

**Domestic dog attacks on sheep in the urban fringe areas of
Perth, Western Australia**

By

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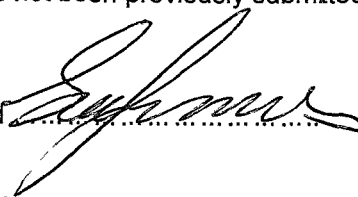
This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis has been performed by me, except where otherwise clearly stated in the text, and that it has not been previously submitted for application for a degree at any University.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Garth Jennens', written over a dotted line.

Garth Jennens

ABSTRACT

DOMESTIC DOG ATTACKS ON SHEEP IN THE URBAN FRINGE AREAS OF PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In common with many cities, Perth, Western Australia has a problem with domestic dogs attacking livestock, such as sheep on its urban fringe areas. The current study used multiple sources to document 1479 attacks on livestock on 1105 properties by 1900 dogs across eight metropolitan local authorities over a three-year period. The hypothesis that dog attacks on sheep are poorly understood by the community and continue as a result of inaction by local authorities, dog owners and livestock owners, rather than being an unavoidable predator/prey interaction, was supported. The predatory behaviour of domestic dogs and the anti-predatory behaviour of sheep were observed to be similar to that of wild canids and ungulates respectively.

The reluctance of local authorities to prosecute offenders and enforce by-laws meant that there was little voluntary compliance by dog owners to control their dogs. It therefore, became necessary for livestock owners to protect their livestock; however, most failed to take effective preventive measures.

Wild canids predominantly attack the head and neck of prey animals, whereas in contrast, domestic dogs may attack any part of a sheep. Examination of injury sites, in conjunction with information collected from other investigative techniques, assisted with the identification of the breed, size and number of dogs responsible. To overcome difficulties in locating a dog not sighted attacking, tracker-dogs were trained to follow the attacker's scent back to its home. The majority of dogs (60%) lived within 200 metres of the livestock they attacked and used the same route to and from the property on subsequent attacks.

A single or pair of owned dogs from the same household, belonging to 14 breeds were primarily responsible for attacks. Poor management by dog owners on inadequately fenced smallholdings enabled these dogs to wander unnoticed from their properties. Although most dog owners accepted evidence of their dogs' involvement, few accepted blame and most

were surprised that their “friendly” pet could attack livestock. Unless dogs were destroyed, relocated or contained by their owners they were likely to attack again.

It is concluded that dog attacks occur commonly in urban fringe areas; however, with appropriate management of dogs and livestock these can be minimised.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xix
LIST OF FIGURES	xxiv
CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Domestication of dogs and sheep	1
1.2 The problem of dog attacks on livestock	2
1.3 Hypothesis and aims of thesis	5
1.4 Chapter content	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Assessing losses of livestock due to dog attacks	8
2.3 Identifying the type of dogs responsible for attacks on livestock	10
2.4 Predatory behaviour of wild canids and dogs	11
2.4.1 Chasing and attacking in wild canids and dogs	12
2.4.2 Killing by wild canids and dogs	13
2.4.3 Injury patterns caused by domestic dogs	17
2.4.4 Breed differences in predatory behaviour	18
2.4.5 Frequency of involvement of individual breeds in attacks on livestock	19
2.4.6 Pack characteristics of wild canids and dogs	19
2.5 Anti-predatory behaviour of wild ungulates and domestic sheep	21

