges:

And this, this just goes to show that, I mean, they had a, an impeccable relationship, or so she thought, but she got a little careless. You have to think of these things in these terms.

I never, after a while, turned my back on Little Jack Horner. Little Jack Horner was about as good as he could possibly be. But when I was listening to people about putting the chain over his nose and under his chin and all of that, didn't like the knots on the nose, didn't like the knots under the chin. And so I tried putting the chain in his mouth, but he was so willing to do everything that I asked him to do that when I went out there with the, the halter and I had the chain already on it, and so when I went to put it on, he would go ahead and open his mouth and grabbed the chain. Well, one day he got my thumb too. And-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, boy.

Meredith Hodges:

... he almost bit it completely off. But of course that wasn't his fault. That was my fault for teaching him that he had to take a chain in his mouth, you know? And that, that was the thing that changed my mind and, and, and made me go with this, what I call the quick twist, you know, with the lead rope, and that was much better.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

Because he had to wait while I fed that thing through after I had the halter already on, you know? And it was a much safer approach.

And so, you know, these guys, they learn exactly what you teach them. So, be careful what you teach them. If you let them jump on you, they will jump on you. If you think they're really cute when, when they're coming at you and they're being aggressive in play and they got their ears back, a lotta people will see that as, uh, kind of a scary aggression. It's play in their minds when they're young, you know? And it's even play when they get older. If they're really angry with you, their ears won't just be laid back. They'll be flat back. Their nostrils will be flared, their eyes will look mean, and they'll look like they're coming for ya. But most of the time, they're just chasing you 'cause they wanna play.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

And that's what they look like when they just kinda lay their ears back and let 'em go back. And you can see in their eyes, they're not mean. Their nostrils aren't flared like they're going to eat you alive.

And so if you look at it like they're mean and coming after you, and you turn around and run, you've established the game. If you stand your ground, like I said, and put your hand up like a stop sign and smack 'em if you need to, to make 'em stop coming at you, and establish that boundary really strong, then, you know, you will soon realize that they're not serious about attacking you. They just don't know the difference between this boundary and that boundary, and where they need to stop.

And when they're younger, it's easier to teach 'em to stop than it is once they get older. And especially, I, I mean, I use this with mules and donkeys. And if you get a rescue mule or buy yourself an older mule, you might find yourself with an animal that's pretty darn big coming at ya. But you still do the same thing. And that's so they can identify the boundary. If you start getting busy about setting boundaries, they're gonna look upon that as a game. That's called dodgeball (laughs).

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

They will engage. (laughs) They will engage. So, you know, chasing 'em around is not a good thing to do and letting them chase you is not a good thing to do.

Now, people have been pushing donkeys as guard animals since the early '90s that I can remember, and they use 'em for small livestock per- protection and even with cattle and predator control. And because donkeys have this instinct, they can be a formidable opponent for cats and dogs, and other smaller animals. But you have to be careful about what the, who the donkey's pastured with since it's in their nature to pursue and sometimes kill animals that are smaller and weaker than them. This is true in all donkeys, although some individual females tend to be more maternal and are not apt to go after smaller livestock. And when there's only one or two donkeys with the livestock, they don't tend to be as aggressive. The females tend to be better guardians for smaller livestock, but I don't even really recommend that.

The other thing to consider is whether or not they've been raised with the livestock they're expected to guard. When they're raised with other livestock, they feel more a part of that family, and I do mean family, and are less likely to do them harm. A donkey that's going to be ex- expected to guard livestock but wasn't raised with them should be carefully introduced to them over the fence for several weeks. Then if all seems to go well, you can introduce 'em in the same pen and watch for any signs of aggression. If there are signs of aggression after weeks of being separated, then they probably will never get along.

You have to remember that a donkey is not a predator, nor a prey animal that will necessarily get along with other livestock. Donkeys like to be herded with other donkeys.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

And if there's more than two of them, then they're going to ostracize any other animal that they're around, and they might start these games of chasing them. And if you have one with an aggre- overly aggressive personality, they will blend, but grudgingly, and if they engage in the games, they could get dangerous and injure the other animals, uh, or possibly even kill them.

They, donkeys come in three basic sizes. There, there are miniatures, standard donkeys, and mammoths. Our American donkeys are further designated by size, with your miniature donkeys are 36 inches or under, small standard donkeys are 36 to 42, standard donkeys are 42 inches to 48 inches, large standard donkeys are 48 to 56, and mammoth donkeys, the male's over 56 inches, the female's over 54 inches.

