

Dog Attacks on Livestock and Horses: January-May 2008

DogsBite.org | June 23rd, 2008

DogsBite.org is a national dog bite victims group dedicated to reducing serious dog attacks by creating common sense laws. Our research shows that the same dogs that pose the greatest threat to human beings, also pose the greatest threat to livestock and horse owners. Between January 1st to May 20th of 2008, we actively tracked dog attacks on livestock and horse owners. Several trends emerged that will alarm their owners.

This document contains verifiable information recorded by DogsBite.org about U.S. livestock and horse attacks by dangerous dogs. The information was gathered through media accounts that were available at the time of the attack. Accounts can be verified by weblinks found in the Bibliography section or Google News Archive.

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Introduction

DogsBite.org is a national dog bite victims group dedicated to educating policymakers and the public about dangerous dogs. Through our work, we hope to protect both people and pets from future attacks. Our website launched in October 2007. In this time we have actively tracked attacks on people and pets by these dogs, along with related trends. By December 2007, it became clear that residents of semi-rural areas and livestock owners were at great risk of dangerous dog attacks.

"Fighting breeds" pose the highest risk. Pit bulls are the most common fighting breed and negatively impact communities the most. Due to their animal-aggressive heritage, which stems back several hundred years, pit bulls are more likely to attack animals than any other dog. As the popularity of this breed rises and urban areas spill into semi-rural ones, owners bring their dogs with them. In these "open" environments, owners seem to care less about constraining their dogs.¹

The results to livestock owners have been devastating. Our research shows that pit bulls will not just take down 2-3 animals within a herd, but without immediate human intervention, they may continue to kill, taking down the entire herd. While various breeds of roaming dogs pose a significant threat to livestock owners, we've only run across a single breed that attacks a large animal like a horse without a partner or group of dogs: pit bulls. A single pit bull is just as lethal as a pack of dogs to a horse owner.²



Molly the pony was victimized by a pit bull after Katrina.

Dominating Trends

In the first five months of 2008, several trends appear to dominate livestock owners in regards to dangerous dogs. One has been mentioned already. As urban populations spread into semi-rural areas, people bring their dogs with them without insight into the danger loose dogs pose. But not all roaming dogs are equally as dangerous. Fighting breeds are proving to be the most harmful due to selective breeding practices that promote high-prey drive and animal aggression.

Woven through each trend are ongoing themes that spell additional trouble if left unaddressed. Many semi-rural areas lack animal control resources needed to rein in loose dogs. Even when they can, agencies often have their hands tied. In many states, animal control must, by law, return offending dogs to their owner even after a second animal attack. Such dog laws were written long before fighting breeds became popular. These old laws need to be readdressed now.

Fighting Breeds (Pit Bulls) Pose a Greater Risk



From left: pit bull, American Staffordshire terrier, American bulldog

Pit bull type dogs are a class of dogs comprised of the following breeds: American pit bull terrier, Staffordshire bull terrier, American Staffordshire terrier, bull terrier, and any other pure bred or mixed breed that is a combination of these dogs. The American bulldog is also starting to be classified within this group. They share a common gene pool and for many years have been crossbred with pit bulls for the purposes of dogfighting.

Selective breeding of pit bulls has created a dog with powerful jaws and unmatched tenacity -- the ability to keep attacking even after considerable damage is inflicted upon it.³ This made the pit bull a fierce contender in the fighting ring, where matches lasted about an hour and often up to three. These breeding practices effectively took the "wolf" out of the dog, suppressing the natural instinct to survive. Pit bulls rarely retreat in the face of death, wild animals like coyotes and cougars do.⁴

Pit bulls are also notoriously difficult to constrain, particularly when in high-prey drive mode. Ample evidence exists that a pit bull can scale a 6-foot fence, break tethering methods -- including chains -- bite through wood slats and chew through metal to reach their target. During attacks, a pit bull will often not release causing catastrophic injury to its victim. To force a release, pit bull handlers use a device called a "break stick" to pry open the dog's jaws.⁵ Other than this, little can be done to stop the attack outside of shooting the dog.

Learn more about pit bull type dogs »

Visit: www.dogsbite.org/dangerous-dogs-pitbull-faq.htm

Livestock Attacks on the Rise

Between the combination of city dwellers spreading into semi-rural areas and loose, dangerous dogs, there has been a spike in livestock attacks. In the County of Lubbock, Texas, 13 livestock animals were killed by loose pit bulls in one week's time (January 27th - February 2nd). The county is 900 square miles and hosts about 255,000 people. 82% percent of these people live in the city of Lubbock.⁶

By March 18th, the death count had reached 23. Animals killed by loose pit bulls included over a dozen goats, three prize winning potbelly pigs and three miniature horses, two of which were therapy animals owned by Hearts and Hooves Ranch. Several more of their miniature horses were left badly wounded. The shocked community raised \$10,000 in donations for immediate veterinary costs for Hearts and Hooves.⁷ Rarely are livestock owners as fortunate.*