2.5.1	Type of livestock attacked	21
2.5.2	Defensive behaviours of wild and domestic sheep	22
2.6	Farm management practices	25
2.6.1	Farm management practices that assist in preventing dog attacks	25
2.7	Temporal and spatial patterns of attack	29
2.7.1	Temporal patterns	29
2.7.2	Spatial patterns	30
2.8	Methods of controlling predators	31
2.8.1	Shooting, baiting and trapping	31
2.8.2	Predator control and animal welfare	34
2.8.3	Effectiveness of predator control	34
2.9	Actions and reactions of witnesses and livestock owners to an attack	35
2.10	Methods of identifying and locating dogs	36
2.10.1	Animal tracks and hair samples	36
2.10.2	Using other dogs to locate predators	36
2.10.3	Identifying the routes used by wild canids and dogs	38
2.11	Dogs that attack livestock and their behaviour towards people	39
2.12	Gender and neutering status of dogs that attack livestock	40
2.13	Behaviour and attitudes of dog owners	40
2.14	Legislating for the control of dogs that attack livestock	42
2.15	The cost and impact of dog attacks	43
2.16	Solutions to dogs attacking livestock	45
 CHAPTER THREE: LOCAL AUTHORITY OFFICERS' AND RESIDENTS' VIEWS ON DOG ATTACKS ON LIVESTOCK		 47
3.1	Introduction	47
3.2	Materials and Methods	48
3.2.1	Perth	48
3.2.2	Terms and definitions	48

3.2.3	Survey 1: Local Authority officers in Western Australia	50
3.2.3.1	Contents of questionnaire	50
3.2.4	Survey 2: Residents in the study area	50
3.2.4.1	The study area	50
3.2.4.2	Number of residents surveyed and purpose of the survey	52
3.2.4.3	Reinterviewing of residents	53
3.3	Results	53
	Survey 1: Local Authority officers in Western Australia	53
3.3.1	Rank order of problems caused by dogs	53
3.3.2	Dog attacks on livestock	54
3.3.2.1	Causes of dog attacks on livestock	54
3.3.2.2	Solutions to dog attacks on livestock	55
3.3.3	Problems encountered by local authority officers when carrying out dog control	57
3.3.4	Sterilisation, identification and registration	58
3.3.5	Training of local authority enforcement staff	58
3.3.6	Enforcement of the Dog Act	59
3.3.6.1	Problems experienced by local authority officers when enforcing the Dog Act.....	59
3.3.6.2	Problems experienced by local authority officers when prosecuting offenders	60
3.3.7	Co-operation and uniformity between local authorities and centralisation of dog control and education	60
3.3.8	Education and enforcement	62
3.3.8.1	Emphasis of dog control	62
3.3.8.2	Type of action taken by local authorities against dog owners	63
3.3.8.3	Type of educational activities carried out by local authorities for dog owners	63
	Survey 2: Residents in the study area	64

3.3.9	Resident details and property ownership	64
3.3.9.1	Age and gender of residents	64
3.3.9.2	Property ownership, duration of occupancy and household size	64
3.3.10	Type of livestock kept	65
3.3.11	Dogs owned by residents	66
3.3.11.1	Number of dogs currently or previously owned by residents	66
3.3.11.2	Breed of dog	66
3.3.11.3	Gender and neutering status of dogs	67
3.3.11.4	Age of dog and duration of ownership	68
3.3.11.5	Ownership and purpose of keeping a dog	68
3.3.12	Fencing of properties and containment of dogs	69
3.3.12.1	Standard of fencing and containment of dogs.....	69
3.3.12.2	Time of containment and occupancy of property	69
3.3.12.3	Locations on a property where dogs were kept	70
3.3.12.4	Compliance with containment	70
3.3.13	Exercise and training of dogs	71
3.3.13.1	Method of exercising a dog	71
3.3.13.2	Obedience training	71
3.3.14	Dogs wandering from their property	72
3.3.14.1	Locations to where dogs wander	72
3.3.14.2	Residents solutions to stop a dog from wandering	72
3.3.14.3	Reasons for dogs wandering from their property	73
3.3.15	Interaction of dog(s) with livestock	73
3.3.15.1	Current or previous contact with livestock	73
3.3.15.2	Likelihood of a dog attacking livestock	74
3.3.15.3	Likely action if own dog attacked livestock	75
3.3.15.4	Residents reasons for a dog attacking livestock	75
3.3.16	Reinterviewing of residents	76
3.3.16.1	Livestock currently kept and previous attacks	76