Miniature donkeys are never suitable guardians for any livestock at all. They're too small and they can fall victim to predators themselves. They simply cannot defend themselves. Standard donkey jennets are the most sought after for predator control. However, keep in mind they are prey animals and can fall victim to predators that are fairly large or predators that run in packs.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, wow.

Meredith Hodges:

Mammoth donkeys are simply too slow to react. They lack the quickness and the athleticism that it takes to combat a predator. Donkeys, uh, will never be able to guard against such predators as bears and mountain lions. There's just no way.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

So, when you put them out there with the livestock, then they are als- they are a prey animal, and they can become prey to these larger animals that will run them down if they stop to fight like they will want to do. If they're guarding a herd, their herd, uh, their territorial instinct and their protective instinct will often put them at risk that way. And like I said, they can't, they cannot defend themselves against packs of dogs and wolves and coyotes. That's just too much to ask for them or from them. They're not really guard animals.

Just like all livestock, donkeys need to be provided with adequate shelter from the elements, whether heat or cold, and they must be provided trace mineral salt blocks, clean fresh water. Their time on pasture will need to be monitored for optimum health, which will often clash with the grazing needs of sheep, goats, and other smaller livestock, and even with cattle.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

You have to re- yeah. So, they can't just be left out there with them.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right. Yeah, good point.

Meredith Hodges:

D- yeah. Donkeys are desert animals and really easy-keepers. It's not uncommon, when they're left on pasture, when they colic or founder on too much or too rich grass. They cannot be on pasture 24/7.

They also need to be trimmed regularly and need to be reasonably trained in order to go out and catch them from their herds that they're supposedly with. It's another reason. They're just not that good a guard animal, really. There's just too much that needs to take place. They need their vaccinations twice a year and regular

worming. If they're not trained to accept these things, most ver- uh, veterinarians and farriers will not even wanna handle 'em-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

... until they are trained well enough to be handled because they are a formidable opponent (laughs) when they don't wanna do something.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

They can kick really hard and, in a lotta cases, harder than a mule. They're more apt to use their teeth and their front feet and their back feet and everything in their body, including pushing you out of the way, cornering you by pushing you and pinning you against a wall where they can really take you down. And they will take you down by grabbing you at the back of the neck and slinging you to the ground the way they do coyotes and other dogs and cats, and things like that.

So, you gotta know that they're gonna fight with everything that they've got. You are more at risk with a donkey than you are with a mule who does not really possess the stop-and-fight attitude that the donkey does. The mule is half horse, and his flight, uh, reflex is a lot stronger than the, the stop-and-fight reflexes in a donkey. So, you gotta half a chance against a, a mule that you don't have against a donkey. The donkey will stop and fight you. He doesn't like to exert a lot of energy in flight.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

So, he's more apt to stop and fight with you.

There are some of the... The important roles of sheep and cattle her- or actually, I have found it better to be smart about livestock control and not make it so easy for the predators. Donkeys are not good guard animals. They're not good pets because of their freeze reflex, freeze and fight, and because they are a formidable opponent

when they do freeze and fight with you, and they use everything in their instinct to fight against you. So, my suggestion would be to use guard dogs.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

There are, there are a lotta dog breeds that are actually bred to be guard animals and they seem small and ineffective, but because of their breeding, they're more effective than you might think.

Guard dogs, some of the most important roles of sheep and cattle herding dogs, and herding dogs in general, they protect the herd from predators. And they're able to do it because they're quick, they're agile, they can attack the predator from all different sides in a split second because they're smaller and they snap their teeth and they bite their heels and they'll be at the front, and in an instant, they're at the, at the back, you know? And this is the way they protect the herds from predators. They will keep the animals grouped together so that it's easier for them to protect the herd. They can move the herd if necessary. They have the ability to cause a whole herd of animals to move wherever they want. And they can keep this herd within a certain perimeter. The best sheep herding dog breeds are Border Collies, number one.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

While they might not make the best (laughs) apartment dogs because they're very busy, Border Collies are one of the best sheep herding dogs. He's a medium-sized herding dog breed that originated in the Anglo-Scottish border of Northumberland, bred for herding livestock, particularly sheep. Border Collies normally reach a weight between 30 and, and 55 pounds once they're fully grown. Their high energy level, along with their intellect, devotion, and loyalty to their owners propels Border Collies to the top of the best herding dogs. Because they're loyal to the handler, their owner, they're not aggressive towards the owner the way that donkeys would be.

