

EDUCATION: Barking

By Anna Abney on Wednesday, July 10, 2013

Barking is part of how LGDs do their jobs. There are 3 main types of barking.

*Patrol Barking: "Hey, any predators out there, I'm just letting you know I am here & on duty! So don't even think about it!"

*Alert Barking: "I think I see/hear/smell something amiss!"

*Call To Arms Barking: "I need the cavalry on the south perimeter, STAT!"

Some LGDs will even bark to let you know there is something amiss with the stock, like a newborn calf in trouble, or perhaps a goat with its head stuck through the fence. As you get to know your dogs, you will learn to readily identify the sounds they make & why. Most of the time, if your LGD is barking, there is a good reason.

To limit the dog's barking to only the daylight hours is vastly reducing their ability to "own" their territory. Predators are clever & they are quick to pick up when the dogs are kept up in the barn or the house or in kennels & they choose their attack times very carefully. Predators also tend to be more active at night, when most prey species are at a distinct disadvantage, so naturally the dogs are going to bark more at night! Young dogs tend to bark more than older dogs. They're still learning what actually constitutes a potential threat so they bark at everything, just in case. My young CAS alert me to an acorn hitting the roof, thunder, squirrels on the fence, the mail man, etc. The more mature & experienced the dog, the less alert barking you will hear. Patrol barking stays about the same & call to arms barking only occurs when there is an immediate & obvious threat. In CAS, females bark a LOT more than males but they're also typically more alert so they notice more. Some breeds bark more than others, but all LGDs bark to some degree, & if a coyote trots past or a raccoon trundles by or a skunk comes nosing around, they're going to bark at it, period. To completely ban them from using this tool is unrealistic & an unfair handicap.

It is possible to reduce some of the unnecessary barking of immature dogs by helping them learn when it's appropriate. Having an adult dog helps, but even without an adult, it helps to investigate the cause of the barking when the dog barks. When you come outside & "take control", the dog learns from your behavior. If you see a critter that shouldn't be there, yell at it, waving your arms, & praise your dog if she barks. If it's nothing more than a squirrel or something equally silly, tell the dog to hush, reward her if she goes quiet & put her in a brief time out or at least remove her from the immediate area by taking her by the collar & leading her away if she does not. Since I have adult dogs, I can just tell the barking youngun to hush if the adult isn't barking, since I know by the adult's calm demeanor that nothing is amiss. If the whippersnapper doesn't get the message, I will lead him away at minimum or possibly put him in his pen or even in a crate, depending on how over the top the pup is being.

If you are concerned that the barking might cause problems with your neighbors, or if there have already been complaints, there are some steps you can take. The first step? Make nice! I know most of us choose to live rurally precisely we don't want to deal with neighbors, but sometimes all it takes is a smile & maybe a plate of cookies & a little acknowledgment that you know your dogs bark & an explanation that they are doing so in order to keep predators like coyotes out of the area. Neighbors

with pets, small children, or livestock themselves will often appreciate this information & come to look as fondly on your dogs' barking as you do. At the very least they will see you as a person who respects them, & not just "that awful neighbor with those damned noisy dogs".

Secondly, research the Right To Farm act in your area. Look for case precedents, both locally & nationwide. Find out your local Animal Control or municipal court's history of rulings on farming cases. Most farms, including hobby farms, have at least some exceptions to nuisance laws due to the nature of farming. Machinery noise, strong odors, & working dogs are often covered under this act, which means in the event of a particularly cantankerous neighbor, there is nothing they do to you legally. Bad neighbors can make life really hard, but the Right To Farm act can head off a lot of legal headaches. Know your rights!