3.3.16.2	Fate of previously owned dogs	76
3.4	Discussion	76
3.4.1	Survey 1: Local authority officers in Western Australia	76
3.4.2	Survey 2: Residents in the study area	81
3.5	Conclusion	86
CHAPTER FOUR: DOG ATTACKS ON LIVESTOCK IN PERTH		88
4.1	Introduction	88
4.2	Materials and Methods	89
4.2.1	Sources of information for attacks	89
4.2.2	Number of properties where attacks occurred	92
4.2.3	Species and number of animals attacked	93
4.2.4	Categories of attacks	93
4.2.5	Number, breed and ownership of dogs responsible for attacks	94
4.3	Results	95
4.3.1	Number, location and size of properties where attacks occurred	95
4.3.1.1	Number of properties	95
4.3.1.2	Localities where dog attacks on livestock occurred	96
4.3.1.3	Size of property where dog attacks on livestock occurred	96
4.3.2	Sources of information for attacks	97
4.3.3	Species of livestock attacked by dogs	98
4.3.4	Number of animals killed or injured	99
4.3.5	Number of livestock kept and lost on each property	99
4.3.6	Number and location of attacks on people and animals reported to local authorities	100
4.3.7	Ownership, number and breed of dogs	103
4.3.7.1	Ownership of dogs	103
4.3.7.2	Number of dogs	103
4.3.7.3	Breed of dog	103
4.3.8	Reinterviewing of livestock owners	105

4.4	Discussion	106
4.4.1	Number and location of attacks on livestock	106
4.4.2	Sources of information for attacks, and their limitations	108
4.4.3	Species of livestock attacked	109
4.4.4	Dog attacks on people and other animals	110
4.4.5	Ownership, number and breed of dogs	112
4.4.6	Reinterviewing of livestock owners	115
4.5	Conclusion	116
 CHAPTER FIVE: ACTIONS OF DOGS, LIVESTOCK AND WITNESSES DURING AND AFTER AN ATTACK		 117
5.1	Introduction	117
5.2	Materials and Methods	118
5.2.1	Behaviour of dogs and sheep	118
5.2.2	Signs of an attack and the actions of witnesses	119
5.2.3	On-site investigations of attacks	120
5.2.4	Measures used by livestock owners to prevent attacks	121
5.2.4.1	Preventive measures taken prior to an attack	121
5.2.4.2	Preventive measures taken subsequent to an attack	122
5.2.4.3	Cage and steel-jaw traps	122
5.2.4.4	Tranquillisers, dyes and toxic baits	125
5.2.5	Attacks by dogs belonging to livestock owners	126
5.2.6	Degree of co-operation by livestock owners with immediate . Neighbours and the author	126
5.2.7	Reporting an attack to local authorities	127
5.2.8	Month and time of the first known attack on a property	127
5.2.9	Livestock owners solution's to dog attacks on livestock	128
5.2.10	Cost and impact of an attack	128
5.3	Results	128
5.3.1	Predatory behaviour of dogs and anti-predatory behaviour of sheep	128

5.3.1.1	Behavioural patterns of dogs and sheep during an attack	128
5.3.1.2	Location of sheep after an attack (dead and alive)	132
5.3.2	Behavioural changes observed in sheep after an attack	134
5.3.3	Discovering an attack	135
5.3.3.1	Witnessing of an attack	135
5.3.3.2	Signs of an attack	136
5.3.3.3	Occupancy of a property during an attack	137
5.3.3.4	Response of a livestock owner's dog to another dog on its property attacking livestock	137
5.3.3.5	Proximity of a paddock to an occupied dwelling	138
5.3.4	Type of actions taken by a witness to an attack	138
5.3.5	Farm management practices	138
5.3.5.1	Precautions taken prior to the first attack on a property	138
5.3.5.2	Reasons for keeping livestock	139
5.3.5.3	Preventive and control measures taken after the first attack	140
5.3.5.4	Trapping	140
5.3.5.5	Pens and enclosures	143
5.3.5.6	Use of dogs and other animals to protect livestock	144
5.3.5.7	Toxic baits and dyes	145
5.3.5.8	Reasons for livestock owners failing to take preventive measures	146
5.3.6	Co-operation by livestock owners with their immediate neighbours and the author	146
5.3.7	Attacks by dogs belonging to livestock owners	146
5.3.8	Reporting an attack on livestock to the local authority	147
5.3.8.1	Reasons for livestock owners reporting or not reporting an attack	147
5.3.8.2	Type of action taken by rangers when an attack was reported to them	149
5.3.9	Seasonal and daily patterns of attack	149
5.3.9.1	Seasonal patterns	149

