

# LOUISE LIEBENBERG

## CANADA

49 YEARS OLD



**1. How long have you been working as a shepherd?**

27 years, plus four years as a hobby.

**2. How did you become a shepherd?**

I am self-taught. We have no family tradition and I had no formal training.

**3. Please describe your flock and herding system.**

I previously shepherded 1,200 ewes in a grazing situation. Currently we have 300 Suffolk x Dorset commercial ewes, feedlot about 1,500–2,000 lambs, 80 Aberdeen Angus cows plus chickens and horses, 8 Sarplaninac guardian dogs and 4 Border Collies.

Grazing only takes place in the summer and fall. In winter we feed the stock in feedlots due to the cold and snow. The summer grazing pastures are on and off the ranch. We own 480 acres and rent another 1,500 acres.

**4. Where do you graze the flock?**

We live in the subarctic/boreal forest region of Canada at 605 m a.s.l.. The winters are very cold and long (–40°C), while the summers are short and warm with a lot of daylight hours.

**5. What is your main motivation to work as a shepherd?**

We sell meat from our cattle and sheep. It is our income source. We love farming and feel it is a way of life for us.

**6. What difficulties do you face working as a shepherd?**

The climate is a big challenge as well as predators.

**7. What kind of large carnivores do you have in your area?**

Bears, wolves, cougars, coyotes, eagles, ravens, wolf, verine, lynx, bobcat and fisher.

**8. What are your experiences with them?**

We see predators daily and they are all around us. We have wolves, coyotes and bears on our ranch regularly. We have lost some animals to predation. If we did not actively manage, we would lose large numbers of stock.

**9. Please describe one experience with large carnivores.**

A pack of coyotes attacked a ewe and killed her, with only one guardian dog in that field. The coyotes overwhelmed the dog and nearly killed it.

**10. Which measures do you take to prevent damage and what are the pros and cons?**

We strongly believe that to be able to run sheep or other livestock in regions where predators live, one needs to have a predator management strategy in place. An integrated predator management approach works the best. No single system keeps working due to habituation, but combining various methods, predation can be managed.

We have various strategies; our primary strategy is to implement LGDs. These are the first line of defence and we find them highly effective. We combine the use of the dogs with both permanent and temporary electric fencing. If predator pressure is high we will further subdivide pastures to contain the livestock a little closer

together and night corral if needed. We also hang up game cameras and speak to wildlife officers to monitor what is in the area. We believe flexibility is very important. If predators are active in the area we try to move the livestock further away or closer to home. We change groups, add extra dogs, place additional fencing if need be, increase human presence and in some cases we actively “haze” (chase off predators) using bangers, or simply by being more active in the area, with quads or on horseback and in some cases we place additional lights or sounds.

Our secondary measures include livestock management strategies; things like lambing indoors, removing the sick and weak animals from the main grazing herd, disposing and removing of carcasses, regular counting and daily checks of the animals. If we are grazing in very bushy or wild areas, we will often shepherd the sheep.

Other measure we implement would be considered habitat modification. We remove brush piles, discourage elk on the ranch, clear bush close to fence lines, stack our hay close to the yard to discourage deer and elk from eating it in the winter, remove attractants and compost dead animals. We believe it is a combination of all these strategies and the variable use of them that keeps predation at a minimum.

We also have an emergency plan in place describing what to do in the event of a predation incident, and

that is clear to everyone on the ranch. Having this plan means we know what to do directly to ensure no further incidents happen. It is about being proactive and being vigilant.

By implementing some of these systems, one can also reduce hay predation of deer in feed yards and keep tuberculosis infected deer away from stock. Keeping elk and deer away from areas your stock graze will keep predators further away, as the wolves tend to follow the elk in our region.

A total management strategy, implemented before predation sets in is the best way to ensure that your stock stays safe.

### **11. Do you get subsidies or counselling support?**

We can claim compensation for wildlife kills (except by coyotes), the local Fish and Wildlife officers have to examine the carcass before claims can be approved, but small stock such as sheep often simply disappear and no carcass is found.

### **12. What are the main challenges when dealing with large carnivores in your area?**

The biggest challenge is maintaining the number of dogs we need. You have to be very vigilant with where you place your stock and the number of dogs with them. And actively manage and monitor the flock/ herd very often.