The second-best sheep herding and livestock herding dog, believe it or not, I was kinda surprised when I heard this, was the German Shepherd.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

Because... Yeah.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

Because of their intelligent, intelligence, their docility, their strength and trainability. They were later introduced to many other jobs. At present, German Shepherds are utilized as police dogs in search and rescue activities, service dogs in assisting people with disabilities, and much more. Because German Shepherds have been used since their origins as sheep herding dogs, we can say that they have this activity in their DNA, therefore making them excellent for grazing sheep and cattle.

Australian Shepherds are very, very popular. They're known as Aussies. Despite its controversial name, they are a dog breed with origins in the United States and not Australia as many people believe. The reason this dog breed originally appeared is to help farmers and ranchers herding their livestock. They did their job extremely well ever since.

Belgian Sheepdogs. Belgian Sheepdog is a medium-sized herding dog with origins in Belgium. This breed is also known as a Belgian Shepherd, or Chien de Berger Belge. The members of this breed can be further classified into four separate varieties based on coat type and color: the Groenendael, the Laekenois, the Malinois, the trevureu- uh, tervue- eh, I know a little bit of French, so I know how to pronounce these.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

Sort of.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Very good (laughs).

Meredith Hodges:

(laughs) Thank you. Like any shepherd breed, the Belgian sheepdog was, and still is, uh, used in herding sheep, cows, and other livestock. That's because they're highly intelligent, agile, high energy level, and other qualities that a good herding dog should have. Like we were talking about earlier, they can totally confound a predator with their ability to go front, back, to the side, and attack from all four sides and cause the predator to run off. It's just too much for the predator to take.

Shetland Sheepdogs has... A quality that most highlights the Shetland Sheepdogs is their tremendous loyalty and a very strong bond with the family, hence making the breed a very good choice for an affectionate family dog as well.

Old English Sheepdogs, also commonly known as Shepherd's Dog or Bobtailed Sheepdog, is one of England's oldest sheep herding dogs. They're massive, muscular dogs with strong bone structure. Their bodies are covered with dense fur that helps them to quickly adapt to the cold mountain areas, but also to protect them against attack from the predator. The coats being so thick, their chance of getting really bad bites is minimized.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

Welsh Sheepdogs is a herding dog breed from Wales in the United Kingdom. This breed can either have short or long coat, which enables them to also withstand cold climates. Because they have longer and shorter legs than Border Collies, it enables them to easily accommodate any, almost any terrain.

Miniature American Shepherds. Miniature American Shepherds are traditionally used for herding smaller stock, such as goats and sheep, but are nowadays very popular house pets and very frequently used in canine competitions for agility, intelligence, and skills at the dog shows.

Rough Collies. One of the most famous Rough Collies was Lassie, the canine character loved by everyone in the TV s- series with the same name. Rough Collies, also known as Long-Haired Collie, is a medium to large-sized dog breed with a short or beautiful long coat that has its or- origins in Scotland, United Kingdom. Based on the coat type, there are two distinctive variations of this breed. The rough-coated Collies and the smooth-coat Collies. Even though today we can see most of these pets in dog shows and canine beauty contests, Rough Collies were incipiently used for herding sheep in various regions of the UK.

Bearded Collie, also known as a Beardie, is a breed of dogs with roots in Scotland. Because of their long, double-coated fur, people often confuse them with Old

English Sheepdogs. They gained the name of Bouncing Beardies due to their unique way of facing stubborn ewes through barking and bouncing on their forelegs.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

And the hair, their hair coat, of course, can really protect them, again, against predators' teeth. The injuries that they may sustain will be minimal.

One should never use mules as guardians, as they will be dangerous to smaller livestock and other smaller or weaker animals, even older mules. I've discovered that when my mules were pastured next to the smaller animals, predators give them a wide berth and thus skirt the pens where the smaller animals, like the mini donkeys, are kept.

Since miniature donkeys and mules are always at risk, I add another element of safety in the pens by lining their pens with metal grating over the stock panels. Then everyone is also brought in every night and turned out for a minimum amount of time during the day. This gives me the, uh, opportunity to monitor their diet, to check for inj- injuries twice a day and keep them safe overnight. All of my equines are taught to come in from turnout upon request. They know there is always the crimped oats reward that's awaiting them.

Wooden barns and wire fences can be easily torn down by larger predators. So, over the years, I slowly replaced all my wooden barns and wire fences with metal barns, steel panels, and vinyl fencing with hot wires on top and bottom where they are, they're housing smaller animals. Or if the larger animals are playing with bottom rails 'cause they will pull them out.

I also know that there are predators where animals are likely to come in through by climbing underneath. The way my pens are laid out, I do line, again, where the mini donkeys and the miniature mules are gonna be, I line those pens with panels and metal grating. And then I put the pens surrounding the miniature's pens where the larger mules are gonna be because they will fend off any animals, like coyotes and, and other predators. So, if they are housed around the mini donkey pens, that usually discourages the predators, and the bears and the larger predators and the large cats see that and they just go, "Well, that looks like too much trouble to me." And they'll sh- they won't even wanna fight to get to those miniature pens.

And there are cats, bears, coyotes, and other large predators in the foothills of Colorado where I live, and it's getting even worse as more developments are built in the mountains and they drive these predators down to the lowlands.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

And you know, you hear about people in residential areas whose smaller dogs are being snatched.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm-hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

You know? And their cats and things like that. So, you know, you gotta be, you just gotta be aware that these things are happening and try to set up your animals so that they are as safe as they can be.

When I don't have the animals, like in the winter time, uh, where there might be under, multiple animals in the pens around the miniatures, where I can, you know, actually leave the miniatures out at night, the mules will discourage them when they're around. But in the winter when it's snowing, the mules have their stalls and runs too, and they're not any longer in the larger pens that are around the miniature turnout areas. So, when that happens, I actually take the miniatures and they are enclosed in the stalls overnight as well. And all the barn doors are closed so there's no chance of any predators getting inside the barn and getting to those animals that would be trapped in their stalls.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

We have made it that way. We make it-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Good.

Meredith Hodges:

... so that there is no way for them to get in. We still have the raccoon problem, but they don't necessarily bother the animals (laughs).

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right, those raccoons.

Meredith Hodges:

Because mules and donkeys can handle raccoons (laughs).

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) You know, Mer, I'm looking at this dog list again, uh, about the breeds that are good for, for protecting the herds. I don't see Chihuahuas on this list.

Meredith Hodges:

(laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

And you know, when I-

Meredith Hodges:

No, and you won't. They are a-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

And-

Meredith Hodges:

... mighty bite for-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Well-

Meredith Hodges:

... a puma.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

... when I was a-

Meredith Hodges:

Y- you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

When I was a little kid, I was attacked by a Chihuahua. So (laughs), I, I kinda feel like they have, you know, a certain, a-

Meredith Hodges:

Well, they know they can attack humans.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

Because we don't fight back like a puma or a bear does-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right (laughs).

Meredith Hodges:

... or even a, a wolf or a coyote, you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh.

Meredith Hodges:

And there, you know, dogs do tend to, as a rule, be very aggressive. And again, I, I use this term, uh, quite frequently with the mini mules, dealing with smaller animals, they do necessarily have a Napoleon complex, which makes them-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

... quite aggressive.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

But no, a Chihuahua will not be the very good guard animal.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

However, however, there are more animals than I, than the ones that I mentioned that are aggressive, but you have to be careful what, you know, dog-wise, what dogs you put in because there are, the herding dogs that I mentioned, there are also hunting dogs that are quite dangerous, but they can also become dangerous to your livestock.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

Like Pit Bulls. You know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

You take Pit Bulls when you're going boar hunting and they can take down a, a wild pig.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

You know? And they can also be a formidable opponent for a bear or a big animal like that, but they don't necessarily have that herding instinct when it comes to livestock, so they might not be your best choice for herd guarding.

The other thing is, is you, when you're using donkeys as herd animals, you need to remember that they, donkeys, innately will attack anything that is smaller or weaker than them, as will mules.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

So, even in a herd situation where the donkey is with his family, the jack needs to be taken out, and any male donkeys need to be taken out of the herd of foaling females.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

Because they will attack the smaller offspring.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yes, they will.

Meredith Hodges:

And a lotta times they'll kill them.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

And the same goes for being left in herds of, uh, goats and sheep. And that, they may get along with the a- adult goats and the adult sheep. But when they start having their offspring, they will have a tendency to kill them, get them outta the way, because they are strangers to the donkey's territorial herd.