5.3.9.2	Daily patterns	150
5.3.10	Livestock owner's solutions to dog attacks on livestock	151
5.4.11	Cost and impact of attacks on livestock owners	152
5.4	Discussion	152
5.4.1	Behavioural patterns of dogs and sheep during an attack	152
5.4.2	On-site investigations of attacks	155
5.4.3	Discovering an attack	157
5.4.4	Preventive measures taken by livestock owners	159
5.4.5	Co-operation by livestock owners with immediate neighbours and the author	164
5.4.6	Reporting an attack and subsequent action taken by authorities	164
5.4.7	Seasonal and daily patterns of attack	166
5.4.8	Livestock owner's solutions to attacks	168
5.4.9	Cost and impact of attacks on livestock owners	168
5.5	Conclusion	169
 CHAPTER SIX: INVESTIGATING AN ATTACK		 171
6.1	Introduction	171
6.2	Materials and Methods	172
6.2.1	The type and site of injuries to sheep	173
6.2.1.1	Types of wounds caused by dog bites	173
6.2.1.2	Other types of injuries	174
6.2.1.3	Site(s) of injuries to sheep	174
6.2.1.4	Examination of bite marks	176
6.2.1.5	Fox attacks	176
6.2.2	Cause of death	176
6.2.3	Treatment of injured sheep	177
6.2.4	Dogs feeding off sheep	177
6.2.5	Locating the dog's entry into, or exit from a property	177

6.2.6	Tracker-dogs	179
6.2.6.1	Selection of dogs	179
6.2.6.2	Methods of training	179
6.2.6.3	Training the tracker-dogs to follow the scent trail of another dog (tracking)	181
6.2.6.4	Delays, distractions and discrimination (in tracking)	183
6.2.6.5	Tracking a dog from the attack scene	185
6.2.7	Other methods used to locate dogs	187
6.2.7.1	Dog prints	188
6.2.7.2	Locating the dogs route back to its home	188
6.2.7.3	Observations and enquiries	189
6.2.8	Distance between the livestock owner's property and the dog's home	190
6.3	Results	190
6.3.1	Type and site of injuries to sheep	190
6.3.1.1	Type of wounds from dog bites	190
6.3.1.2	Sites of injuries to sheep	199
6.3.1.3	The site of injury in relation to the breed of dog	202
6.3.2	Cause of death of sheep	206
6.3.3	Treatment of injured sheep	207
6.3.4	Dogs feeding on sheep carcasses	208
6.3.5	The dog's entry into and exit from the livestock owner's property or paddock	210
6.3.5.1	Location from where a dog entered the livestock owner's property	210
6.3.5.2	Type of perimeter fencing	211
6.3.5.3	A dog's method of entry into and exit from the paddock	212
6.3.6	Location of dog prints after an attack	212
6.3.7	The use of a tracker-dog to locate dogs responsible for an attack	214
6.3.7.1	Locating dogs by using a tracker-dog	214
6.3.7.2	Problems associated with the use of tracker-dogs	216