With a deteriorating situation, city officials in Lubbock developed a public service announcement. Television stations ran ad spots warning people of loose dogs and reminding owners to constrain their dogs or face criminal penalties.⁸ Livestock owners and parents were rightfully anxious. Finally, by the end of March, after a child suffered serious injuries by a loose pit bull and a senior citizen was mauled by an unidentified dog, this episode of attacks ended.⁹

In Elcentro, California (population near 40,000) the combination of a pit bull and a German shepherd mix fatally mauled 32 goats in a herd of 49. The goats were inside a fenced enclosure and could not escape.¹⁰ The death count was so startling that the Associated Press picked up the story. Another major attack occurred just a few months later in Quincy, Illinois. Three pit bull mixes killed 34 pet deer that were penned. The livestock owners were left with two animals.¹¹ The valuation of the herd fell from \$50,000 to \$3,000 in a matter of hours.

In many instances, the death of livestock is less expensive than caring for injured animals that cannot perform adequately after an attack. In Livermore, Maine, two pit bulls attacked a farm killing several chickens and two goats. The dogs left another 9 goats seriously injured. Out of pocket expenses reached over \$13,000 and included: veterinary bills, property damage, lost chickens and laying hens, loss of milk and goats lost as a result of miscarriage.¹²

CALL TO ACTION: U.S. livestock organizations must educate members about the unique dangers that fighting breeds (pit bulls) pose, and the rising number of attacks inflicted by them. Livestock groups should actively support existing dog laws calling for new laws where they are needed. Examples of new laws that target fighting breeds are provided in the last portion of this document.

Learn more about livestock attacks »

Visit: www.dogsbite.org/blog-livestock-attacks.htm

**In June, Hearts and Hooves Ranch reports the cost of the attack reached \$20,000.*



The facial wounds of Honor, one of the surviving miniature horses from Hearts and Hooves.



The back leg and hind quarter wounds to Honor after the pit bull attack.

Horse Attacks on the Rise



From left: Auburn horse showing nose wounds; Tevis Cup horse showing stomach wounds.

DogsBite.org pays close attention to horse attacks, on a national and international basis. The number of horse attacks in Britain, primarily by pit bull type dogs, has increased so rapidly in the last year that the British Horse Society (BHS) is now tracking them. The hope is that by collating these cases they can begin to understand how widespread the problem is, in addition to learning the dog breeds most accountable.¹³

In the U.S., reports of attacks on the horse family occur weekly. Last January, in the Handy Township area of Michigan (population about 7,000), an Arabian mare was fatally attacked by two pit bulls while in her stall. The owner of the dogs was a new neighbor. Because the county had adequate dog laws, the owner was found guilty of several misdemeanors, sentenced to 30 days in jail and ordered to pay \$22,000 in restitution.¹⁴ The penalty in this case is rare. Owners of these dogs are hardly ever prosecuted.

This past April, three horses with riders were attacked by pit bulls in nearby parks. The first, an attack on a young Arab-Morgan gelding occurred near Auburn, California. The pit bull attacked the horse's flank first, then locked onto the horse's nose. The gelding flung the dog into a nearby tree before losing balance and sending the 70-year old rider toppling to the ground. The dog attacked a third time, launching the two animals into a dead run. The horse was found three miles out. The pit bull and his owner were never found having fled the scene.¹⁵

Ten miles away, another unleashed pit bull was brought into a park. When the dog saw two horses, ridden by a husband and wife team, it attacked despite screams from its owner to stop. Before the chaos struck, both riders were able to dismount. The pit bull attacked the wife's horse, first in the belly then in the flanks. The horse futilely stomped the dog then fled into the river with the pit bull in close pursuit. The strong current carried the dog downstream, away from the horse.¹⁶

The husband and wife had been on a training ride, preparing for the Tevis Cup 100-mile endurance ride. The cost to the horse owners is still unknown. In a similar attack in Ohio, a horse owner estimates her losses in the vicinity of \$25,000. While riding at the Rocky River Reservation, a leashed pit bull "slipped out" of his collar and attacked the horse. The traumatized young horse survived but is no longer a reliable trail horse.¹⁷

CALL TO ACTION: U.S. horse organizations must begin tracking dog attacks on horses. Information gathered should include: dog breed, injury to the horse and rider, location of the attack and the estimated cost to the horse owner. Horse organizations should also educate members about the unique dangers that fighting breeds (pit bulls) pose, and the rising number of attacks inflicted by them.