So I, in summary, I don't recommend using donkeys as guard an- guardian animals.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay. Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

They just should not be used. And donkeys should not be considered pets. You need to remember that they are prey animals themselves and can be grossly injured in any altercations with a predator. I think there are better choices for guard animals, as I said, like the dogs.

The, the thing is you wanna promote the health and welfare of your livestock and your animals, taking into consideration all of their individual needs and instincts and what they're prone to do, you know, what they are primarily used for. It's okay, if you're willing to put in the training, to have a donkey as a companion for such things as competitive trail, competitive pack donkeys, that they have all kinds of competitions for donkeys on the lead line that are fun to do and all of that. But you just have to remember that they all need training to set boundaries on how they interact with you, because otherwise, they become the predator and you become the prey.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

And they have a propensity to do that. They start out as these cute little fuzzy things that we just like to cuddle, but as they grow and as they mature, those instincts that they're born with, genetically born with, are ingrained in them and they will surface as they age.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

So, never turn your back on a donkey is what I always say. I don't care if it's the jack or the jennet, or even a baby.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

You know? The babies can come at you and leaping and playing, and if you're not watching, you can get knocked right down on the ground. And in their play patterns is that instinct that prepares them for breeding. You just don't know. I mean, they don't think they're doing anything wrong, but they are so rambunctious and so strong, they can really hurt you.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

So-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Well, Meredith, this has all been very educational because, uh, you have brought out some things that I wasn't aware of, so I wanna thank you for coming back on. And you have a website?

Meredith Hodges:

Yes, I do. It's at www.LuckyThreeRanch, three all spelled out, not the number three, .com, and I have another website for children at jasperthemule.com. I have a Facebook page at Meredith Hodges public figure page, and I make regular posts up there and that's where we're posting our podcasts. And then I'm, they're followed by MULE CROSSING articles that I've written about the subjects that we're discussing.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

And if you don't, yeah, and if you don't get the answers to your questions either on the, the website or in posts, you can always email me at meredith@LuckyThreeRanch.com.

And I want you to know that all of these things that we're talking about are coming from 43-plus years of experience with these animals. And I learned everything firsthand, and I didn't know a lot of these things either until I was confronted with them and had to deal with them. But since I did, and I dealt with them with a good attitude and, and an attitude of negotiating with my animals and finding the best way for their health and welfare and both of our safety, this has turned out to be an optimum way to train and manage your animals. And when you do this, they do kinda turn out more like pets, but you both know the rules of the game.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

There you go. Well, Meredith, thank you. And as I always say, don't turn your back on a Chihuahua, so.

Meredith Hodges:

(laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:
Right (laughs).

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
You have a great day and we will talk soon.

Meredith Hodges:
Sounds great, Cindy.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Meredith's website is LuckyThreeRanch.com and you can call her at 1-800-816-7566. And I can be reached through my website, EveryCowgirlsDream.com.
Gotta go. My mule is looking for me.

Speaker 3:
Mule Talk! is an Every Cowgirl's Dream production.

RESOURCES:

WEBSITE at www.LuckyThreeRanch.com /TRAINING:

- 1) Another Augie & Spuds Adventure
- 2) Chasity's Challenges
- 3) Longears Music Videos
- 4) Mule Crossing Articles
- 5) Mule Facts
- 6) Podcast Appearances
- 7) Training Tips
- 8) Rock & Roll: Diary of a Rescue
- 9) What's New With Roll?
- 10) Video On Demand
- 11) Wrangler's Donkey Diary

BOOKS/VIDEOS IN THE STORE:

- 1) Training Mules & Donkeys: A Logical Approach to Training
- 2) A Guide to Raising & Training Mules
- 3) Donkey Training
- 4) Training Without Resistance
- 5) Equine Management & Donkey Training
- 6) Equus Revisited Manual
- 7) Equus Revisited Video
- 8) Rock & Roll Documentary
- 9) Building the Jasper Carousel
- 10) LTR Hay Production
- 11) The Road to Bishop
- 12) The Bishop Experience
- 13) The Bishop All Stars
- 14) Walk On: Exploring Therapeutic Riding
- 15) Build of a Nation
- 16) Give Your Equine the Athletic Edge
- 17) For Children: www.JasperTheMule.com for books & videos