6.3.7.3	Reasons for not using a tracker-dog after an attack	216
6.3.8	Areas used by a dog when returning to its home after an attack	217
6.3.9	Locating a dog responsible for an attack, or its owner	223
6.3.9.1	Means used to identify a dog, or its owner	223
6.3.9.2	Type of observation that assisted in identifying the dog responsible	223
6.3.10	The distance of a dog's home from the livestock owner's property	224
6.4	Discussion	225
6.4.1	The type and site of injuries to sheep from dog bites	225
6.4.2	Methods of the dog's entry into and exit from a paddock	233
6.4.3	Locating dogs that have left the attack scene	234
6.4.4	The use of tracker-dogs to locate dogs after an attack	235
6.4.5	Locating the dog's route back to its home	238
6.5	Conclusion	242
 CHAPTER SEVEN: DOGS, AND OWNERS OF DOGS RESPONSIBLE FOR AN ATTACK		 244
7.1	Introduction	244
7.2	Materials and methods	245
7.2.1	Location of a dog's home relative to the livestock owners property	245
7.2.2	Dog owner interviews and examination of dogs	246
7.2.2.1	Dog owner interviews	246
7.2.2.2	Examination of a dog	247
7.2.3	Gender, age and neutering status of dogs	248
7.2.4	Management of a dog by its owner	248
7.2.5	Dog owner's history of offending and a dog's duration of residency on its property	248
7.2.6	Dog and property ownership	249
7.2.7	Actions of the dog owner when advised of their dog attacking livestock	249
7.2.8	Fate of the dog	250

7.2.9	Compensation for livestock owners	250
7.2.10	Action by local authorities against the dog owner	250
7.3	Results	250
7.3.1	Ownership of a dog and the location of it's home	250
7.3.2	Examination of a dog responsible for an attack	251
7.3.2.1	Visual signs on a dog that had attacked livestock, scavenged or wandered	251
7.3.2.2	Behaviour of a dog towards people on its property or at the local authority pound	252
7.3.2.3	Behaviour of a dog towards people on the livestock owner's property	253
7.3.3	Age, gender and neutering status of dogs	254
7.3.3.1	Age	254
7.3.3.2	Gender and neutering status	254
7.3.3.3	The gender composition of two or more dogs responsible for an attack	255
7.3.3.4	Residential relationship between two dogs responsible for the same attack	256
7.3.3.5	Composition of dogs that returned to a property	256
7.3.4	Management of a dog by its owner	256
7.3.4.1	Means by which a dog escaped from the dog owner's property	256
7.3.4.2	Location where a dog was kept at night, or when its owner was not at home	257
7.3.4.3	Containment of a dog prior to an attack	258
7.3.4.4	Reasons given by dog owners for not containing their dog	259
7.3.4.5	History of offending by a dog owner	259
7.3.4.6	Length of time a dog had been on its property prior to an attack	259
7.3.5	Dog ownership	260
7.3.5.1	Ownership of a dog	260
7.3.5.2	Purpose for which a dog is kept	260
7.3.5.3	Ownership and type of property where a dog was kept	260

	7.3.5.4	Presence of livestock on a dog owner's property	261
7.3.6		Awareness and reaction of a dog owner to their dog attacking livestock	261
	7.3.6.1	A dog owner's awareness of their dog wandering or attacking livestock	261
	7.3.6.2	Period of time after an attack to when a dog owner was notified	261
	7.3.6.3	Reaction of a dog owner to being advised	261
	7.3.6.4	A dog owner's attribution of blame for a dog attacking livestock	262
	7.3.6.5	Physical and behavioural reasons given for a dog not attacking livestock	262
	7.3.6.6	Reaction of a dog owner to a request by the livestock owner for assistance	263
7.3.7		Compensation for livestock owners	264
7.3.8		Action by local authorities	265
	7.3.8.1	Type of action taken by local authorities against the dog owner	265
	7.3.8.2	Reasons for a local authority issuing a warning to a dog owner	265
7.3.9		Subsequent attacks by a dog that was kept by its owner	266
7.3.10		Fate of a dog and reasons for destruction or relocation	266
	7.3.10.1	Fate of a dog responsible for an attack on livestock	266
	7.3.10.2	Reasons for the destruction or relocation of a dog	267
7.4		Discussion	268
	7.4.1	Dog ownership and the location of a dog's home.....	268
	7.4.2	Examination of a dog	268
	7.4.3	Age, gender and neutering status of a dog	270
	7.4.4	Management of a dog responsible for an attack	272
	7.4.5	Reaction of dog owners to their dog attacking, and the attribution of blame	273
	7.4.6	Compensation for livestock owners	276
	7.4.7	Action taken by the local authority against the dog owner	277
	7.4.8	Fate of a dog responsible for an attack	278

