

Guardian dogs have been used to guard livestock for hundreds (even thousands) of years in the countries where they originated, including Turkey, Hungary, Italy, and Spain. About thirty years ago, ranchers brought these guardian dogs to the Rocky Mountains.



The dogs protect livestock from predators such as grizzly bears and gray wolves.





Guardian dogs, such as Snip here, are not used to move or herd livestock. Their only job is to stand guard, keeping predators from harming any members of their herds. The dogs receive very little training.



Instead, the dogs are raised with livestock, in a process called *socialization*. Ranchers help the process along by introducing the pups to their herds at a young age.



The sheep trust their guardian dogs, and that trust is returned. Many of the dogs spend their entire lives with one herd of sheep and recognize that herd as being different from other herds.



Sometimes, a guardian dog that is lost will actually walk past other sheep herds while looking for its own herd.



Bears, mountain lions, and wolves are all a threat to sheep, but coyotes are their primary predator. Coyotes live in nearly every environment on the North American continent.



They are called “food opportunists,” meaning they will eat almost any food that is available, from birds and mice to rabbits and deer. Coyotes also prey on domestic livestock, including sheep.

During lambing, when ewes have their babies, shepherds keep a close eye on newborn lambs, and so do their guardian dogs. Guardian dogs can be born at any time of the year, but lambs are usually born in the spring.



This ewe has four lambs and needs full-time help. Guardian dogs make great baby-sitters.



As the pups grow up, they want to be with their sheep.
And guard them.
And stay with them always, keeping them safe from harm.