

## **Breed Behaviors in Dogs**

Our topics for this week are:

- **Breed behavior and selection of new dogs into your family**
- **Traits of common dog breed groups**
- **Specific traits among dog breeds intended to work livestock**

A dog is not just another dog. Dogs have an exceptionally large number of chromosomes and a short gestation period. This allows a breeder to select desirable traits for their intended use of future dogs relatively rapidly. There are currently 200 recognized dog breeds each with concentrated line-bred traits. Some breeds will fetch soon after they learn to walk. Some breeds will never learn to fetch. Some breeds bark for a variety of reasons and some rarely bark. Some bond strongly to one handler while some never bond to any human. Some breeds are uninhibited about biting to protect property, but some do not attempt to protect property. Some breeds are big and strong enough to inflict serious bite injuries and some are too small, slow, and weak to cause serious injury from their bites.

It is therefore imperative that a potential dog owner decide in advance what characteristics they wish in their new dog and which breeds typically manifest those traits. Then, potential owners should learn the breed or breeds that their prospective new dog has in their lineage. A breed's traits can be intensified or suppressed by training, but the trait will remain and can be manifested again under new circumstances such as a new home, owner, or handler, among many possibilities.

Traits differ among dog groups, such as personal guard dogs, livestock guard dogs, terriers and pinschers, sighthounds, scenthounds, sled dogs, and herding dogs. Personal guard dogs, such as the boxer, St. Bernard, and mastiff, tend to be even tempered and have a strong bond to family. Terriers and pinschers are highly alert, aggressive, and develop possessive bonding with individual handlers. Sighthounds (e.g., borzoi, greyhound, saluki, whippet) are aloof and quiet, have low reactivity, and bond less strongly with handlers. Scenthounds (e.g., bloodhound, coonhound, basset hound, beagle) have low reactivity and low aggression with stoic dispositions. Sled dogs (e.g., malamutes, spitz, Norwegian elkhound, Siberian husky) are usually not aggressive but can be, bond weakly with owners, and have moderate reactivity. Herding dogs (collie and shepherd breeds) bond strongly to individual handlers, have high desire to chase and herd things that move, and a low level of fear. Livestock guard dogs (e.g., Great Pyrenees, Komondor, Kuvasz) are solitary, bond less with handlers, and have low reactivity.

Breeds that work with livestock have distinctive traits despite an identical work environment. Herding dogs are usually moderate-sized (30-50 lb.) intense, workaholic athletes. Guardian dogs are large breeds often exceeding 100 lb. Guardians like to rest near flocks and watch sheep during the day, although they are protective and should become aggressive with possible predators.

Abby is a herding dog, but even within the herding group, breeds have distinctive traits. There are gathering types, tending types, and driving types. The gathering breeds are border collies, kelpies, Australian shepherds, collies, and bearded collies. Border collies and kelpies dominate in sheep gathering competition. The tending breeds are Belgian Malinois, Belgian sheepdogs, Belgian tervurens, Bouvier des Flandres, Briards, German shepherd dogs, Beauceron Pyrenean shepherds, and Pulis. These have the inherent trait to patrol the perimeters of a flock and keep the sheep in a particular grazing area. The driving breeds are Rottweilers, Welsh corgis, Old English Sheepdogs, and Australian Cattle dogs. They were originally used on sheep to drive them to market and assist in moving sheep in stockyards. Australian Cattle Dogs are the most agile and aggressive which enables them to also drive cattle.

Therefore if you wish to bring a purebred dog into your family, you should learn the typical breed behaviors and find a trustworthy hobby breeder. They can also help you determine if the breed might fit into your life. Your veterinarian can also assist you. Make sure that the dog is evaluated for inheritable diseases and that the owner will begin its socialization. Selecting a dog based only on its appearance and an assumption that all breeds have the same behavior and propensity to be dangerous is a recipe for disaster for you, your family, and/or your dog.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at [CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com](mailto:CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com)

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. There are currently 200 AKC-recognized dog breeds each with breed-related behaviors.**
- 2. Knowing breed behaviors is important in properly selecting a compatible dog for your family.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and available from all major science book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com) . This website has more than 150 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.