7.5	Conclusion	280
CHAPTER EIGHT: GENERAL DISCUSSION		282
8.1	Summary of major findings of this study	282
8.2	Limitations of the current study	290
8.3	Solutions to dog attacks on livestock and areas for future research	290
REFERENCES		296
APPENDIXES		310

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER THREE

Table 3.1	Terms and definitions	49
Table 3.2	Area, distance from Perth CBD, total population and population per square kilometre for the eight local authorities	52
Table 3.3	Rank order of dog problems	54
Table 3.4	Causes of dog attacks on livestock	55
Table 3.5	Solutions to dog attacks on livestock	56
Table 3.6	Problems encountered when carrying out dog control	57
Table 3.7	Compulsory sterilisation, permanent identification and increased registration fees	58
Table 3.8	Type of training a local authority would provide for, or permit its rangers to attend	58
Table 3.9	Problems when enforcing the Dog Act	59
Table 3.10	Problems experienced when prosecuting offenders	60
Table 3.11	Co-operation and uniformity between councils and centralisation of services	61
Table 3.12	Responsibility for the enforcement of dog control legislation.....	61
Table 3.13	Solutions to the lack of co-operation and uniformity between local authorities	62
Table 3.14	Reasons for not supporting centralisation of dog control and dog owner education	62
Table 3.15	Emphasis of dog control	63
Table 3.16	Type of enforcement action	63
Table 3.17	Type of educational activities	64
Table 3.18	Age of residents	64
Table 3.19	Number of householders per property	65
Table 3.20	Type of livestock kept on properties	65
Table 3.21	Number of dogs owned by residents	66
Table 3.22	Fate of previously owned dogs	66
Table 3.23	Breed of purebred and crossbred dogs	67
Table 3.24	Gender and neutering status of dogs	68

Table 3.25	Age of dog and duration of ownership	68
Table 3.26	Fencing and containment	69
Table 3.27	Time of containment and occupancy	69
Table 3.28	Locations where dogs were kept	70
Table 3.29	Reasons for not restraining or confining a dog	70
Table 3.30	Reasons for restraining or confining a dog	71
Table 3.31	Method of exercise	71
Table 3.32	Solutions to prevent a dog from wandering	72
Table 3.33	Reasons given for dogs wandering	73
Table 3.34	Reasons why owners believed that their dog would attack livestock	74
Table 3.35	Reasons why owners believed that their dog would not attack livestock	74
Table 3.36	Residents given for dogs attacking livestock	75

CHAPTER FOUR

Table 4.1	Numbers of attacks or properties in each category	90
Table 4.2	Number of properties where livestock were attacked	96
Table 4.3	Property size	97
Table 4.4	Sources of information	97
Table 4.5	Properties where both sheep and another species of livestock were kept and attacked	98
Table 4.6	Number of livestock kept on a property, before the first documented attack	99
Table 4.7	Number of livestock killed on a property during the year of an attack	99
Table 4.8	Percentage of livestock killed on each property per annum	100
Table 4.9	Number of reported dog attacks on people and animals	101
Table 4.10	Location of reported dog attacks on people and animals	102
Table 4.11	Breed of purebred dogs	104
Table 4.12	Breed of crossbred dogs	105

