



National Sheep Association

National Sheep Association statement on sheep worrying

The National Sheep Association (NSA) and its sheep farming members want everyone to share in the iconic landscapes and beautiful countryside that sheep farming in the UK has played an integral role in creating and maintaining.

Farmers appreciate lots of people like their dogs to enjoy the countryside with them, but as much of the UK's rural landscape is maintained by grazing sheep there is always a strong chance that walkers will encounter some whilst out with their dogs, and for that reason NSA is urging the general public to take time to learn a little on the potential damage even the most sweet natured of dogs could cause to sheep.

What is sheep (livestock) worrying by dogs?

Sheep worrying by dogs occurs when a dog in some way distresses a sheep or whole flock of sheep. As a prey animal, even the mere presence of an unknown dog can be stressful for a sheep - and one which is running freely, off lead, perhaps barking and then more seriously chasing and attacking can cause significant harm and even death.

It is every dog's instinct to chase, even if they are usually obedient and good with other animals.

Chasing by dogs can do **serious damage** to sheep, even if the dog doesn't catch them. The stress of worrying by dogs can cause sheep to die and pregnant ewes to miscarry their lambs.

Sheep fleeing from dogs are often killed or seriously injured by their panicked attempts to escape, causing untold damage to fences and field boundaries in the process.

Dog bites can cause death in sheep or necessitate them being put down at a later date, or in less severe cases considerable veterinary bills and additional welfare issues. Injuries to sheep can also delay the normal farming routine, be it the mating season or administration of vital medicines and vaccines.

How can sheep farmers protect themselves and their flocks from attacks?

NSA produces gate post signs that are available to its members to display warning dog owners to keep their pets on a lead. Other signs are also available to download from the NSA website (See below for details).

NSA also encourages sheep farmers to engage positively with walkers and their local community. Informing the local neighbourhood via social media when sheep are going to be located in certain areas with polite requests to keep dogs on leads has been found as an effective way of reducing incidents.

How can dog owners stop their animals from being involved in sheep worrying?

It is a criminal offence to allow a dog to worry sheep. Dog owners can be fined and there is currently a call for increased legislation including imprisonment for the most serious offenders. In some circumstances, farmers are legally entitled to shoot dogs if they are endangering their sheep. An end result that is devastating for all involved.

Whilst walking through the countryside dogs must be kept on a lead and under control. * Walkers must keep to footpaths and not approach sheep and lambs. Dog owners are also reminded of the need to remove any dog faeces also as this can cause parasitic infection to sheep flocks.

If you live in or near a farming area, you must make sure that your dog cannot escape from your property, as it may find its way onto land containing sheep. Straying dogs are one of the biggest culprits of sheep worrying attacks.

If your dog is involved in an incident or you witness another dog chasing or attacking sheep please try and contact the farmer as soon as possible. There may be signs on fence posts indicating who the field or sheep belong to? Is there a farmhouse nearby you could enquire at? Are you part of a local social media group where you could post notification of what has happened? The sheep may need urgent veterinary treatment so if at all unavoidable please do not leave without notifying someone who may be able to help.

*Please note, dogs should be released from a lead if walkers are followed or chased by cattle.

For more information:

Please visit the NSA website www.sheepworrying.org.uk or email enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk