

Predator Awareness

Whether it's right for you

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I have had discussions on the response cattle should have and what that response should look like when confronted by an apex predator. Some have said that they want the cow to attack or charge in such a situation. Then there are those who want the cows to be handled with low stress Stockmanship. Which is a fantastic concept for managing cattle and doing our management practices, but it doesn't instill a reaction to a predator's pressure.

The herd is a herd for a reason, the herd is a response to pressures. The herd itself is an instinctual defensive posture for grazing animals. In my opinion the best defensive stance for cattle is to unite into *the defensive posture of the herd group*. Standing as a group with no individualized flight, this is the *Standing Solution*.



Predators will cause the reaction of the herd group if they are left to the training. But, it will develop a state of fear and anxiety that the cattle may never overcome. It is also promoting a reaction of fear for future encounters. By the predators' establishing the herd group, they can pressure the herd to find an individual that has an elevated stress level and exploit its fear. Fear has two responses, fight or flight. Either response is a good day for the predator.

The only way to prepare cattle with the preferred response, is to mimic such an attack.

By using dogs as pseudo-predators we can mimic such an attack, thereby training a preferred response to predatory presence and possible predatory pressures.

Our goal is to unite the defensiveness of the herd group and instill the reaction of the *Standing Solution*. Proactively establishing a calm stressless stance.

These are not the stockdogs that help us move and manage our herds, they are a quicker moving dog that promotes the stop. They are specifically specialized *Predator Awareness* training assistants.

I have been asked about the size of the training herd. I would say a minimum of three mature animals. And the maximum of about thirty pair per training session. The defining factors are the range where your concerns are, how your stock utilizes that range, how many cows are usually together, and how many cows can water at one time. These are all solid factors for determining the size of a training group.

Even if you have more cattle, the training should be done on manageable size lots, not your entire inventory at once.

Training sessions usually take three stops per session to effectively engage the *Standing Solution*. It takes three sessions to develop the proper herd posture. Those three sessions should be spread over 1 to 2 weeks and each session should take about 1 to 2 hours time.



The training should be performed outside of the corrals, in a pasture that is large enough to allow movement and flight, but small enough that the cattle can not escape your control.

Whether it's the beginning of a training session or an actual predator, there is stress. The difference is with the training session we are there to control the outcome. By working through a stressful situation and presenting a comfortable outcome, we promote a response of the herd group being a safe zone.

The shelf life for the *Standing Solution* seems to be about 6 months.

There are handling techniques that will decrease the training's effectiveness and shorten the shelf life of the training. Any action of promoting the individualization and the chase sequence or even pressured movement will defeat the effort. This isn't directed towards corral work, but open area Stockmanship.

It is suggested that you routinely check and tuneup the Cattle's training. When I am monitoring and checking cattle and reapplying scents, I have the predator awareness dogs rather than my stock dogs. So I will give a short tuneup session randomly.

The goal is individuals seeking *the defensive posture of the herd group*. Rekindling that basic instinct of *the Standing Solution*.

I prefer training prior to turnout. I like winter feed grounds for training. If you're on ranges for the winter, then maybe fall transitional grounds are a possibility.

When the predators seek prey they are seeking an opportunity. That opportunity comes when an individual separates itself from others. Then that individual is subject to direct predatory pressures and the chase sequence. The predators require the component of *fear* when obtaining their prey.

By practicing, and promoting a response to predatory pressures you accomplish two tasks.

The first is an exposure to a fearful situation that's in your control, where you can present an encounter that normally would be a life or death situation. Through practice, this instills a resolution that promotes calmness, giving an animal exposure and a suggested solution to such a threat.

When the animals are exposed to such pressures, the animals overcome fear and replace it with a response and calm resolve and will seek the herd group.

The exposure to such pressures, desensitizes the Cattle's reactions and subdues the direct connection to the responses of *fear*.

Secondly, providing a release to pressure is a basic training skill of training any animal. By releasing at the proper time, you establish a response. The release of pressure sets to memory a reaction of where to find relief to future pressures which is the herd group.

That reaction becomes the cow or calf seeking others for comfort and relief from pressures.

I also believe that by deterring such a predator's presence in the first place, you are proactively preventing conflict.

All animals have instincts, those instincts are in fact an action or a reaction.

By placing an unsolvable riddle to the predator we engage an instinctual response. We can present this to the predators via their nose, possibly their strongest sensory perception of all their senses.

If we present a foreign and strange scent, that scent will bring with it a precautionary reaction. These scents are manmade manufactured scents, not found in nature.

These scents are economical and readily available in any stores cleaner and laundry isle. These scents are so powerful that we can even smell them through their packaging.

In their concentrated form they produce a powerful scent deterrent. One that presents a new and strange scent among nature's vastness.

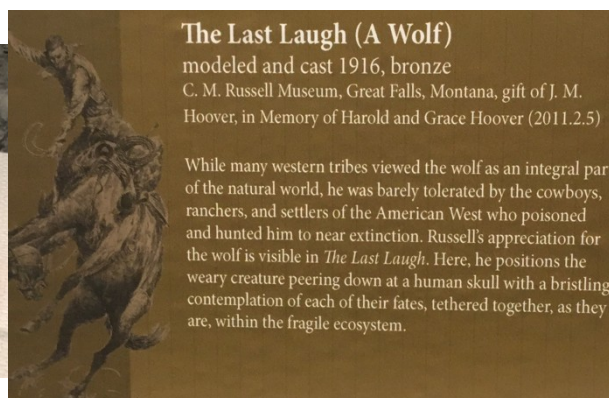
We are often so busy with our everyday work we don't consider that all animals have reactions to their basic instincts. Predators also have those reactions. If we can present fear, or an uncomfortable situation, the response is fight or flight. If there is nothing to fight, it greatly reduces the response to just, flight. It is then simply our suggestion for them to move on.

If the stimulus remains the same and doesn't change, what happens is that the animal becomes accustomed to such stimulation and accepts it, actually becoming comfortable there. This is desensitization, it is the first step towards habituation. This is the downfall for most physical deterrents.

By routinely changing our placement and specific scent, we present an ever-changing scenario that doesn't allow the predators to become comfortable.

Understanding that the animal kingdom speaks in posture and scent rather than speech, we can then use that scent as a deterrent. Much like wolves marking their territory to warn others, this is mine. We are simply stating, this is ours.

The combination of the *Standing Solution* and the placement of *Scent* deterrents have been an effective solution on USFS grazing permits and large tracts of private ground since 2013.



Some artwork by Charlie Russell at the C.M. Russell Museum.

For me personally, it has changed my losses from five head a year, to one loss since I began. Although my losses were spread over multiple species, it's original effort was directed at wolves. But, its actual effective efforts have covered all species of predators here. The predators here are coyotes, black bear, mountain lion and wolves. This is written in 2020, and I began this effort in 2011. That's a positive result of forty four head. For me the effort has been worth it.

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