CHAPTER FIVE

Table 5.1	Number of attacks and properties in each category	118
Table 5.2	Location of sheep after an attack	132
Table 5.3	Behavioural changes in sheep after an attack	134
Table 5.4	Witnesses to an attack	135
Table 5.5	Period of time after an attack to when it was discovered	136
Table 5.6	Initial signs of an attack	136
Table 5.7	Response of the livestock owner's dog(s) to another dog	137
Table 5.8	Action taken by witnesses	138
Table 5.9	Precautions taken by livestock owners prior to the first attack on their animals	139
Table 5.10	Reasons for keeping livestock	139
Table 5.11	Measures taken by livestock owners to protect their animals, the effectiveness of these measures in preventing subsequent attacks and reasons for further attacks	141
Table 5.12	Reasons for preventive measures not being taken	146
Table 5.13	Chasing and attacking by dogs belonging to livestock owners	147
Table 5.14	Reasons given for reporting an attack	148
Table 5.15	Reasons given for not reporting an attack	148
Table 5.16	Type of action taken by rangers	149
Table 5.17	Month of the first recorded attack on a property	150
Table 5.18	Time of the first recorded attack on a property	151
Table 5.19	Livestock owners solutions	151
Table 5.20	Type of costs incurred by livestock owners	152

CHAPTER SIX

Table 6.1	Number of attacks in each category	172
Table 6.2	Injury sites on sheep	200
Table 6.3	Injury sites on sheep after attacks by purebred dogs	203
Table 6.4	Injury sites on sheep after attacks by purebred and crossbred dogs	205

Table 6.5	Cause of death	206
Table 6.6	Survival of injured sheep after an attack	207
Table 6.7	Primary site of feeding by a dog	209
Table 6.8	Location of a dog's entry	210
Table 6.9	Type of perimeter fencing around the paddock where livestock were attacked	211
Table 6.10	Means used by a dog to enter and leave a paddock	212
Table 6.11	Location of dog prints	213
Table 6.12	Locations where dog prints were lost	214
Table 6.13	Use of the tracker-dog	214
Table 6.14	Problems encountered when using the tracker-dog	216
Table 6.15	Reasons for not using the tracker-dog	217
Table 6.16	Areas used by dogs when travelling back to their homes	218
Table 6.17	Means by which a dog, or its owner was identified	223
Table 6.18	Type of observations used to identify a dog	224
Table 6.19	Distance between the livestock owner's property and the dog's home	225

CHAPTER SEVEN

Table 7.1	Number of dogs, owners and properties in each category	246
Table 7.2	Location of a dog's home relative to the livestock owner's property	251
Table 7.3	Visual signs on a dog	251
Table 7.4	A dog's behaviour towards people	253
Table 7.5	Age of dog	254
Table 7.6	Neutering status	255
Table 7.7	Gender composition of a pair or group of dogs	255
Table 7.8	Composition of dogs	256
Table 7.9	Means by which a dog escaped	257
Table 7.10	Location of a dog at night or when its owner was not at home	257

Table 7.11	Containment of a dog prior to an attack	258
Table 7.12	Reasons for not containing a dog	259
Table 7.13	Length of time a dog had resided on its property	260
Table 7.14	Ownership and type of the dog owner's property	261
Table 7.15	Attribution of blame for a dog attacking livestock	262
Table 7.16	Reasons given for a dog not attacking livestock	263
Table 7.17	Reaction of the dog owner to a request for assistance	264
Table 7.18	Reasons for a dog owner not paying compensation	265
Table 7.19	Reasons for the dog owner being warned	266
Table 7.20	Fate of dogs responsible for attacks on livestock	267
Table 7.21	Reasons given for disposing of a dog	267

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER THREE

Figure 3.1	Location of the eight local authorities included in the study area relative to other Perth local authorities	51
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CHAPTER FOUR

Figure 4.1	Multiple number of sheep killed by dogs	98
Figure 4.2	Shar Pei shot whilst attacking livestock	104