Learn more about horse attacks »

Visit: www.dogsbite.org/blog-horse-attacks.htm

Arcane Dog Laws

To describe the ineffectiveness of existing dog laws in many states, we've chosen a recent attack that occurred in Aiken County, South Carolina. Several pit bulls mutilated two donkeys that were forced to be euthanized -- severe head injury, tearing off ears, noses and legs is an attribute of the pit bull breed. Two weeks later, at a nearby farm, 10 goats were attacked and left for dead. As of May 7th, 2008, the dogs still cannot be located. Attempts to trap them have been unsuccessful and the dog owners have not stepped forward.¹⁸

A non-captured dog is equivalent to no recourse for a livestock owner. A painful trend we see at **DogsBite.org** is that many pit bull owners do not register or microchip their dogs. So even if the dog is captured, it can't be traced back to its owner. As the horse attack in Auburn depicts, owners of these dogs will flee the scene* to escape accountability as well. Existing dog laws operate on the assumption that a dog and its owner *can* be identified. Owners of dangerous dogs have nothing to gain by practicing this assumption.

While dog laws vary from state-to-state, a common way in which they work is described below:

It usually takes two documented instances of livestock attacks for authorities to penalize a dog owner. Each attack may result in multiple injured or killed animals. After the first attack the dog is labeled a Potentially Dangerous Dog (PDD) and returned to its owner. The label often results in microchipping, a higher annual registration fee and stiffer fines the next time the dog attacks. But in some states, the dog owner can appeal the PDD label multiple times.

If the dog attacks again, and depending upon the severity of the attack, the dog is labeled a Dangerous Dog (DD) and returned to its owner. Only at this stage do demands upon the dog owner become significant. The DD label usually requires the owner to buy a \$250,000 liability policy and build a special containment area for the dog. Annual registration fees shoot up as well, as much \$500 dollars per year.¹⁹

By the time a dog is legally labeled a DD, it may have inflicted three attacks. These attacks may result in the loss of many livestock animals. Furthermore, as is often the case with pit bull owners, once the dog is given the DD label the owner will put the dog down. The financial cost of ownership becomes too high. The owner is then free to go out and buy two new pit bulls, and the process starts all over again.

Breed-Specific Laws

Some policymakers have implemented breed-specific measures to tackle these problems. The state of Ohio, a handful of U.S. counties and about 250 U.S. cities regulate pit bulls and other fighting breeds. Some communities *automatically* label these breeds as PDD or DD. This means that after a first human attack (but not always an animal attack) authorities can take serious action through fines -- upwards of \$1,000 dollars -- and special containment rules. If the dog owner fails to comply, animal control officers can impound the animal immediately.

Other U.S. cities ban pit bulls altogether and have since 1988. The idea is to significantly reduce the number of these dogs in the community. The U.S. is not alone. Entire countries ban fighting breeds as well, including: New Zealand, UK, Spain, Norway, Singapore, Puerto Rico, Guyana, Israel, parts of Canada, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland and Australia.²⁰ Before New Zealand's ban, the combination of traditional farming, modern urban sprawl and dangerous dogs mirrored what is occurring in U.S. semi-rural areas today.

**Nearly two months after the Auburn attack, the community has not lost hope. In late May, "Wanted" posters went up from Reno to Sacramento to Stockton with a sketch artist image of the pit bull owner and his dog.*

Another way to reduce attacks by these breeds concerns animal shelter policy. After the horse was killed in Handy Township, Livingston County officials were on the hot seat. Several months earlier, loose American bulldog-mixes in the same area killed two human beings. The county recently passed a "No Adopt Out" policy for pit bull type dogs. Under the new law, stray "bully breeds" will only be held for four days at county animal shelters before being euthanized. If the dog has evidence of ownership, it will be held for seven days.²¹

Lastly, **DogsBite.org** sees another trend emerging that may prove beneficial if it catches on. After four dogs from a family in Buffalo, New York attacked three people over a period of years -- each bite resulted in a minor infraction because it was a "first" bite for each dog -- a city council member asked: "What if we penalized dog owners based on 'collective' dog bites?" In other words, what if the law tracked dog bites to the owner *and* the dog? Such a law would finally hold owners of dangerous dogs -- who continue to buy these animals -- accountable.²²

CALL TO ACTION: In all instances of breed-specific and non breed-specific dangerous dog laws, livestock and horse organizations must actively engage in the legislation process to ensure that "animal attacks" are equally as penalized as "human attacks." Many communities have inadequate animal attack laws and some have no laws at all.

Learn more about legislating dogs »

Visit: www.dogsbite.org/legislating-dogs.htm

About DogsBite.org

DogsBite.org is a national dog bite victims' group dedicated to reducing serious dog attacks. Through our work, we hope to protect both people and pets from future attacks. Our website contains a wide collection of data to help policymakers and citizens learn about dangerous dogs. Our research focuses on pit bull type dogs. Due to selective breeding practices that emphasize aggression and tenacity, this class of dogs negatively impacts communities the most.

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"Molly the Pony" is a children's book about people, ponies and hope. It is a story about a speckled pony that was abandoned after Katrina. After finally finding shelter, Molly was attacked by a pit bull and lost part of her front leg. Through the power of love and grace, she survived and now inspires hope in thousands of others.