

Sue Harper, dog trainer and behaviourist, has provided some tips for puppy owners to help prevent dogs chasing sheep. These tips could be useful if you unexpectedly come across livestock on your walk. If ever in doubt, or if you know you're going to be walking near livestock, keep your dog on a lead at all times.

Early Prevention of Sheep Chasing in Dogs

I have never met a dog owner who has made a decision to allow their pet dog to chase sheep. Dogs chase "by accident." Sheep suddenly appear in unexpected places, then the dog gets into the 'red zone' and totally ignores shouts to come back.

Sheep chasing is perfectly natural but totally unacceptable dog behaviour, punishable by death. It is also highly addictive behaviour, the more they do it the more they want to do it.

Teach retrieve

Teaching a puppy to retrieve is the first step in teaching a pup to ignore livestock. A thrown ball, a canvas dummy, a rolled up sock these are all controllable moving targets. A sheep is an uncontrollable moving target.

Few owners have the facilities to practise chase training on a sheep, but anyone can practise chase- training games with a ball.

The vast majority of puppies are not predatory chasers of sheep they are just chasing for fun, for them it's a game, so redirect this chase game onto a safe target a ball is easiest, and train an on switch *fetch it* and an off switch *leave*.

Chasing a ball, should be contingent upon the puppy being told *fetch it*, right from the start, no chasing unless you hear *fetch it*.

Despite the fact that nearly everyone does it, puppies should not be allowed to just run up and play with any other puppy they fancy playing with. If a puppy chases everything in sight that moves, then it is guaranteed to chase sheep and fail to come back to call.



Teach a good recall very early on

Young puppies follow their people because they lack the confidence to branch out on their own. Don't just ignore this obliging behaviour. Interact with, encourage and randomly reward the puppy at this stage, and he should then be conditioned to reliably come to call by the time he hits the challenging adolescence stage.

Those that hunt together stay together

Pups left to hunt for themselves learn to ignore humans. Be part of their hunting, secretly hide a ball or chunk of liver and be the one to find it, you manipulate the game to appear to be hunt leader and thus worthy of attention

Take the pup out hungry use part of his food for hunting around the house, garden, and on walks. Be interesting.

Hooligan gangs.

Puppies and older dogs are twice as likely to chase sheep if they are with other pups or dogs off lead, the pack mentality takes over and they quickly become uncontrollable.

If in any doubt just keep the dog or puppy on a long line or extending lead, both provide limited freedom, and keep the sheep safe.

The sheep safe course focuses on preventing and controlling chase behaviour and teaching dogs to ignore livestock.

Sue Harper.

Sheep worrying (including chasing) is crime and the police may be involved.

These tips are for the early prevention of sheep chasing in dogs, and could help if you came across livestock unexpectedly. The Malvern Hills and Commons are registered Common Land and livestock could be found anywhere at any time.

If ever in doubt, or if you know you're going to be walking near livestock, keep your dog on a lead at all times.

Malvern Hills Trust