CHAPTER FIVE

Figure 5.1	Large cage trap	123
Figure 5.2	Modified steel-jaw trap	124
Figure 5.3	Behavioural patterns of dogs and sheep during an attack (1)	129
Figure 5.4	Behavioural patterns of dogs and sheep during an attack (2)	130
Figure 5.5	A dog watching sheep in a paddock	131
Figure 5.6	Sheep bunching into a group when approached by a dog	131
Figure 5.7	Sheep being chased by a dog	132
Figure 5.8	Sheep trapped after being chased	133
Figure 5.9	Sheep unable to escape from the perimeter fence	133
Figure 5.10	Sheep in a horse's yard after being chased	134
Figure 5.11	Sheep bunched into a group after an attack	135
Figure 5.12	Steel-jaw traps set at the dog's entry into a paddock	140
Figure 5.13	Rabbit traps set illegally to capture dogs	143
Figure 5.14	Permanent and secure enclosure for sheep	143
Figure 5.15	Temporary and ineffective enclosure for sheep	144
Figure 5.16	Livestock guarding dog escaping from its paddock	144
Figure 5.17	Cattle kept in the same paddock as sheep to protect them	145
Figure 5.18	Dye spread over a carcass	145

CHAPTER SIX

Figure 6.1	Standard livestock fencing on a smallholding	178
Figure 6.2	Webbing tracking harness, attached to a three metre lead	180
Figure 6.3	Locating a scent trail from a carcass	186
Figure 6.4	Puncture wound's on a sheep's face	191
Figure 6.5	Lacerated wound on a sheep's neck	191
Figure 6.6	Lacerated wound on a sheep's flank	192
Figure 6.7	Incised wound on an sheep's ear	192
Figure 6.8	Chipped bone on the back of head and neck of a sheep	193
Figure 6.9	Crushed lower part of the nasal bone	193
Figure 6.10	Crushed upper part of the nasal bone and skull	194
Figure 6.11	Injuries other than from bite wounds (broken hip)	194
Figure 6.12	Injuries to hind limbs as a result of a sheep being grabbed during the chase	195
Figure 6.13	Bite wounds to facial region, causing respiratory problems	196
Figure 6.14	Ear removed from a sheep	196
Figure 6.15	Tail removed from a sheep	197
Figure 6.16	Skin removed from part of the body of a sheep	197
Figure 6.17	Disembowelment of a sheep	198
Figure 6.18	Subcutaneous bruising to a sheep	198
Figure 6.19	Extensive internal bleeding from injuries to the neck of a sheep	199
Figure 6.20	Size of bite marks left by a medium sized dog	200
Figure 6.21	Injuries to a single site on one sheep	201
Figure 6.22	Injuries to a single site on several sheep	201
Figure 6.23	Injuries to several sites on many sheep	202
Figure 6.24	Injuries to multiple sites on a single sheep	202
Figure 6.25	Injuries to the back of the neck of a sheep from an attack by a Rottweiler	204
Figure 6.26	Lower facial injuries on a sheep from an attack by a Bull Terrier	204

Figure 6.27	Extensive injuries necessitating euthanasia of the sheep	206
Figure 6.28	Sheep chased into a dam and drowned	207
Figure 6.29	Inappropriate treatment of an injured sheep by a livestock owner	208
Figure 6.30	Minimal feeding by a dog on a sheep carcass	209
Figure 6.31	Extensive feeding by a dog on a sheep carcass	210
Figure 6.32	Damage perimeter fencing	211
Figure 6.33	Dog prints leading into a creek	213
Figure 6.34	“Bondi” following a scent trail	215
Figure 6.35	“Yana” following a scent trail	215
Figure 6.36	Paddock bordering a river	218
Figure 6.37	Public firebreak bordering a rear paddock	219
Figure 6.38	Roadway bordering a smallholding	219
Figure 6.39	Two adjacent paddocks containing livestock	220
Figure 6.40	Bush area bordering a paddock	220
Figure 6.41	Bush tracks used by dogs to return to their home	221
Figure 6.42	Sheep grazing in scrub	221
Figure 6.43	Hilly areas of orchard where sheep were grazed	222
Figure 6.44	Creek bed used by dogs to enter a paddock	222

CHAPTER SEVEN

Figure 7.1	Bloodstains on the shoulder of a Rottweiler	252
Figure 7.2	Carcass dug up and partially removed by a dog scavenging	252
Figure 7.3	Dogs responsible for an attack, friendly to people	253
Figure 7.4	Dog responsible for an attack, wary of people	254
Figure 7.5	Transportable dog pen used on a smallholding	258