

## Rancher Predator Awareness LOW STRESS STOCKMANSHIP

We hear quite a bit about low stress handling skills. There are a lot of situations that seem to get lumped into this low stress category. Establishing the skills for deterring predators will require a more in-depth understanding than simply handling stock in a low stress manner.

What is stress? Stress has a very broad definition. But it could be said that stress is a physical or mental issue that causes a physical reaction. The reaction could be movement, unsettledness, nervousness or anxiety. All could be said to hamper the calm productive wellbeing of the stock.

Most would say that fear would be categorized as stress. Then what about Pressure? If an animal moves from pressure how do you define what the animal moved from, was it Pressure or the reaction of some level of fear?

Certainly an animal that is worked more often, such as a show steer or an old saddle horse, would have less significant movement from pressure than that of a green or unhandled individual. That may suggest that exposure to previous pressures may have overcome some of their ties to fear, possibly reacting to more measured degrees of pressure.

A famous horse trainer once said “\*make the right things easy and the wrong things difficult “. This is the basic essence of *pressure and release*. In confinement, the pressure and release is easily defined. If you create pressure, the release can be created by you and attributed to you. By practicing pressure and release you set the parameters. The comfort level of the animals is in understanding that movement in a particular direction releases the pressure, establishing low-stress handling.

Out in the open areas that are not confined, the challenge becomes once the pressure is



applied, how do you establish a definition of release rather than just creating a reaction of fear and flight? In reality, how do you eliminate encouraging a *chase sequence*? Promoting a response to predators' pressures. The needed confinement can be implemented by using pseudo predators to confine the stocks movement. The ability to promote the stop is the first step of training *predator awareness*.

It has been effectively taught and practiced that being aware of the flight zone and applying pressure outside of this zone can successfully move stock, and is considered low-stress. Most of the time, the distance of the zone increases outside of confinement. The response of the stock is a comfort level to pressure. But, our awareness of the flight zones may not engage a response of Flight, but may rather just be creating low-stress movement. Without evoking fear and flight, it is understandable that the stock will never relate such pressure to a response from a predator, effectively moving stock in a low-stress manner but completely missing in developing a prepared response to predators.

Many skills of good Stockmanship may present situations that actually promote the reinforcement of a learned behavior that relates back to predator/prey relations of promoting the *chase sequence*. Chasing and driving cattle can promote a *chase sequence* response in the stock and instill a reaction into memory that will be drawn on in a stressful situation, completely missing the mark of deterring predatory pressures.

Many times slowing down is equated to low-stress Stockmanship. By observing predators interactions with stock, you soon realize that this is a predatory skill and practiced by predators. I call this interaction *predatory desensitization*. In developing a reaction to predatory pressures, one needs to realize the requirement of creating a response that is a reaction to presence and not just pressure.

The training requires that the stock have a different response than the reactions to fear and the response of fight or flight, by effectively presenting pressure to simulate a predators actions, and releasing of the pressure when they have achieved the defensive posture. This, for lack of better terms, could be thought of as practicing depredations, setting to memory a response to a predators pressure and presence. This is called *the standing solution*. While training, another posture develops. It is a grazing reaction that develops a tighter grazing pattern. This is called *herd awareness*. Then finally, the *defensive posture of the herd group* is *predator awareness*. All of these accomplishments can be trained with pseudo predators, dogs that work in place of the predators, simulating a predator's pressures to create the defensive posture of the herd group.

If one's country can be successfully monitored by range riders, then that may be an effective choice. The principals of being an effective deterrent fall into the same parameters as *predator awareness training*, like establishing a human presence which can then relate to the predators as scent, and establishing a herd group which itself is a deterrent against predators, and monitoring on a routine basis.

The deterrent of range riders is one of the most costly choices, but many NGO's offer cost share.

A range that can support range riders requires a capability to water the stock and the ability to keep one large herd group together. The resource of stock water dictates how the stock can use the range. In much of Northern California and Southern Oregon the stock water dictates that the stock water in rotation or at smaller supply sources often many miles from one another.

Often forestry permits were designed this way to promote better range use, spreading cattle out evenly.

A range with limited water resources requires a different method of deterring predators such as Scenting, the actual placement of a product that suggests of human presence, and a reaction by the stock of seeking the *defensive posture of the herd group*. The *herd group's* size can be as low as three cows. It's the *standing solution* that is important not the size of the herd. Fear is a component in every breathing animal, and the predator is no different. The instinct of *self-preservation* rules, and presenting a situation that's new and unusual will evoke that instinct, telling the predator to move on.

The training of *predator awareness* is an effort to instill a response in the stock rather than relying on a reaction to the natural instinct of fear, which is *fight or flight*, relying instead on the calmness of the *defensive posture of the herd group*.

[www.rancherpredatorawareness.net](http://www.rancherpredatorawareness.net)

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