

Rancher Predator Awareness Training Behavior

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Creating a response

The effort of training a response in our livestock is so that when they encounter predators they will seek safety. The effort of training is to replace *fear* and the *the chase sequence* with the *standing solution* and *the defensive posture of the herd group*.

I will start with horses to make a point. Take a mustang who's run wild for his entire life. Imagine that you have secured this horse through the Governments adoption program. This individual has only known *flight* as its response to pressure.

Flight has been this young horse's only trained response. Whether it's from the pressure of predators or humans, both are simply perceived as pressures that result in flight.

Now we have all seen the Hollywood version that love and understanding will magically create a working relationship of riding off into the sunset on some topical beach. Actually the rider and horse relationship never ends, it's a constant development of understanding.

Achieving a goal of performance shouldn't require an ending to the building of the working relationship.

But as the young horse arrives at the ranch, *fear* is this young horses only reaction. Our goal is to remove the *fear* and replace it with calmness. This goal is the first step in creating a working relationship.

Exploring this first step will also relate to the effort of developing the *defensive posture of the herd group* in our stock.

The First Step

In comparing the *colt* with *our stock*, the effort is to is to make a realization that animal behavior is not so different between species. Every living thing has instincts that are the foundations of behavior.

In the case of the colt, if you try removing movement by restraint, it's possible, but once you



release the colt, *flight* is immediately resumed, strengthening the environment with more fear. This is also the response of our stock. If training is done in confinement, such as corrals, rather than an open area, *flight* is resumed in the open and the *fear* is never overcome. In both the training sessions, the colt and the stock, both efforts were ineffective, although the objective of restraint was met.

The goal for the stock is to seek the *defensive posture of the herd group* and the *standing solution* so that when they receive pressure they will stand and not react in *fear's* response of *flight or fight*.

Desensitizing

In the case of desensitizing the colt, we will apply pressure with the aid of a tool such as a sack, which is why it's called *sacking out*. It's a repeated action that when applied without injury creates calmness, and removes movement. With the proper release, it soon establishes a connection between the colt and it's handler.

We will use that same method of desensitizing "*sacking out*" on our stock to remove movement and begin the *Standing Solution*. Our tool rather than a sack, shall be an animal that will mimic the predators, a *pseudo predator*, and they will apply the pressure. These dogs are quite different from stock dogs that aid a rancher in moving stock. The *pseudo predator* removes movement. They are completely different in their objectives and performance than the stock dogs.

The *pseudo predators* needs speed and a lack of stalking, completely opposite of an admirable stock dog. The *pseudo predator* also requires a strong stopping ability with a quick release.

Inflicting pain or biting is not a preferred action. That only plays to the predator's abilities. Our goal is the *standing solution* and a confident, calm *defensive posture of the herd group*. Upon the stock reaching the *herd group*, the *pseudo predators* release should be immediate. This sets to memory that the herd is the *safe zone*. If we promote the infliction of pain, the stock never make the connection with the calmness of being with the *herd group*. They just remain in some degree of unsettled stress.

The Release

We have talked about creating the pressure to instill a response. It's also important to realize how significant the release of the pressure is in establishing the proper response.

In the beginning of the training, the *pseudo predators* chase an individual in a *block* to prevent a return, or engage the *shedding action* to remove an individual from *the herd*. That initial training may seem to be to intense and there may be an urge to stop the session. Remember that our actions are to simulate a predator and to build a response to the predator. This training is our effort to save our stock not abuse them. There is a fine line of when the proper time to call for a release is.

The predator's efforts are simply to accomplish its task of securing its sustainability (food). For the stock it is a life or death situation. In training the *defensive posture of the herd group* and the *standing solution*, one should not weaken because the efforts make us nervous of being to harsh.

If the predators are left to train our cattle, there will be NO release and the outcome will end in a depredation.

The key is that just enough pressure is applied so that the release is the *reward* for seeking the *herd group*. Another example of a release in the beginning, would be a weakening of pressure, so the release resembles an escape and a return to *the herd*.

As the training progresses, the release will not be until the desired response of reaching the *defensive posture of the herd group* is achieved. This is when the release is asked for. Then the release should happen quickly. In short order the *pseudo predators* will realize that this is the objective and will release upon achieving the return automatically and then quickly move to their next effort.

The effort is to duplicate a predator's action, minus the depredation. Creating a reaction of seeking the *defensive posture of the herd group* and the *standing solution* challenging the *self-preservation instinct* of the predators.

Challenges

There are challenges with the training timing. If bred cows are heavy with calf, the pressure added with abrupt movement is not healthy for the unborn calf. The prudent thing to do is postpone training, waiting and starting with a solid pair.

If the timing is when the calf is new to two months of age, this training would not resemble the training that we have just talked about. This aged pair is a time when the maternal instinct is at its peak. The pressure at this time should be just to unite the pair. Often just the presence of our *pseudo predators* will have the mother seeking her calf. That effort is enough. When the calf is older, then you can start applying more pressure to seek the *defensive posture of the herd group*.

When the calf reaches that 4 to 5 month age, they begin to start establishing their independence. It is a time to be on high alert, the calves independent behavior naturally creates individualization. It also individualizes the mother as she is seeking to find her calf, setting her up as a target as well. Individualization is the basic predator's requirement.

Mature bulls also seek independence. Younger bulls seem to be content with the *herd group*. But the mature size of the bull may challenge the predators instinct of *self-preservation*.

Dwell time

Dwell time is also an important factor in using the training method of *pressure and release*. You must allow time for the stock to set to memory what the accomplishment has been. After effectively establishing the *defensive posture of the herd group*, you must release the pressure and give a rest to the training. I have found that three *defensive postures* is a good day. The next session can be the next day or even a week before repeating the training.

Response and interaction

As in the beginning we said that a working relationship with the colt is a lifelong journey. Deterring predators is no different. It is not a one-day event, it is a journey that will be adapted and built on as time goes by.

By presenting a *defensive posture of the herd group*, we are injecting a challenge to the predator and calling on the predators basic instinct of *self-preservation*, and simply asking the predator to move on.

In establishing a response to a predator's presence, we are simply doing our best to mitigate predatory risks.

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